



## Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 17-207

**Aubrey Boggs, Advocacy and Outreach Coordinator**

The Colorado Mental Wellness Network supports Senate Bill 17-207 because no one should ever be placed in a jail without committing a crime. If a person were to have a heart attack, they would never be placed in a jail under any circumstances. A mental health crisis is not a crime, and we should not treat it like one. If we want to offer hope and wellness to people in crisis, we must get them treatment and access to care. Creating a more robust crisis system is good for Colorado. Mental health affects everyone. We all know someone, love someone, or are someone with mental health conditions. In order to create a safer and happier Colorado we must commit to creating systems that support people and offer them hope in a crisis.

A study from 2013 assessed the ways in which time in the criminal justice system effected the mental health of women. One person in the study was quoted saying, "Before I came in, I was always feeling anxious and stressed. In here, the anxiety is heightened, and with absolute lack of control over my life, the stress is tremendous." (Harner & Riley, 2013, p. 31) I'm sure anyone could imagine how much higher the stress would be for someone already experiencing a mental health crisis and then being placed in jail.

Another study from 2013 looked at the effects of the criminal justice system on mental health as well. The study found that the symptoms of mental health conditions were "significantly worse than beforehand" at the beginning of being placed in the criminal justice system than they were right before incarceration. Considering the short amount of time most people would be in jail following emergency procedure for a mental health hold, it would stand to reason that someone experiencing a crisis would likely experience much worse symptoms shortly after going to a jail.

I am a person with mental health conditions. 12 years ago I didn't think I would be alive today. 12 years ago I was in a crisis and incredibly suicidal. I am lucky that I found support and a chance at wellness. It was hard work, but I found hope and began my wellness journey. I still have anxiety and depression, but I live well. I have a home, I am married, I have a job that I love, I just graduated from MSU Denver, and I wake up grateful for every day. Anyone can get well, even people in crisis, and everyone deserves a chance at that hope, absolutely everyone.

Senate Bill 207 is an encouraging step in the right direction. By voting for this bill, you will be supporting your constituents with mental health conditions and their friends and family. Each of you has a multitude of constituents that will be affected by this bill. Please make the best decision for Colorado and support the mental wellness of all Coloradans.

References:

Harner, H. M., & Riley, S. (2013) The impact of incarceration on women's mental health: Responses from women in a maximum security prison. *Qualitative Health Research*, 23(1), 26.

Walker, J., Illingworth, C., Canning, A., Garner, E., Woolley, J., Taylor, P., & Amos, T. (2014). Changes in mental state associated with prison environments: A systematic review. *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*; 129(6), 427-426. doi: 10.1111/acps.12221

BE WELL. HAVE HOPE. *pass it on.*

Please feel free to contact me with questions at:

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