

S.153 – Mental Health First Aid Act of 2013

U.S. Congress – Bill Summary

For the Health District of Northern Larimer County Board of Directors

Bill Title:	Mental Health First Aid Act of 2013
Related Bill:	H.R.274 – Mental Health First Aid Act of 2013
Bill Sponsors:	S.153 – Sen. Begich (AK) and 10 others, including Sen. Bennet (CO) H.R.274 – Rep. Barber (AZ)
Bill History:	S.153 – Introduced January 24, 2013, referred to Senate Committee on Health, Education, and Labor (HELP) H.R.274 – Introduced January 15, 2013, referred to House Committee on Energy and Commerce
Date of Analysis:	February 8, 2013
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BILL SUMMARY

S.153, the Mental Health First Aid Act of 2013, was introduced in late January by a bipartisan group of senators (11 in total). This bill is the Senate accompanying bill for H.R.274, an identical bill introduced earlier in the month in the House of Representatives.

The Mental Health First Aid Act creates the Mental Health First Aid Grant Program, with fund authorizations of \$20 million in FY2014, which will provide training grants to states, state subdivisions, and non-profit entities to “initiate and sustain mental health first aid training programs.” The goal is to increase access to these trainings for law enforcement, teachers, school administrators and other individuals who would benefit from training in identifying, understanding, and addressing crisis situations.

The training that will be funded through the grant will focus on three primary areas: safe de-escalation of crisis situations, recognizing the signs and symptoms of mental illness, and timely referral to mental health services. In all areas, an overarching theme is identifying early stages of developing mental illnesses.

WHY IS THIS ISSUE IMPORTANT?

One in four adults and 10 percent of children in the United States will suffer from a mental health illness this year. The idea behind MHFA is similar to traditional first aid: to create an environment where people know how to help someone in emergency situations. The 12-hour course teaches people how to recognize the signs and symptoms of mental health problems and how to provide initial aid before guiding a person toward appropriate professional help.

Senator Bennet cosponsored this bill after hearing from George DelGrosso with the Colorado Behavioral Health Council, who testified in January before the Senate HELP committee, on which Senator Bennet sits. Mr. DelGrosso participated in a committee panel on new approaches to the early identification of mental illness and other mental disorders. He also highlighted the use of mental health first aid in Colorado.

In announcing his co-sponsorship of S.153, specifically in reference to DelGrosso’s testimony, Senator Bennet stated, “This bill will provide critical resources to help make sure that training is available to help identify the warning signs of mental illness, effectively respond to a crisis, and get help to those who need it. It provides a commonsense solution that can help save lives all across our country.”

In Larimer County, Touchstone Health Partners currently provides training in mental health first aid, but there are potential questions about the sustainability of Touchstone’s program. The program is highly regarded but is sometimes not highly attended, making it a potential target for freeing up resources. The grant program under S.153 would potentially make the program more sustainable and available to more people. Further, increased national attention and media focus on mental health first aid and early identification/intervention could help make more people aware of and bring more people into the local training program.

REASON FOR LETTER TO SENATOR BENNET

Senator Bennet has already signed on to support this legislation, so the accompanying letter is to thank him for his work in this area. The goal is to ensure that the Senator and his staff are aware of the importance of this bill and how it will affect Larimer County.

In addition to this letter to Bennet, we could send letters to Senator Udall and Rep. Polis, asking that they sign on as cosponsors of the respective (House and Senate) bills.

About this Bill Summary

This summary was prepared by Health District of Northern Larimer County staff to assist the Health District Board of Directors in determining whether to take an official stand on various health-related issues. Summaries are based on bills or issues at the time of their consideration by the Board and are accurate to the best of staff knowledge. It is suggested that people check to see that a bill has not changed during the course of a legislative session by visiting the Colorado General Assembly web page at www.state.co.us/gov_dir/stateleg.html. To see whether the Health District Board of Directors took a position on this or other policy issues, please visit www.healthdistrict.org/policy.

About the Health District

The Health District is a special district of the northern two-thirds of Larimer County, Colorado, supported by local property tax dollars and governed by a publicly elected five-member board. The Health District provides medical, mental health, dental, preventive and health planning services to the communities it serves.

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