

State Representative
IMAN M. JODEH
Colorado State Capitol
200 East Colfax Avenue, Room 307
Denver, Colorado 80203
Office: 303-866-2919
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Email: iman.jodeh.house@state.co.us



Member:
Appropriations
Public & Behavioral Health &
Human Services Committee

COLORADO
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
State Capitol
Denver
80203

The Honorable Jason Crow
1229 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC, 20515-0606

Dear Congressman Crow,

It is our honor to support the Cherry Creek School District's (CCSD) request for capital construction resources allocated through your Congressional Direct Spending budget to complete their mental health day treatment facility for students in grades four through twelve. In any given year, CCSD sends 75-120 students to day treatment facilities at a cost of \$1.25 to \$3 million, if they can find spots. Suicide Risk Assessments in Cherry Creek and associated mental health needs have increased steadily over the last five years resulting in unprecedented levels of pressure on mental health staff in the district.

At any point in time, CCSD has an active waiting list of 10-15 students in crisis who need day treatment placements and cannot get one due to lack of spots in facilities or insurance barriers. There are no options for students in CCSD who need a placement and cannot get one. In addition, there are no options for students who are in a placement and being discharged due to insurance disputes, medical necessity, lack of parent participation, or any other artificial limit on their length of stay. These students are simply discharged and sent back to the schools. CCSD proposed an innovative solution to their voters in 2020 and received overwhelming support (70%) for a bond measure that featured a proposal for the district to build and operate its own day treatment facility.

After several months of planning, the district is ready to begin construction on a first-of-its-kind day treatment facility which, when completed, will offer students in crisis a therapeutic level of care combined with educational services provided by CCSD teachers and staff.

The facility will be built and operated in a unique manner to offer support and education according to the level of clinical need. There will be three levels of care: Acute, Moderate, and Transitional. Students will be placed based on severity, with the goal of supporting their clinical needs as they progress and eventually transition back to their home school.

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The goal is to make this facility available to any CCSD student in crisis, especially students who are underserved in the current system due to financial or insurance barriers.

COVID-related supply chain issues have greatly impacted the cost. In addition, it is much more expensive to build a mental health facility than it is to build a school. This facility will include extensive safety features designed to help staff keep students safe, including students who might be seeking to harm themselves. These building features go beyond what is planned in a typical school building.

As a result of this range of factors, the original \$19 million cost of the project increased by \$1.5 million, resulting in this shortfall.

This project will be a model, not only for school districts in Colorado, but for school districts across the country. Adolescent mental health is a crisis everywhere. This facility will usher in an entirely new concept of what school districts can provide for their kids. With your help, we can make this innovative project become a state-of-the-art reality, truly impacting children's lives. We sincerely hope you will lend your financial assistance to CCSD for this very worthy endeavor.

Sincerely,

Iman Jodeh
State Representative

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IMAN M. JODEH
Colorado State Capitol
200 East Colfax Avenue, Room 307
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Member:
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Public & Behavioral Health &
Human Services Committee

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Iman M. Jodeh".

Iman M. Jodeh
State Representative
House District 41

Chris Smith
Superintendent
Educational Services Center
4700 South Yosemite Street
Greenwood Village, CO 80111
720-554-4262



April 25, 2022

To Representative Jason Crow:

I am writing this letter to ask for your support for the Cherry Creek School District's Community Project Funding request for assistance in constructing a mental health day treatment facility. As you know, the entire country is experiencing a mental health crisis for adolescents. Colorado is no exception, and the Cherry Creek School District has felt the effects of this crisis increasingly over the last few years.

In response to this crisis, and in need of creative solutions, the Cherry Creek School District asked voters in the 2020 Bond election to support the construction of a day treatment facility. The Bond proposal passed with the support of 70% of our voters, an all-time high, especially surprising in the midst of the pandemic. We believe we will be the first school district in the nation to build and operate our own clinical level day treatment facility. This project has the potential to be a model not only for other school districts in Colorado, but across the nation as well.

COVID-related supply chain issues have greatly impacted the cost. In addition, it is much more expensive to build a mental health facility than it is to build a school. This facility will include extensive safety features designed to help staff keep students safe, including students who might be seeking to harm themselves. These building features go beyond what is planned in a typical school building.

As a result of this range of factors, the original \$19 million cost of the project increased by \$1.5 million, resulting in this shortfall.

Once again, this program can serve as a powerful model for school districts across the nation, and it has the potential to destigmatize adolescent mental health care and change the narrative. Your support is crucial to our efforts and vital for our kids!

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Chris Smith
Superintendent of Cherry Creek Schools

Mental Health Department

Educational Services Center
4700 South Yosemite Street
Greenwood Village, Colorado 80111
720.554.4259
FAX 720.554.4272

April 20, 2022

Dear House of Representatives Jason Crow:

As your constituent, Cherry Creek School District Special Education Mental Health Director, and school psychologist, I am writing to ask for your support to remedy the shortage of day treatment placements in Colorado and to focus on increase mental health support. School mental health professionals provide comprehensive mental and behavioral health services in our schools. We are an integral part of school safety efforts as we create a positive learning environment in which students feel connected to their school community. School psychologists lead crisis preparedness and response efforts. Importantly, mental health professionals collaborate with teachers, administrators, and families to help reduce barriers to learning for all students, including those with disabilities. There is currently a critical shortage of mental health providers and within the last few years there have been multiple closings of day treatments due to budget cuts. To fully meet the needs of our students and their families as well as provide the full continuum of services in special education we need to fund day treatment. Only 20% of students who need mental health services receive them. Of those students that do receive services, the vast majority receive them at school. We must enact meaningful solutions that will address the nation's current mental health crisis and improve equitable outcomes for students.

Unfortunately, we have a critical shortage of school psychologists and other school-employed mental health professionals that prevents many students from receiving the supports they need to thrive and succeed. The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) recommends a ratio of 1 school psychologist for every 500 students. Current data indicate a national ratio of approximately 1:1200, which is more than double the recommendation. Some school districts report ratios of 1:5000. When disaggregating by race, there is a limited pool of mental health professionals of color with a significantly reduced pool for BIPOC school psychologists.

To provide the full continuum of school psychological services, I ask that you sponsor and support funding for Cherry Creek School District's Day treatment. This innovative day treatment facility will help more students receive comprehensive services and direct special education instruction by the highest quality teachers and mental health providers. Cherry Creek school district already has multiple community partnerships that will support advanced clinical training and trauma informed care.

It is critical that we receive this additional funding to build our day treatment and it is imperative that we continue to advocate and employ quality school based mental health professionals particularly those that identify as BIPOC or LBGTQIA2S+. We must ensure that all students feel safe, supported, and reach their full academic potential. School based mental health professionals must be available and accessible in every district to respond to children's social, emotional, behavioral, and academic needs.

Thank you for your continued service to Colorado and for consideration of this request.
If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to reach out to me at 720 554-4269 or email me at lwilliams33@cherrycreekschools.org.

Sincerely

Leigh M. Williams, MA, Ed. S, NCSP, LPC, NCC
Special Education Director for Mental Health

Tony J Poole, Ed.D.
Assistant Superintendent of Special Populations
4700 S. Yosemite St.
Greenwood Village, Colorado 80111
(720) 554-4225
tpoole@cherrycreekschools.org



April 25, 2022

Dear Congressman Crow,

I am writing this letter to ask for your support for the Cherry Creek School District's Community Project Funding request for assistance in constructing a mental health day treatment facility. As you know, the entire country is experiencing a mental health crisis for adolescents. In fact, the front page of yesterday's New York Times contained an article entitled, "Its life or death: U.S. Teenagers Face a Mental Health Crisis". The article points out that the crisis is nothing new, stating that adolescents reporting a major depressive episode increased by 60% between 2007 and 2019. In addition, there was a 60% increase in adolescent suicide during the same time period. These data predate the pandemic, which has done nothing but exacerbate the problems. Colorado is no exception, and in fact, local news reports have also pointed to the urgent nature of the mental health needs of our kids.

As if the crisis alone was not bad enough, community support for adolescent mental health has deteriorated alarmingly. Ten years ago, there were 77 placement options in the Denver metro area for kids in mental health crisis. With the recent announcement that three more day treatment facilities are closing in the coming months, the metro area will now have fewer than 30 placement options. Students who are in urgent need of a day treatment placement are being put on wait lists and returned to their regular school setting, where they walk in our hallways in crisis. Cherry Creek alone has 15 students currently wait listed for day treatment.

In response to this crisis, and in need of creative solutions, the Cherry Creek School District asked voters in the 2020 Bond election to support the construction of a day treatment facility. The Bond proposal passed with the support of 70% of our voters, an all-time high, especially surprising in the midst of the pandemic. We believe we will be the first school district in the nation to build and operate our own clinical level day treatment facility. This project has the potential to be a model not only for other school districts in Colorado, but across the nation as well.

Aside from being the first of its kind, the facility and program will be unique as well. The building will have three wings to correspond with three distinct levels of care based on acuity. There will be a severe wing for students in significant crisis, a moderate wing for students who are out of crisis yet continue to need high levels of clinical care, and a transitional wing for students who are ready to begin their journey back to the regular school setting. In an effort to destigmatize mental health care and settings, the facility has indoor and outdoor features that focus on comfort, warmth, and healing. Nothing about this facility should feel institutional. Inside the building, there is a welcome café, individual and group therapy areas, innovation classrooms, a climbing wall, a fitness center, and comforting nook spaces for individual reflection. Outside there are outdoor classroom spaces, a labyrinth and gardening area, and a boulder climbing feature.

The facility has a budget of \$19 million, but due to material shortages and supply chain issues, there is currently a \$1.5 million shortfall. Once again, this program can serve as a powerful model for school districts across the nation, and it has the potential to destigmatize adolescent mental health care and change the narrative. Your support is crucial to our efforts and vital for our kids!

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tony J Poole', with a stylized, cursive script.

Dr. Tony J Poole

John D. Britz
4565 E. Mexico Ave., Unit 7
Denver, CO 80222

The Honorable Jason Crow
1229 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC, 20515-0606

Dear Congressman Crow,

In 30 plus years as a political professional I've had the honor to work on many issues that impact the public good, but none are more important to me then helping to assist children and young adults when it comes to addressing their mental health needs.

I'm not contacting you today as a consultant, but as a member of a professional family, Cherry Creek Schools (CCSD), a family that has taken an innovative leap to address children's mental health needs in a unique way that no other school district in the nation has done before. Embarking on building a mental health day treatment facility owned and operated by a public school system is a huge endeavor. The fact that so many children once diagnosed with having a mental health condition enter a system that is scary, unfortunately carries a negative stigma in our society and that many families cannot afford the therapy that will help their child get the necessary treatment is beyond epidemic levels.

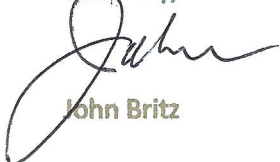
I've experienced this from personal level as a father, having a child during their adolescence make two attempts to take their own life and then being thrust into the system that takes you down a dark corridor that without guidance and financial resources would be the area that exists between purgatory and hell for a parent. Our child spent many nights in a mental health hospital away from us, often in an environment that was somewhat "nightmarish" for our family. Looking back on that I cannot imagine being faced with those feelings while simultaneously being stressed by not having the financial means to address our child's needs.

The Cherry Creek Schools commitment to addressing these issues are both compassionate and innovative. District leadership's dedication to addressing the changing demographics of the district while finding a way that parents and children can obtain mental health services while staying in our community is so very important to their progression through recovery. Many children once court ordered to enter day treatment therapy have to be sent out of their community or even out of the state to get the help they need. Having experienced this firsthand, having your child sleep in their own bed, remaining in a supportive academic environment, are key ingredients that every child should have access to.

Cherry Creek Schools' dedication and plan to build and operate a mental health day treatment facility for 4th grade through 12th grade children goes beyond the definition of innovation, it truly reflects the essence of the word "caring." Your financial help will allow them to complete this facility without having to make budgetary cuts they are faced with due to the rising costs of construction and supply chain interruptions.

I haven't chosen to share my personal story with many, however over the last several years I have become a member of the Cherry Creek Schools family, a community that sincerely is dedicated to helping all children reach their ultimate level of success. Please honor their work by making a \$1.5 million investment in their "commitment to caring." The impact this facility will make in CCSD children, and their families', lives has the potential to serve as a stellar example for other school districts throughout the country.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "John Britz", with a stylized, flowing script.

John Britz

The Honorable Jason Crow
1229 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC, 20515-0606

Dear Representative Crow,

It is my honor to support the Cherry Creek School District's (CCSD) request for capital construction resources allocated through your Congressional Direct Spending budget to complete their mental health day treatment facility for students in grades four through twelve.

My husband Jeff and I have raised our four children in the Cherry Creek School District. Six years ago, we attended the funeral of one of their classmates, a close family friend, who died by suicide. Zach had struggled with mental health from an early age. By the time he was in middle school, he was in a residential treatment facility. When Zach was deemed ready for day treatment, there were no options available. He died within a year of being released.

I wish Zach's story was an exception. The attached Dvar Torah (talk on topics related to the Torah – in Judaism, the law of God as revealed to Moses) was written by my own son three years ago as a high school sophomore struggling with depression and anxiety during a rash of suicides in our adolescent community. He shared it with our Temple Sinai congregation during his confirmation and asked if I would share it with you to help address the deepening adolescent mental health crisis in our community, state and nation. Jack describes the stigma of mental health, the outpouring of love and support in the wake of tragedy, and the need to build a new future for addressing the adolescent mental health crisis that is available to ALL students in crisis, not the day after a tragedy. The goal of the Cherry Creek School District adolescent mental health day treatment facility is to be available to any Cherry Creek student in crisis, especially students who are underserved in the current system due to financial or insurance barriers.

The adolescent mental health crisis is an important issue in our community. We can make Colorado an innovative model for the nation to address this crisis and create a brighter future by working together. Thank you for your consideration of resources to make this cutting edge facility a reality.

Sincerely,

Ilana Dubin Spiegel

Ilana Dubin Spiegel

University of Colorado Board of Regents, CD6

The Day After

I'm about to leave the house at 7:50am for school. I am already a few minutes behind, and my mom says, "Jack, wait a minute. I just got a call from school." We stand there in silence for a minute and a half until she says, "There was another suicide a Creek." After another minute, I follow my mom out the door to tell my sister, sitting in the car waiting for me. As I get in the car my sister had started to sob. We drive away as rain patters the windshield and she says, "I didn't even know her that well, but it hurts my heart to know that someone I know can be gone that fast." We drive the rest of the way to school in silence. We pull into the parking lot and I see the seniors scrambling to find their friends in their cars on a gloomy 39 degree Friday morning at 8:05am. They just want answers. Four minutes pass, and I get out of the car and walk to class. I walk in at 8:14 to 4 people sitting in their seats quietly. At 8:21, Principle Silva comes on the PA system and addresses the situation. After three minutes of listening, the announcement was over. We sit in silence for another minute. Our teacher asks if anyone doesn't know what has happened. One person raises their hand, and she recaps what happened the night before. More people trickle into the room with tears on their face to give our teacher a hug. One after another they open the door and walk in. Tear after tear. Hug after hug. The whole period. The bell rings at 9:12am. I walk into the hall, and again. Hug after hug. Tear after tear. Silence. The whole walk from the West building to the East building was in silence. All I hear is the door opening and closing, ice clinking against someone's water bottle, and a few light conversations. As second period starts, the class is silent. My friends and I walk in the door and are all checking in with each other. Listening to see if each other was ok. The substitute turns on a movie in history instead of our 70 question test that I didn't study for. For the first 20 minutes of class, 8 people trickle out one after another. Three minutes before class ends another 2 people leave. At 10:13 the bell rings for third period, there are 16 empty seats. We start the period with our teacher saying "there is no way for me to make the pain go away, but you need to be honest with yourself and where you are at." At 10:17 she asks us to take out our writer's notebook, and as we do that a classmate gets up and brings a box of tissues to another classmate. We write for 10 minutes about what we are feeling. As I look around the room, there are tears in the eyes of some, confusion in the eyes of some, and disbelief in the eyes of

others. Silence again. My teacher closes her computer and looks around seemingly confused and lets out a big exhale. I look Around again, more tears, more confusion, more disbelief. This is what the day after the second, some consider the third, suicide in two months at Cherry Creek High School looks like.

But what I found in all of the silence of the day, was the incredible outpouring of support and community. Through all the silence, the tears, the confusion, the disbelief, there was so much love. People who don't even know each other, asking if you are ok, and making sure you are doing alright, giving a hug. We can no longer dwell on the fact that these people are gone and that whoever hasn't done enough to prevent anything further from happening. We have to figure out what we can do going further, rather than be mad at what wasn't done in the past.

As I sit here on the couch at 9:18 pm on March 29, 2019, I have shared the same conversation with numerous people. A teacher, my Rabbi, my parents, my friends from youth group and school. We all ask the same questions yet again, why? What can we do going forward? We are past the point where we have to put it on the kids to reach out to their trusted adults or their friends or call a hotline when distressed.

In the parsha we are reading, Leviticus 19, the Holiness Code, G-d commands Moses to call together the Israelite community. G-d has called upon Moses to inform the community of the laws he has put in place. As stated in verse 13, "You shall not defraud your fellow. You shall not commit robbery"(Lev. 19:13). When G-d commands Moses to tell his people the new laws, he leaves it open ended to interpretation. The parsha states what exactly it means to be holy, not what being holy is to oneself. When someone takes their own life, they are robbing their neighbor of a friendship, memories, and life itself. They leave behind them so many memories, so many friendships, and so much love.

But, no matter how many times someone says you are loved, you matter, you are worth it, the hole has been dug far too deep. To the point that you are so far down, you cannot hear what is going on in the real world. Screaming into the hole are teachers, family members, friends, echoing as far down as sound can be heard. Depression and anxiety and stress dig you so deep that when there is no support system going down into the hole to assist you in getting out, it is seemingly impossible. When we tell our kids to reach out if you need anything, or we are here if you need anything, or just breathe, that doesn't do anything. Because being at the rim

of the hole isn't going to work for someone at the bottom to reach out, it is far too deep. Because if you are standing at the rim of the hole, you aren't there for them. And I hate to break it to you, but breathing is not going to magically levitate you to the top of a hole.

G-d also says in verse 16, "You shall not insult the deaf, or place a stumbling block before the blind"(Lev. 19:14). This is can also be left open to interpretation. the deaf being when you are at the bottom of the hole and people are screaming down to you. You cannot just stand at the rim of the hole and stare at them and hope something good happens. You have to go into the hole and look at them and let them know that you are here for them and are there to help you out. The blind being when you cannot see past the fact that you don't want to live anymore. You cannot see past the wall where you have friends and family and tons of people who love you.

It is now on the trusted adults and our peers to reach out to one another. Instead of asking are you ok? Tell them YOU are ok, tell them, not ask them, tell them to let you know what is going on. And most importantly, listen. From suffering with a mental illness myself, I know what it is like to be trapped inside of the gaping holes of stress and anxiety. I know what it is like to be at the bottom of a seemingly impossible hole to climb out of. But the ways I find my way out of it is with the incredible support systems that I am blessed to have at home and at school. What we need to implement are the support systems that are accessible to all people. To have support groups with friends, teachers, anyone, to check in with one another, and make sure they are doing alright. To start class on normal days by teachers saying that you are loved and that we are here if you need anything. It should not take another tragedy for this to be said.

G-d also says in verse 18, to conclude the parsha "v'-a-hav-TA l'-ray-a-KHA ka-MO-kha-love your neighbor as yourself". In simpler words, just be kind to one another. Don't be the person that insults the deaf or puts the stumbling block in front of the blind, so they don't have to be the person that robs their community of love and memories that they hold. And as Joe Biden said in his campaign kickoff, "we've heard it so often, it's almost a cliche", but if you see something say something. But there is no need to do it in an aggressive or public way. G-d begins verse 18 by saying, " You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your neighbors"

(Lev. 18). Meaning do not do it in a way that may start a public outrage or an argument. Pull them aside privately and tell them simply that was not nice, let's not do this again.

Instead of putting it on the job of the kids to make sure everyone is doing ok, it is the job of everyone - parents, peers, and trusted adults, to have the connections with kids, so they feel comfortable talking about such a stigmatized topic. To have these connections, so we can continue to have conversations to celebrate the good in life, not the conversations about how we lost another student the night before. So there are no more days after. "Olam chesed yibaneh", we will build this world from love. WE will build this world from love.