

Submitter: Elise Leibowitz
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Early Childhood and Human Services
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3835

HB 3835

Chair, Vice-Chair, and Committee members, thank you for your time and care in hearing testimony on this bill. I am strongly in favor of HB 3835. I worked for Trillium Family Services at two of their locations, the Farm Home and the Perry Center, serving children and adolescents in residential mental health care. I am additionally in graduate school working towards becoming a mental health counselor. Throughout my time working in residential mental health, it became clear how much pain and suffering many of our clients had experienced. Some of this suffering culminated in externalized volatility, which became dangerous for themselves, other clients, and staff. While we did our best to provide care for the clients given the limited resources and staff we had, there were times that multiple clients were engaging in dangerous behavior and we didn't have enough staff present to properly support them. This was due to the systemic de-prioritization of mental health, insufficient pay and frequent turnover rate, and how other units, who were serving more acute clients, 'borrowed' our staff when they were in crises. There was times where there weren't enough staff to provide the required ratios for the clients in care. We did everything we could to provide care for the clients present, yet ultimately, the staff could be liable if 'abuse' or 'neglect' took place. HB 3835 provides a foundational definition across the board for incorrect care, which takes into consideration the systemic issues present within our system, and ultimately provides care providers with more security, thus enabling them to better support clients. HB 3835 will hopefully pave the way to more mental health resources, as well as contextually appropriate and trauma-informed care. Mental health workers and the organizations they work within need the financial, structural, and systemic supports required in order to truly provide generative care, rather than blaming first line workers for the insufficiencies of the current system, which devalues mental health, and thus, ultimately hurts clients and those caring for them.