

Testimony as Submitted in Support of SB23-004: Employment of School Mental Health Professionals by Megan Ives, Senior Policy Analyst at the Colorado Children's Campaign

**House Education Committee
April 6, 2023, 1:30 p.m.
HCR 0107**

Dear Madame Chair and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of SB23-004. My name is Megan Ives and I am the Senior Policy Analyst at the Colorado Children's Campaign.

The Colorado Children's Campaign is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, policy, research and advocacy organization, committed to securing every chance for every child in Colorado since our founding in 1985. That includes advocating for better support for our state's youth and adolescents. We also convene the School Climate Coalition which is a cross-sector group of K-12, health, youth-serving organizations, and state agencies focused on improving Colorado learning environments to be safe and supportive.

We appreciate Representatives Michaelson Jenet and Young for their leadership on this bill to remove barriers to school employment of mental health professionals.

The share of Colorado youth experiencing negative mental health outcomes has significantly increased in recent years. National data from Youth Truth tell us that secondary students at every grade level have stated that depression, stress, and anxiety are the most common barriers to learning. And fewer than half of them, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, and racial identity, have an adult they feel comfortable talking to when stressed or upset. State data from the 2021 Healthy Kids Colorado Survey found that 40% of youth experienced feelings of depression in the past year, an increase of 35% since 2019.

With this knowledge comes a responsibility to provide access to affordable, high quality behavioral health care services and professionals in every region of the state. We know that many schools and districts struggle with workforce challenges. SB23-004 works to address regulatory challenges to this access.

Schools are crucial settings for addressing the mental wellness of students. Data show that more than half of mental health challenges begin before the age of 14. Of those students who access the treatment they need, at least 70% begin their journey to treatment at school.

Access to mental health professionals in school settings is more critical than ever to the well-being of young people in our state.

We support this effort to increase access to quality, licensed mental health professionals in our schools. We urge a yes vote on SB23-004.

Thank you,

Megan Ives
Senior Policy Analyst
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Cited sources:

Data show that more than half of mental health challenges begin before the age of 14 (*National Alliance on Mental Illness [Children MH Facts 9-21-16 rev \(nami.org\)](#)*).

Of those students who access the treatment they need, at least 70% begin their journey to treatment at school (Rones, M., & Hoagwood, K. (2000). *School-based mental health services: A research review*. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 3(4), 223-241. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1026425104386>).