

Testimony for SB 17-207

Aubrey Boggs

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Mr. Chair, Senator Gardner, members of the committee, thank you for hearing my testimony on Senate Bill 207 today. My name is Aubrey Boggs and I am the advocacy and outreach coordinator for the Colorado Mental Wellness Network. Our organization supports this bill because this bill serves Colorado and individuals with mental health conditions.

I am one of those individuals. I have lived with anxiety and depression for most of my life, and I live well. Our organization believes that people with mental health conditions can find hope, and wellness. While the image of people with mental health conditions is often one of despair, difficulty, and hopelessness, I am here today to share that people can, and do recover.

Ten years ago, I wouldn't have ever believed I could be where I am today. I was in crisis. I was dealing with an incredibly serious period of depression, and was suicidal for a very long time. I didn't want to tell anyone. I was ashamed that I felt the way I did, and I worried I would experience discrimination if I sought help. I was right about that, the health professionals I worked with and the college I was attending treated me like I was a bad person for having such serious depression. In fact, the school I went to expelled me for having depression. I was lucky enough to have dear friends and one kind counselor that helped me find hope, and with their support and my own hard work, I found recovery. I have been living well for a long time now. I am happily married, have a wonderful home in Aurora, I graduated from Metropolitan State University this last December, and I have the best job I could have ever hoped for. People can live well, if we offer them hope. Hope changed my life, hope helped me love myself, with all my mental health conditions, and find my path.

This bill offers hope. People should not be treated like criminals for experiencing a crisis. A person having a heart attack would never be placed in a jail because "there weren't enough beds", so why should someone experiencing psychosis or having a panic attack be placed in jail as though this is a safe place for them? If I had been placed in a jail while I was suicidal, I can guarantee you I would have become ten times more suicidal, and I likely would have attempted suicide in that jail cell. If I had been experiencing a panic attack in a jail cell, it likely would've continued for hours longer than normal, due to the fear of being in a jail cell.

There is nothing hopeful about being treated like a criminal. People need help, support, and appropriate evaluation and treatment, not to be "held" somewhere because we don't know what to do with them. A crisis is not a crime, and should not be treated like one under any circumstances. The majority of states in our country have figured this out, and have created statutes to ensure that no one is held in a jail without committing a crime under any circumstances. I hope Colorado can catch up with these states, finally, and commit to the wellness of Coloradans with mental health conditions.



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I would like to share a story from a person we work with, Elizabeth, who experienced a mental health hold in a hospital. She is someone who intimately understands the importance of appropriate crisis care, and these are her words and her story:

In this bill it is stated "Recognizes the obligations of hospitals and hospital-based emergency departments under federal law to screen and stabilize every patient who comes to the hospital-based emergency department, including those patients experiencing a behavioral health crisis"

This was not my experience, and here are a few examples from it.

- 1. The behavioral health lady only had a five-minute conversation with me which does not a screening or an assessment make. If it does, then this needs to be seriously re-evaluated.**
- 2. I have often asked myself, "If they were so concerned about me and my well-being then why didn't they give me a UA?" Isn't that a requirement before sending someone to a facility?**
- 3. They never treated the original reason that took me there in the first place - anxiety. In fact, they did the exact opposite and significantly exacerbated the problem by putting me on an unnecessary involuntary 72hr hold. At no point while I was there, from start to finish, was I being unreasonable, irrational or unruly. I wasn't under the influence of alcohol or illicit drugs, either. So how is it that I went there voluntarily yet was forced to leave involuntarily?**
- 4. My patient rights were violated by never being offered the opportunity to go voluntarily.**

I don't know about you, but I don't consider any of this experience stabilizing the individual. Nor was I treated kindly, sensitively or with the respect I deserved for even trying to seek out assistance in the first place. I didn't even consider it a crisis being as I zero intent on hurting or killing myself or anyone else. My oldest son's birthday was the very next day, and I was looking forward to spending time with him for it. If she had bothered to ask more questions and spend more than five minutes with me she would have learned this.

As a result of this experience I have no trust in ER's, and absolutely refuse to utilize their services, especially for mental health needs.

It took three months and the kindness and patience of my psychiatrist before I'd even consider trying to open up to any professional. If it hadn't been for the fact that I've known my psychiatrist for about ten years, I can say with a strong



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amount of certainty that I would have never opened up to any mental health professional again.

The greatest assets you have when it comes to the mental health community are the ones that will foster trust. Without it things are made much worse and significantly more difficult for everyone involved, including those trying to help this community, but most importantly the ones trying to receive the help. And while my experience is only but a sliver of this particular bill I don't believe that putting people in jails will serve you or those you're attempting to help well, either.

I'm thankful you're beginning to acknowledge this side of things, and hope you will fervently continue to pursue the best practices to treat the mental health community with the respect they both need and deserve.

So, having heard this story, and my own, please let SB 207 make Colorado safer for ALL Coloradans. Hope can change lives, and with this bill we have the opportunity to ensure that people know hope exists. We need compassionate, educated, and experienced individuals to be the ones to respond to a crisis. We need to treat people, no matter the crisis, with the dignity and respect we would treat a person with if they were experiencing a physical crisis.

This bill is good for Colorado, period. Senate Bill 207 is good for me, for Elizabeth, and for all the individuals with mental health conditions in our beautiful state. Thank you for your time, and for letting me speak with you today.

Be well.

Have hope.

Pass it on.



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