

Chairwoman Ginal and Committee members

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB1223. My name is Tana Rice, and I am the Director of Operations for the Alpine Autism Center.

Our current waitlist is approximately 2 years, and this is simply unacceptable. I have had parents come for a tour of our facility and cry in my office because they feel hopeless once they are told the waitlist is so long.

Alpine gets heartbreaking calls daily. These are some of their concerns: lengthy waitlists for services, lack of professionals who are able to diagnose, parents who can't work because their child has either been kicked out or aged out of school and have no funding. Many providers only take the highest paying insurance and do not take clients with high behavioral needs. Our facility does not discriminate and admits clients with high behaviors, where most other facilities have turned them away.

Parents have no idea what if anything is available to them and are often told by the Community Centered Board (the Single Entry Point for Medicaid) that their child does not qualify for Medicaid because he "sleeps through the night," or "autism alone is not a qualifying condition."

Our families are the strongest I have ever seen. They continuously fight. Fight for a diagnosis, fight for services, fight the school districts for an appropriate and fair education and now fight simply to get an accurate count of people affected by autism in our state. While they are fighting, they also get beat up by their child, criticized that it's their fault, called from their child's school and all they desperately want is help for their child affected by autism. Autism may not be diagnosed for years, sometimes into adulthood causing a lifetime of behaviors and family hardships.

Why are we fighting so hard just to find out how many people have autism in our state?

The Alpine Autism Center is once again at the forefront of opening a treatment center for adults with autism and unfortunately, our biggest barrier is funding for clients. We are asking you to be on the forefront of changing the way we count the cases of autism in Colorado.