

5/1/24

I am writing to express support for SB 24-034, Increase Access to School-Based Health Care.

I have been a registered nurse for 31 years and a school nurse for 12 years.

School Based Health Centers (SBHC) are located on school grounds and provide primary care, including immunizations, mental health services, health education, dental care and help with health insurance enrollment. These centers serve our youth with limited access to care. School-Linked services include telehealth, mobile clinics and referrals to full service in nearby community clinics or health centers. Permanently increasing funding to these services is imperative to the health and wellness of our children and families.

SBHC and School-Linked services have several benefits. Every child, regardless of income or health insurance status, will be served. There will be savings to Medicaid and inappropriate use of emergency departments will be decreased. With increased use of primary care, less hospitalizations will occur. In addition, improvements in health and education are a proven strategy to advance equity.

School-Linked services need funding as they are precluded from existing state programs and grant funds. School-Linked services are important to communities with health needs. Communities will need to build upon the existing assets, and often have limited resources and populations.

As a school nurse in a rural district, I have seen many families struggle with access to care. Visiting a primary care doctor, mental health care provider or dentist is often a 30–60-minute drive, or more. Schools are often the hubs of communities (and this is true in the community I work in) and having a strong health service at school benefits student health and the overall health of the community.

Thank you,

Jen Harrington, RN

House Education

05/01/2024 Upon Adjournment

SB24-034 Increase Access to School-Based Health Care

Typed Text of Testimony Submitted

Name, Position, Representing	Typed Text of Testimony
Aahana Paul For themselves	<p>School-based health centers (SBHCs) have been a transformative force across Colorado, and specifically in the county I live in, El Paso County, Colorado, I believe further implementation would provide invaluable support and resources to the community. These centers offer accessible healthcare services directly within schools, ensuring that students have easy access to medical care, mental health support, and preventive services. By removing barriers to healthcare, SBHCs have improved health outcomes, increased school attendance, and enhanced academic performance. They have become a vital component of the many community healthcare infrastructure, particularly for underserved populations. I have firsthand witnessed friends and peers who go to schools with school based health centers and the tremendous benefits it has served to them in getting care, decreasing adverse health situations, and improving access to things like physicals needed to do school activities, mental health support, and aid with students with disabilities. This senate bill has the power to transform lives from hardworking teens like myself, and I would love nothing more than to continue advocating for this amazing bill.</p>
Evie Hudak For Colorado PTA	<p>Colorado PTA supports SB24-034. PTA is dedicated to children's health, well-being, and educational success and works at the local, state, and national levels to enhance the health of our nation's children and families. We know that a healthy child is a teachable child, and sickness, hunger, vision impairment, bad dental conditions, social and emotional problems, and unhealthy dietary habits may inhibit student's ability to learn. PTA believes that health is based on the quality of life of the whole child — emotional, environmental, intellectual, physical, and social. The school is often best positioned to serve as the community's center for meeting the needs of the whole child.</p> <p>PTA supports integrated school and community health promotion efforts that acknowledge the shared responsibility for student health with the home, public and private health care systems, government</p>

	<p>agencies, business, and civic groups. We support funding and resources to help with the physical and mental/behavioral health of students. We believe that school-based health centers and school-linked health services are vital for providing access to health care that many children and families need, especially those in communities outside of densely populated areas.</p>
<p>Maya Wheeler For themselves</p>	<p>I am writing to express my strong support for Senate Bill 24-034, which aims to increase access to school-based health care services. As a parent whose daughter attends a Denver Public School, I have witnessed firsthand the immense benefits of having access to school-based health clinics, particularly through the Denver Health School Based clinics at Manual High School, Montbello High School, and Evie Dennis Campus.</p> <p>When my daughter was in elementary school, she faced challenges with asthma, and our insurance did not cover the necessary inhalers. Thanks to the Denver Health School Based clinics, she was able to receive free asthma inhalers, ensuring she had access to the essential medication she needed to breathe properly. This support was invaluable and greatly contributed to her overall health and well-being.</p> <p>More recently, my daughter has been struggling with her mental health, and accessing timely care was crucial. Through the Denver Health School Based clinics, she was able to receive mental health counseling without having to wait weeks for an appointment. The clinics provided prompt assessments, and within a week, she was connected with a therapist. Additionally, she was able to see a psychiatrist within two weeks. This swift access to care has made a significant difference in her quality of life and overall well-being.</p> <p>I am profoundly grateful for the services provided by the Denver Health School Based clinics. The fact that cost is not a barrier to children receiving the support they need to be successful is commendable and essential. Senate Bill 24-034 will further expand access to school-based health care services, including primary health care, behavioral health care, oral health care, and preventive health care services. By authorizing grants for evidence-informed, school-linked health care services and allowing for the delivery of services through telehealth and mobile services, this bill will ensure that more students across Colorado can access the care they need to thrive academically, emotionally, and physically.</p>

	<p>I urge you to support Senate Bill 24-034 and help ensure that all students have equitable access to comprehensive health care services.</p>
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Madame Chair and members of the House Education Committee,

On behalf of Immunize Colorado, we urge you to vote YES on SB-24-034: Increase Access to School-Based Health Care. Immunize Colorado is a coalition of public health and health care providers, businesses, and community organizations working to protect Colorado communities from vaccine-preventable diseases.

Vaccines are widely recognized as one of the greatest public health achievements in history. They are a proven, effective tool for limiting the spread of dangerous diseases and preventing severe illness and death. Unfortunately, in Colorado, our vaccination rates are currently the lowest they've been in years. Only 87% of kindergarteners are vaccinated against measles, leaving over 100,000 of our youngest children at risk for this incredibly contagious disease—one that is causing outbreaks across the U.S.

The reasons for our state's low immunization rates are myriad, however limited access to healthcare services (like immunizations) is a major factor. Increasing access, especially for young children, is critical. SB24-034 will do just this by increasing funding dedicated to School-Based Health Centers, or SBHCs, and school-linked services, especially in high-needs areas where healthcare access has historically been a barrier. Being able to access high-quality healthcare in the school setting or at a nearby community clinic is critical for families who may not have the time or resources to seek medical care for their children elsewhere. School-based health care is a proven strategy to advance equity. It results in net savings to Medicaid, reduces unnecessary use of emergency room care, results in fewer hospitalizations, and improves educational outcomes by keeping students in school.

We must prioritize strategies for increasing access to healthcare, including lifesaving vaccinations, by going beyond the traditional health clinic model and increasing the variation of locations and times at which people can access care. Funding for SBHCs has not grown in nearly 10 years, however the need for them has increased. In fact, there are over 50 communities that would benefit from an expansion of SBHC services. We must invest in non-traditional models of care, like SBHCs, to improve health equity and keep Colorado kids and communities healthy.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and please vote YES on SB24-034.