

Testimony on Senate Bill 214
Senate Health and Human Services Committee
March 29th, 2018
Aubrey Boggs and Kate Fitch

Mr. Chair, Senator Smallwood, Vice Chair, Senator Martinez Humenik, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony today. My name is Aubrey Boggs and I am the Advocacy and Outreach Coordinator for the Colorado Mental Wellness Network. With me today is Kate Fitch, our organization's Communications Specialist. Kate will be sharing why Medicaid matters to her. We are a mental health advocacy organization run by people with lived experience of mental health conditions. We are here today representing the Colorado Mental Wellness Network in **opposition to Senate Bill 214.**

Many members of our community are able to live well and care for themselves because of Medicaid. A very large number of people **are able to work because they have Medicaid**, and they can receive the treatment and support they need to be well enough to work. As an organization representing people with lived experience we know firsthand how difficult accessing mental health care can be even when you do have insurance. We should not be creating more barriers to healthcare, which this bill would do. **Medicaid allows Coloradans to receive the care they need; care they could not afford otherwise.**

Please vote no on Senate Bill 214. Thank you for hearing my testimony today.

I have severe and persistent mental illness. In other words, I have a disability that rapidly becomes unmanageable without consistent treatment in the form of regular cognitive and talk therapy, four daily medications, and active self-care. I'm also a Medicaid recipient. However, that's not all that I am. I'm also a student at CU Denver studying Public Health with a focus on mental health. I work for a mental health education and advocacy organization called the Colorado Mental Wellness Network. I'm an active voter and stay involved in local and state public affairs. I know my neighbors, volunteer for causes I care about, and do my best to make my community more accepting, inclusive, and respectful of people with psychiatric disabilities.

I, like many others on Medicaid, do not receive these benefits so I don't have to work and be self-sufficient. I receive them because I'm currently in the process of improving my life, earning potential, and career prospects. Because of my disability and need to work to support myself, I can only attend college half-time or less, meaning I still have many more years to go. If this bill passes, it is very likely that I will run out of lifetime Medicaid funds before completing my education. I just want you to consider what will happen to me and others like me in that scenario.

I would have to drop out of school to work full-time at my current low wages, which would not be enough to afford employer-sponsored health coverage that I would then qualify for. Lack of adequate health coverage would cause me to need to taper off my medication. Eventually, I would become too sick to work in the absence of treatment. I would have no choice but to seek the label of "totally disabled" in order to qualify for health coverage, meaning that I would also be receiving social security benefits. Being unable to work means that I would need food stamps, housing assistance, energy assistance, and other benefits that I do not currently receive. All of this would cost a lot more money than helping to cover the cost of my prescriptions and therapy twice a month.

Regardless of the budget implications, this is an issue of equity. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, 74% of Medicaid recipients in Colorado work full-time and another 11% work part-time¹. A bill that establishes time limits, adds burdensome reporting requirements, and insists on employment that the vast majority of us already have is an insulting disregard for the value that low-income and disabled people add to their communities. We are not just taking public funding out of selfishness. We are giving our labor to our employers, our caretaking to our parents and children, our diversity of voices and experiences to our communities, our generosity in choosing low-paying, high-impact careers to the people that we serve, and our education to society at large. In return, we are simply receiving the benefits of living in a governed society. We give what we are able to give, and we receive what we need to receive in order to participate in society in the same ways that our wealthier neighbors do. We deserve to survive regardless of our socioeconomic status, life circumstances, or disability. This is simply called equity. I hope that you choose to value it in casting your vote.

Thank you,
Kate Fitch

¹ <https://www.kff.org/medicaid/state-indicator/distribution-by-employment-status-4/?currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=%7B%22colId%22:%22Location%22,%22sort%22:%22asc%22%7D>