



Vote YES  on SB17-207

### Who is Disability Law Colorado?

Disability Law Colorado is a nonprofit organization established to protect and promote the legal and human rights of individuals with disabilities. It serves as the federally-mandated and state-designated Protection and Advocacy System for people with disabilities. Since Disability Law Colorado was founded in 1976, we have represented nearly 20,000 individuals with disabilities and assisted more than 65,000 individuals with disabilities in advocating for themselves.

### **SB17-207 Prevents People in a Mental Health Crisis from Being Treated as Criminals and Housed in Jails**

In 2016, Disability Law Colorado strongly opposed the passage of SB16-169, the predecessor bill to SB17-207, primarily because it increased the number of days a person placed on an emergency mental health hold could be held in jail. Remember, persons placed on an emergency mental health hold have committed **no crime** yet they are currently treated like criminals, taken to jail, locked in a cell and not provided adequate mental health treatment to alleviate their emergency, thus promoting the stigma that persons with mental illness are criminals. Disability Law Colorado's mantra became "End the practice of using jails to confine persons placed on emergency mental health holds."

Unfortunately, an amended version of SB16-169 passed both houses and was presented to the Governor for his signature. Disability Law Colorado persisted in its opposition and wrote the Governor urging him to veto SB16-169 for the reasons stated above, plus voicing our belief that the bill violated the constitutional and due process rights of those taken to jail rather than a treatment facility. In our veto letter, we also asked for the formation of a task force composed of stakeholders and professionals to study the issues and make recommendations in time for this legislative session. The Governor vetoed SB16-169 for all of the right reasons, and directed the creation of a task force that included Disability Law Colorado. The Governor directed the task force to, "make recommendations to end the practice of confining in jail persons with mental illness who have committed no crime." The Governor also charged the task force, "to assess the current need for and barriers to providing inpatient psychiatric care in all regions of the State." "Finally, the group will recommend changes in light of limited state resources, and will examine how to maximize current resources for mental health systems." The Governor goes on to say, "This approach will better inform and guide public policy on this topic, and will better serve Coloradans experiencing the trauma of mental health crisis." All was accomplished and SB17-207 represents the product of over a five months of task force work.

### **Support for SB17-207**

Although Disability Law Colorado would rather see a bill that immediately bans the use of jails for persons placed on emergency mental health holds, we recognize that the present crisis system's ability to provide adequate care in rural and frontier counties needs to be ramped up so they can be an effective first line of response for persons in mental health crisis. *SB17-207 allows for people who are experiencing a mental health crisis to be treated with appropriate care in the appropriate facility, rather than be treated as criminals.* We believe this is in line with basic human rights and dignity and we urge you to vote yes.

For these reasons, we support SB17-207, and urge you to vote yes!

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