



June 17, 2021

Legislative Council Members:

I am writing to urge the Executive Committee of Legislative Council to appoint county representatives and members of Governor Polis' Behavioral Health Task Force (BHTF) to the task force (created under SB21-137) that will develop recommendations for the use of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars to address Colorado's Behavioral Health Crisis.

Pursuant to SB21-137, the new Behavioral and Mental Health Cash Fund will consist of \$550 million dollars that can be invested in treatment and services for Coloradoans. Counties continue to be on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic and see the ramifications of the pandemic in our criminal justice systems, public health and human services systems, and workforce development and community supports. The increase in substance abuse, suicides and overall anxiety facing Coloradoans has taken a heavy toll on individuals, their families and their communities. Including county voices in the task force will ensure these interacting, cross system impacts are front and center along with the innovative local solutions many communities are working hard to implement.

Additionally, Colorado's foresight and commitment to improving our current behavioral health system has been underway for over two years. Governor Polis' Behavioral Health Task Force (BHTF) has identified roughly 150 recommendations, including the creation of a new Behavioral Health Administration (HB21-1097). This task force and the many volunteers who have dedicated their time and energy to transform our behavioral health system have already identified short-term and long-term solutions to address workforce shortages, expand the safety net, expand telemedicine, and improve services for Coloradoans with co-Occurring Disabilities and Behavioral Health conditions. Strategically investing ARPA dollars to implement and move the BHTF's recommendations forward would jump start our state's transformation efforts. As such, it is imperative that representatives of the BHTF are included in this new task force to avoid duplication and leverage the substantial work that has been done to date.

Counties eagerly await additional details regarding the membership of the new SB21-137 task force. Colorado's share of the ARPA funding is a once in a lifetime opportunity. Including county and BHTF Representatives at the table will help ensure that the investments made meets the needs of Coloradoans now and into the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Swartout', written over a light blue horizontal line.

John Swartout
Executive Director, CCI

CC: Rachel Kurtz-Phelan and Anne Wallace