



SB25-064: Handle with Care

Sens. Marchman & Frizell/Rep. Clifford

The Problem

Children exposed to trauma—such as violence, crime, or abuse—often struggle emotionally and academically. Studies show up to 60% of U.S. children experience traumatic events (West Virginia Center for Children’s Justice). These children may have difficulty managing emotions, leading to anxiety, depression, or anger. Many continue attending school immediately after trauma, requiring additional support from educators to ensure their well-being and success.

The Solution: Handle with Care

Handle with Care is a trauma-informed response model developed by the West Virginia Defending Childhood Initiative. It aims to mitigate the negative effects of trauma exposure by increasing awareness and knowledge among key professionals, including law enforcement officers and educators. The program ensures that children who have experienced trauma receive the sensitivity and support needed to succeed in school, without requiring them to disclose or discuss their experiences.



How It Works

When law enforcement responds to an incident involving a child, they send a Handle with Care notification to school staff. This discreet alert includes only the child’s name, age/DOB, school, and the phrase “Handle with Care.” Educators and school staff—without asking about the incident—can then implement trauma-informed teaching strategies, ensuring a supportive environment while maintaining student privacy.

Why it matters

Handle with Care fosters a compassionate school environment, bridging first responders and educators to ensure children receive the support needed to focus on learning and emotional well-being despite adversity.

Implementation in Schools

- Safe2Tell Colorado, in conjunction with the Office of School Safety, launched a Handle with Care pilot at Summit School District in 2023-2024, later expanding to Lewis-Palmer School District. Since then, 106 reports have led to trauma-informed responses, including referrals to counselors and mental health providers. A third district will join later this year, further expanding the program’s impact.
- Schools are encouraged to use trauma-informed practices and a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS). Confidentiality is key to preventing re-traumatization while providing necessary emotional and academic support.