



## POLICY STATEMENT

**Colorado’s LGBTQ+ community faces higher rates of mental health and substance use disorders. When coupled with increased experiences of stigma and discrimination due to their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression, the LGBTQ+ community often lacks safe, affirming, and quality healthcare services. Envision:You strongly supports HB 21-1130 to increase access for LGBTQ+ people in community transition specialist programs.**

### House Bill 21-1130 Concerning Expanding the Community Transition Specialist Program:

HB 21-1130 expands the community transition specialist program through providing further definition of a “high-risk individual”, which subsequently allows more individuals to access program services. The bill expands on the definition of a “high-risk” individual by including the presence of significant mental health/substance use disorders made evident through use of behavioral health services. It is important to note that these circumstances must occur without current and consistent use of community-based behavioral health treatment. Moreover, any individual seeking “Transitional Services” will be provided with, and not limited to, services such as increased access to housing, behavioral health treatments, advocacy for treatment by practitioners for any and all mental health and/or substance use disorder treatment, and adequate resources for follow-up visits as needed. This is in accordance with the Safety Clause indicating that the Colorado General Assembly finds this bill to be necessary for immediate protection and preservation of public peace, safety, and health.

### Why it Matters

LGBTQ+ Coloradans experience depressive disorders, anxiety disorders, and suicide contemplation at 3 times the rate of the general population. Nationwide, LGB individuals have greater than 2 times the rates of substance use disorder and opioid misuse. LGBTQ+ youth are especially at risk for behavioral health challenges, with 20% of LGBQ and 33% of Trans Youth reporting a past-year suicide attempt on the 2017 Healthy Kids Colorado Survey. LGBTQ+ individuals living in Colorado face major behavioral health disparities and require identity-affirming, non-discriminatory services to ensure holistic health and well-being.

Moreover, Colorado’s LGBTQ+ community faces stigma and rejection as a result of identifying with a marginalized sexual orientation, gender expression, or gender identity. which has adverse impacts on access to safe, affirming, and quality healthcare. According to OneColorado’s 2019 Closing the Gap report, 42% of LGBTQ+ Coloradans had concerns their provider wasn’t supportive and 36% fear discrimination from their provider. Fear of discrimination may lead some people to conceal their LGBTQ+ identity from providers, and may discourage others from seeking care altogether.

Envision:You strongly supports HB 21-1130 to increase access to community transition specialist programs for LGBTQ+ Coloradans that lack access to safe, affirming, and quality healthcare services.In order to overcome the behavioral health disparities that exist for LGBTQ+ Coloradans increased access to healthcare services need to be implemented at every level of treatment and usage.

Envision:You

The Envision:You mission is to support, educate and empower Colorado’s LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer/questioning) community living with a mental health or substance use disorder. Furthermore, we work to inform the public—including elected officials and policymakers—about the disparities in care facing LGBTQ+ people. Finally, we support partners and allies to enhance training, research, education, and resources to assist LGBTQ+ people. To learn more please visit: [www.envision-you.org](http://www.envision-you.org).

Now that Ben's time with Rocky Mountain Human Services is coming to a close, I wanted to express my gratitude for the invaluable help that the Transition Specialist Program has provided for Ben and for me during a most difficult year for our family.

Ben was diagnosed with developmental delays and Tourette Syndrome as a child. In 2008 he was diagnosed with Schizoaffective/Depressive type. In March of 2020, his medications became less effective and he became very ill. From March through October, he was hospitalized six times; twice in Durango, twice in Grand Junction and twice in Boulder. His diagnosis was changed to Schizoaffective/Bipolar type, Tourette Syndrome and Autism. His medications were completely reworked and Ben was finally able to move back to Durango to move into a coveted government subsidized apartment he had finally been approved for.

RMHS began working with Ben and me last summer. Jamie and Megan really helped by providing support by phone for Ben while he was still hospitalized in Boulder and for me as I was very stressed and exasperated in my efforts to set up services and secure housing for Ben. Ben was also accepted for ACT team services during this time. Even though there are services in Durango, they can be hard to access in a timely manner. Axis Health has increased their patient load greatly since Ben started with them in 2014. Megan helped to access a variety of help through her Service Coordination efforts when I was at an impasse and could not reach a variety of mental health providers for time sensitive tasks. Megan listened patiently to my challenges and contacted these providers and the process began to move forward due to her efforts. By the time Ben returned to Durango, Megan and RMHS were ready to help with Ben's first move ever to independent living in his own apartment.

Because Ben gets a very limited amount of money to live on from SSI for his disability and I was unemployed due to the pandemic, we basically had no money to set up his apartment with basic items and furniture. RMHS and Megan set up his entire apartment with furniture, bedding, towels, pictures, etc. They also paid his rent for several months which really smoothed Ben's transition into independent living and made the move a positive experience for him. He absolutely loves his apartment! To top it all off, RMHS bought him some software and electronic equipment to expand his home recording computer for his favorite artistic endeavor of making music.

I was also given a peer support person through RMHS. Kristine was also incredibly helpful as I was feeling exhausted and traumatized from this difficult year. She provided compassionate listening and support, yoga equipment and yoga instruction through the internet. Which has really helped to reduce my stress level.

I honestly don't know how we would have made it through this difficult year without RMHS. Their incredible staff have been a positive force for Ben and me throughout this year and words cannot express our family's gratitude for their help.

Sincerely,  
Maggie Austin  
Mother and Caregiver