

Written Testimony as prepared for delivery in support to HB21-1021 Peer Support Professionals Behavioral Health to the House Public & Behavioral Health & Human Services Committee by Samantha Espinoza, senior policy analyst for health equity at the Colorado Children's Campaign.

March 9, 2021

- Thank you, Madame Chair and members of the committee. My name is Sam Espinoza and I serve as a Senior Policy Analyst for Health Equity at the Colorado Children's Campaign.
- I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of HB 1021 and am thankful to Representatives Pelton and Caraveo for bringing this bill forward.
- **The Colorado Children's Campaign supports this bill for many reasons.**
- First, suicide is wreaking havoc on Colorado kids and families.
 - o Recent data show that suicide is a leading cause of death for [school age children](#) and for [new mothers](#) (up to one year after birth).
 - o For teenagers, research shows substance use, issues with mental health, a history of trauma and challenges in accessing care are the driving causes of teen suicide in Colorado.
 - o Similarly, behavioral health issues, including suicide and accidental overdose, are the leading cause of maternal mortality in Colorado.
- And even when a new mother does not die by suicide, we know we have too many Colorado families falling through the cracks. Pregnancy mood and anxiety disorders are the [most common complication of pregnancy](#), and half of postpartum people who need help don't get it.
- Second, the number of Coloradans who didn't receive essential behavioral health services almost doubled in the past two years, and we know trouble accessing care can lead to some of the worst possible outcomes.
 - o By increasing the range of settings in which peers may be reimbursed by Medicaid such as the RSSO designation, ensuring reimbursement for telehealth services and allowing peers to operate in school-based health centers, the state may be able to significantly reduce the number of Coloradans who cannot access the behavioral health services they need.
- And finally, the Colorado Children's Campaign supports HB-1021 because peer support professionals are uniquely positioned to reach those struggling with behavioral health and wellness across the state.
 - o Peer support professionals are individuals in recovery from mental health/substance use conditions and who help others experiencing similar situations.
 - o [Data shows](#) that peer support services cut hospitalizations in half, increase engagement in self-care and wellness, and decrease psychotic symptoms.
- Peers are essential to our state's behavioral health infrastructure and I urge a yes vote.