

**Testimony for HB 19-1017
Kindergarten Through 5th Grade Social and Emotional Health Act
State of Colorado
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Good afternoon members of the committee and thank you for your time today. We are representing the Colorado Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers, the Colorado School Social Work Association and ourselves as professionals in the field of social work. Both Liz Davis and Dr. Anne Williford are employed in the School of Social Work at Colorado State University.

It has been seventy four days since the last time we were here testifying in front of you. In this time our students have continued to arrive at our public schools each day holding that backpack full of trauma and mental health related needs. During these seventy four days we witnessed memorials and vigils for the victims of the Columbine High School shootings. During these seventy four days Colorado public schools and communities felt threatened by a Florida teen with mental health needs, those warning signs in her backpack.

A recent report from the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP, 2015) makes clear that the benefits of introducing preventative interventions in schools significantly outweigh the costs, in terms of improving outcomes for students, promoting healthier and more successful families and communities, and prioritizing less expensive (but still impactful) interventions

(http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/ReportFile/1602/Wsipp_What-Works-and-What-Does-Not-Benefit-Cost-Findings-from-WSIPP_Report.pdf). In other words, early prevention and intervention saves dollars and more importantly, saves lives. It's estimated that for every dollar spent on prevention, there is over a \$5 savings when compared to costly interventions to address more severe problems down the road. Early prevention and intervention provided in schools promotes better social, emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes, leading to more successful transitions throughout the life course. Elementary school is a critical time for prevention and school social workers are ideally positioned to provide such support to vulnerable students by giving children important tools to succeed. Doing so can reduce a number of negative outcomes including bullying, violence, substance use, and suicidality as children transition into adolescence and adulthood.

Today we urge you to support House Bill 19-1017 and join us to put more mental health prevention and early intervention based tools in our backpacks to support our students, families, teachers and communities.