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Historic Mental Health Legislation Signed Today at Jefferson Center for Mental Health

WHEAT RIDGE – Earlier today Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper signed two historic mental health bills into law. The ceremony was held at Jefferson Center for Mental Health, the nonprofit community mental health center which serves Jefferson, Gilpin and Clear Creek counties and a first responder in 1999 following the shootings at Columbine High School. Last year, Jefferson Center served more than 19,000 individuals.

In his remarks, the Governor stated that the importance of these bills was to make sure "...that people with mental health problems can get immediate help for themselves and for their loved ones struggling with mental health issues or substance use."

HB 13-1296 establishes a task force to update involuntary treatment statutes that were written forty years ago. SB 13-266 provides funding to create a statewide coordinated behavioral health crisis response system. More than 100 supporters were present for the bill signing, including mental health consumers and advocates, staff, board, local and state elected officials and other stakeholders.

"I want to recognize and thank our Governor and all the legislators who understand the importance of behavioral health and sponsored these two bills, as well as the Joint Budget Committee who allocated the money to make a statewide community crisis system a reality," said Dr. Harriet L. Hall, CEO of Jefferson Center for Mental Health as she welcomed Gov. John Hickenlooper. Hall observed, "When we can break down the barriers to mental health care for individuals and their families with easy and timely access, we can save lives."

Bill sponsor Senator Tracy Kraft-Tharp stated, "We have been working on this for a long time". This is a grassroots program will bring services directly to people and help redevelop Colorado's mental health system Senator Kraft-Tharp explained.

In her remarks, Senator Jeanne Nicholson, sponsor of the Crisis Response System legislation, said "Finally we have the funding we have wanted for years, to do an excellent job in providing not only immediate services, but long term holistic services... for people who have experienced a mental health crisis in order to help in their recovery."

The bills signed include:

Senate Bill 13-266 – Coordinated Behavioral Health Crisis Response

Sponsors for this Bill are Senators Aguilar and Nicholson and Representatives Kraft-Tharp and Young

The bill directs DHS to issue a request for proposals to entities with the capacity to create a statewide coordinated and seamless behavioral health crisis response system. Proposals will be accepted for each of 5 specific components of a crisis system: A 24-hour crisis telephone hotline, walk-in crisis services and crisis stabilization units, mobile crisis services, residential and respite crisis services, and a public information campaign. The department is directed to establish and work with a committee of interested stakeholders, including HCPF, to develop the request for proposals and the selection criteria. The committee will also be responsible for reviewing proposals and awarding contracts. The request for proposals is scheduled to go out on or before September 1, 2013, and contracts must be awarded on or before January 1, 2014. The department is required to make annual reports to the general assembly on the progress toward implementing the crisis system.

House Bill 13-1296 – Civil Commitments and Task Force

Sponsors for this Bill are Representatives McCann and Kraft-Tharp and Senator Newell. The bill creates the civil commitment statute review task force. The membership and duties of the task force are detailed. The bill also adds a definition of "danger to self and others" and amends the current definition of "gravely disabled", as those definitions relate to civil commitments.

About Jefferson Center for Mental Health

Celebrating its 55th year, Jefferson Center for Mental Health helps to bring hope for a brighter future to thousands of community members who struggle with mental health challenges. Part of Colorado's network of community behavioral health providers and member of the Colorado Behavioral Healthcare Council, Jefferson Center serves as the safety net for people with mental illness and behavioral health problems who lack adequate resources to pay for care and often have no place to turn. With specialized programs for veterans, children and families, victims of trauma and seniors, Jefferson Center is also an essential first responder providing critical support in the event of traumatic community disasters. As the community's nonprofit mental health center, Jefferson Center serves people throughout Jefferson, Gilpin and Clear Creek counties at over 20 locations, as well as schools, nursing homes, senior centers and other community settings. Last year Jefferson Center served more than 19,000 people in need. Center staff has expertise in numerous areas including children and family issues, adults with serious mental illness, suicide prevention, early intervention, juvenile justice, and trauma treatment. For more information about Jefferson Center, visit www.jcmh.org.