

**Testimony as prepared for delivery in support of SB22-147 – Behavioral Health Care Services for Children (Kolker & Sonnenberg/Young & Pelton) to the Senate Health & Human Services Committee on March 23, 2022 by Sarah Barnes, Manager of Special Policy Initiatives at the Colorado Children’s Campaign**

- Madam Chair and members of the committee, my name is Sarah Barnes and I am the Manager of Special Policy Initiatives at the Colorado Children’s Campaign.
- Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of SB147 today and thank you to Senators Kolker and Sonnenberg for your leadership on this bill.
- Data pointed to troubling trends in child and youth mental health even before the COVID crisis.
- Comprehensive data on the mental health of children and youth during the pandemic are still scarce, but data collected from adults who live with children suggest that the pandemic and all of the new stressors that accompanied it took a staggering toll on families’ mental health.
- And the mental health of children is closely linked to that of the adults in their household, suggesting mental health struggles among kids and youth likely also mounted as the pandemic dragged on.
- As kids have returned to in-person school and are navigating the academic, social and emotional experiences that come with growing up, ensuring that all children and youth have access to the behavioral health and social-emotional supports and services they need is even more critical than ever.
- As a mom to an 8<sup>th</sup> grader this year, I know firsthand how true this is.
- School health professionals provide supports and services to kids, including by fostering social-emotional wellness and learning and by addressing behavioral health needs and challenges that students face.
- The School Health Professional Grant Program (SHPGP) provides funding for schools to increase the number of health professionals to support the behavioral health of students.
- Between 2016 and 2021, the Colorado Department of Education received more requests every year for funding from the SHPGP than it was able to fulfill. During the 2020-21 school year, CDE received applications for more than \$4.5 million above what they were able to fulfill with the available funding in the grant program. Additional funding in SB147 will help address this unmet need.
- Additionally, school-based health centers provide a critical access point to health services for students and can transform a community by meeting health care needs and providing social supports and care coordination. Additional funding in SB147 will increase access to school-based health centers across the state.
- Increasing funding for the SHPGP and school-based health centers is one critically important tool to increase behavioral health supports for students in school, coupled with other efforts to increase the workforce capacity of health professionals in school and community settings. We urge your support of SB147. Thank you.