

Access To Certain Behavioral Health Services SB 23-174

Org Testimony + Alex's story

Thank you members of the committee for your time today. My name is Alexandra Reyes, a college student and a Policy Fellow at Young Invincibles, an organization that works to uplift young adult voices.

Access to behavioral health services is vital. Not only does it save lives, but it gives individuals the opportunity to achieve true well being. The World Health Organization defines health as “ a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”¹

So many of our youth are facing barriers to these services, and we have the opportunity to change that. Everyone deserves access, but we are seeing those already facing health disparities, are also facing the most barriers. Individuals under Medicaid currently need a formal diagnosis to access services, like therapy. A formal diagnosis is not easy to get, it takes significant time and money, a luxury that many cant afford. It also shouldn't determine who gets access to services like therapy, which can be helpful to anyone, regardless of a diagnosis.

I am under Medicaid, and have only recently had success at starting therapy. My parents tried multiple times when I was younger, and we faced many complications. On two separate occasions, I advocated for myself and asked for help because I was struggling with depressive episodes and suicidal thoughts. The first time I advocated for myself was after experiencing sexual assault. I was 9 and could hardly understand it myself. Access to a therapist that could understand and walk me through the process of healing would have done so much for me. Instead I wasn't able to process this until I was 20 years old. The second time I advocated for myself was in high school when I felt like my life held little meaning, I was struggling with an eating disorder, and my anxiety had me almost throwing up every morning.

Asking for mental health support was a difficult thing to advocate for, considering the stigma around it and the worry my parents would feel. And they were worried. They wanted to do everything they could to get me support. But the places we could go were limited, I had no formal diagnosis, and the ability to get one would take time. That was time I had to from miss school and that my dad was missing from work. It wasn't something we could do. So I didn't go to therapy until I was 19 and was able to navigate the system myself. If this bill had been law when I was 9 or even 15, maybe I wouldn't

¹ <https://www.who.int/about/governance/constitution>

be struggling with depression and anxiety in college as I try to navigate becoming an adult.

But I was lucky, because I had the knowledge and privilege to figure out behavioral health services when I got older. Many others are not. Suicide is the running cause of death for youth in Colorado, so these barriers to behavioral health services are fatal.

I urge you to vote **yes** today on Senate Bill 174 so our youth don't slip through the cracks. They deserve these behavioral health services and the opportunity to have true mental well-being. Thank you.