

Written testimony in support of HB 1017

Good afternoon. My name is Carmen Garcia. I am a member of Padres & Jovenes Unidos and a resident of northeast Denver. I am here to share the testimony of my son, Emmanuel in order to highlight the importance of social workers and mental health services in our schools.

My son Emmanuel is 11 years old. He is a calm, positive and friendly boy. He likes to play with his legos and go to his karate classes. Unfortunately, Emmanuel also suffers from anxiety. This school year has been very difficult for him. After various traumatizing incidents, his school pushed out my son saying they did not have the services or resources that he needed. My son lost an entire month of school that he will never get back. This forced me to look for another school and services somewhere else until Padres & Jovenes Unidos connected me to Rocky Mountain Children's Law Center. With their support I was able to fight for the resources and support Emmanuel deserves.

As a result, the District intervened and the school increased their services - they hired a psychologist, a discipline specialist who does group counseling, he has more time with his teacher, receives more academic support and finally received an IEP. The mental health team works with Emmanuel three times a week. Now he is calm, feels safer and likes going to school.

If my son Emmanuel had the school's support he required, I know things would not have escalated to that point. For everything that Emmanuel, and I went through together I understand very well the importance of mental health in schools. This bill will benefit so many students during an important point in their development. Children often don't know how to deal with trauma and their emotions and even though we as parents support them, we are not professionals. As parents we have so much fear and stress just thinking about the challenges our children will face.

My hope for the future is that Emmanuel can access these services at every school he attends. I get excited when I imagine his high school graduation. But his success, like the success of all students, depends on his well-being and mental health. I ask you to support this bill because it is exactly what we need to transform our schools into places where there is understanding, affection, trust, and support. Where students feel happy, safe, valued and part of a school family. Social workers are fundamental to this.

Thank you very much for your time.