

To: Members of the House Health Insurance and Environment Committee
From: Bob Lawhead, Policy Advisor, Colorado Developmental Disabilities Council
Re: Please oppose HB18-1223 Declare Autism Epidemic in Colorado
Date: April 26, 2018

Good afternoon-

I am respectfully requesting that Committee members consider opposing HB18-1223. This bill, while most certainly well intended, has some concerning issues. The Colorado Developmental Disabilities Council is a publicly-funded advocacy organization focused on policy which will further the independence, productivity and integration of people with developmental disabilities.

We are concerned that HB 18-1223:

- By using the term "epidemic" gives the public the impression that autism is a disease;
- With its declaration of an autism epidemic may cause the public to become fearful of people with autism and desire to institutionalize or otherwise segregate individuals from the general public;
- Will provide unintended consequences including the creation stereotypes toward Colorado citizens with autism negatively affecting their intentions to become employed, live in typical communities and recreate in public settings.

The Colorado Developmental Disabilities Council strongly encourages Representative Reyher, Senator Crowder and those advising on this bill to meet with us, the Autism Society of Colorado, JFK Partners and people who experience autism to discuss revisions to this legislation or new legislation that might better accomplish the intention of this bill.

On a more personal note, my son Jess has been diagnosed with Down syndrome with autistic characteristics. At 22 years of age, he is getting ready to enter the world of work and be an active member of his community. My fear is that this bill will produce a negative reaction by the public toward my son, creating even greater barriers than those he already faces as he attempts to develop relationships that support his intent to become a contributing member of his local community.

Thank you.