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## SECURE TRANSPORTATION BILL 2021

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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### **Secure Transportation Bill Introduced to Improve Mental Health Crisis Response, Reduce Burden on Law Enforcement**

**DENVER**—In the midst of a mental health or substance use crisis, many Coloradans are transported by law enforcement in handcuffs or by ambulance. According to mental health advocates, this dramatic and inappropriate response exacerbates crises, and can be perceived as a public shaming of people with mental health and substance use conditions. Mental Health Colorado and the bipartisan bill sponsors—Representatives Julie McCluskie (D) and Colin Larson (R) and Senators Jeff Bridges (D) and Jim Smallwood (R)—are championing [House Bill 21-1085](https://leg.colorado.gov/bills/hb21-1085) (<https://leg.colorado.gov/bills/hb21-1085>), which proposes a more appropriate, less costly response to these crises. The bill was introduced on Feb. 16 and will be heard in Public & Behavioral Health & Human Services committee on March 12.

A similar bill was introduced last year—House Bill 20-1284—but did not pass due to budget constraints associated with the pandemic. In many of Colorado’s rural communities, when an ambulance or patrol car is taken out of regular service for mental health or substance use transport, it

## TAKE ACTION

We’re working every day to promote mental wellness, end discrimination, and ensure equitable access to mental health and substance use care. Will we succeed? That’s up to you. Become an advocate. Share your story. Make a contribution. At Mental Health Colorado, our strength hinges on you.

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can leave these areas with no emergency response vehicle. Counties also pay a costly premium for fully equipped EMS vehicles when patients can be better served in a more resource-efficient manner.

“People who need mental health care should be transported with the same consideration as people who need any other kind of health care,” said Vincent Atchity, president and CEO of Mental Health Colorado. “By establishing a better way of transporting people in a mental health or substance use crisis, we’ll save taxpayer dollars, decrease the chances of escalating a crisis, and most importantly, prioritize the well-being of people with mental health or substance use conditions.”

House Bill 21-1085 creates a regulatory framework for a lower-cost, high-efficiency alternative to ambulances and law enforcement patrol cars for individuals in need of health care. It also requires Medicaid to pay for secure transportation services, thus creating an opportunity for the state to draw down a federal match for what is currently being paid for by counties.

Other states have implemented similar programs, calling them either “protected” or “secure” transportation. Solutions from these states have demonstrated that transporting people without the public shame and risk-fraught drama results in improved care and a reduced burden on law-enforcement officers.

Efforts to pass the bill are being led by Mental Health Colorado, with other organizations that have signed on in support, including the County Sheriffs of Colorado, the Colorado Fraternal Order of Police, and the Colorado Mental Wellness Network.

### **About Mental Health Colorado:**

Mental Health Colorado is the state’s leading advocate for promoting mental well-being, ending shame and discrimination, and ensuring equitable access to mental health and substance use care. We are a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization and affiliate of Mental Health America.

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