

Hello House Committee Members. My name is Jae Novotny and I am a peer specialist. While I cannot be there with you today, I would like to register my support for HB20-1139.

As a child, I always knew that I was different. My brain worked differently than everyone around me. By the time I was a teenager, I was starting to exhibit signs of what would eventually be diagnosed as Bipolar Type I. When I was 35 I had a major manic episode.

I'm lucky enough to have a supportive family. My nephew was diagnosed with Bipolar I many years before I was and as soon as I told him about my diagnosis, he sent me a copy of every article he had about our diagnosis. Reading everything he sent helped me put my illness into perspective. It wasn't a life sentence. I could still have a "normal" life, although I believe that "normal" is a setting on the dryer. My life is what I choose to make of it and I choose not to be hindered by my illness. I choose to do something positive with it. Having such a supportive family has helped me in more ways than I can express. They don't always understand what I go through, but they are willing to learn and always remain supportive. My husband is my rock and my biggest supporter.

When the financial crisis hit, I was working as an accountant for a finance company and handling my illness. Huge surprise, my company closed, and I lost my job. I also found my purpose. My therapist at North Range Behavioral Health suggested that I go to Peer Specialist training. Becoming a Peer Specialist changed my life. While some look at having a mental illness as a burden (and it's not easy!), I look at it as a gift I was given so that I can help others in similar circumstances. I always knew that I was supposed to help people. I just didn't know how. Now I do. Helping others helps me. Those of us with mental illness are just ordinary people with extraordinary circumstances. If what I've been through helps one person see that there is life and hope on the other side of recovery, what I've been through is worth it. I have been a Peer Specialist for over 8 years and I am currently in charge of a

peer-run drop-in center for North Range Behavioral Health in Greeley. We also have a peer-run respite.

I am also currently going to community college to get my Associates degree.

Hb20-1139 will be helpful to me as I complete my future studies to advance my mental health professional degree. It will also open up other areas where peer support specialists could be employed in the mental health arena. Please support HB20-1139. Thank you,

Sincerely,

Jae Novotny