



Protection of Public Health Workers

HB21-1107

Sponsors: Representatives Caraveo and Carver
Senators Bridges and Lundeen

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought increased responsibilities for public health workers tasked with monitoring and preventing the spread of the disease. Throughout Colorado and across the country there have been instances of local public health officials facing threats and vandalism. Instances in Colorado have included vandalized cars, poisoned dogs, a photograph with comments about “bodies swinging from trees,” and the arrest of a man who said health officials “deserve to pay.”¹

There have also been several incidences of personal addresses of these public health workers shared through social media and protests at the private residences of local public health directors.² For example, 9News reported in December that a group in a metro county “published name and home addresses of public health employees online with veiled threats of retribution for COVID-19 restrictions”³.

In May, after polling local public health directors across the state, CALPHO found about 80% said they or their personal property had been threatened since the pandemic began⁴. Nineteen of the 54 local public health agencies have had directors who have left their positions or plan to do so in the near future. This is due in part to the difficult environment that includes threats and concerns for their personal safety and the safety of their families.

HB21-1107 seeks to protect the personal information of public health workers and their families, providing them the same personal information protections that currently exist for law enforcement officers and certain human service workers.

HB21-1107

This bill protects the personal information of certain public health workers of CDPHE or county or district public health agencies, who are engaged in specific public health duties. The bill also allows eligible workers to submit a written request to a state or local government official to remove personal information from public records that are available on the internet.

Personal information includes their home address, home telephone number, personal mobile telephone number, personal e-mail address, or a personal photograph.

Current law provides these protections for law enforcement officers, human services workers and their families when the dissemination of the personal information poses an imminent and serious threat to safety of the public health worker or their family. Violation of the prohibition on sharing of personal information is a class 1 misdemeanor.

¹ Paul, Jesse & Gibbs, Jessica. (2020, June 20). *Threats, vandalism, job loss: Colorado’s public health officials are under attack at they respond to coronavirus*. Colorado Sun. <https://coloradosun.com/2020/07/20/colorado-public-health-officials-coronavirus-threats/>

² Romeo, Jonathan. (2021, January 15). *Durango police dismayed after protestors show up at health director’s home*. Durango Herald. <https://durangoherald.com/articles/360772>

³ Clark, Kyle. (2020, December 29). *Public health inspectors targeted and doxed by GOP leader*. 9News. <https://www.9news.com/article/news/local/next/next-with-kyle-clark/public-health-inspectors-targeted-doxed-gop-leader/73-1fb5409c-c94d-46d7-87ea-e77e2d4c6e0a>

⁴ Weber, Barry-Jester, & Smith. (2020, June 12). *Public health officials face wave of threats, pressure amid coronavirus response*. KHN. <https://khn.org/news/public-health-officials-face-wave-of-threats-pressure-amid-coronavirus-response/>

Supporting Organizations

American Academy of Pediatrics, Colorado Chapter
Children's Hospital Colorado
Colorado Academy of Family Physicians
Colorado Attorney General's Office
Colorado Children's Campaign
Colorado Community Health Network
Colorado Counties, Inc.
Colorado Cross-Disability Coalition
Colorado District Attorneys Council
Colorado Fraternal Order of Police (FOP)
Colorado Hospital Association
Colorado Immunization Advocates
Colorado Medical Society
Colorado Public Health Association
Colorado Vaccine Equity Taskforce
Counties & Commissioners Acting Together
Healthier Colorado
Immunize Colorado
More to be added....