

Colorado House of Representatives
Health and Human Services Committee

Eileen Bisgard, J.D.

6145 Loral Green

Frederick, Colorado

Member of NOFAS Colorado

Adoptive parent of two children – now adults – with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders

Attorney - Served as GAL for many affected children.

Have done training throughout Colorado and in other states.

Colorado has a serious problem and it's costing us a lot of money. Based upon a national estimate of 1 person in 1000 born with FAS and Colorado's 2006 census, there are 4750 people in Colorado with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and probably ten times that many with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders. This is based upon national averages. The National average cost to the public for each of these individuals was **\$1.6 million in 2002.**

These are probably conservative figures for Colorado. Studies have shown that Colorado has one of the highest rates of drinking among women. In 2006 **11.2%** of women polled in Colorado indicated that they **drank alcohol during the last 3 months of their pregnancy.** There are no figures for the other two tri-mesters.

Studies in other states have shown that the most effective way to reduce drinking during pregnancy is a **state-wide awareness and intervention effort.** Federal law requires warnings on all bottles of alcoholic beverages. Follow-up studies showed that these were very effective for the first two years, then the benefits began to diminish. Addition of signs, availability of diagnosis and foster care screening has, at least in Washington state, made a longer lasting impact. In Washington, they were able to reduce maternal drinking significantly between 1993 and 1998. At the same time, the number of children with FAS in their foster-care system reduced from 6.7% in 1995 to less than 3% in 1998.

Washington is the only state with good research in this area. However, 22 states and the District of Columbia have so far passed legislation either requiring or encouraging signage at the points of sale.

Currently in Adams County, probation officers interview mothers about whether they drank while pregnant with the youth being placed on probation. Over the last couple of years, a consistent 26-30% have acknowledged that they drank at some time in the pregnancy. Attempts have been made to get diagnostic evaluations of the youth in question. 5-6% of all youth placed on probation in the last three years have been diagnosed with an FASD.

No study has been done of the youth in the Division of Youth Corrections, but the likelihood is that the numbers are even greater there. Individuals with FASDs, as the doctors who are going to speak to you will tell you, have a great tendency to end up in the criminal justice system. A landmark study at the Univ of Wash found that 35% of their sample of people over 21 diagnosed with FAS or other FASDs had been incarcerated. We all know that incarceration is terribly expensive to the state.

Caseworkers in Adams County have also begun getting diagnoses for children in long term foster placement for whom adoption has not worked and are finding that many of them also have FASDs. Most of these children have had multiple placements in residential centers at a cost of thousands of dollars per month.

This bill is a beginning to create a greater awareness of FASD in Colorado. The numbers of children born with FASDs can be reduced by a state-wide effort at prevention, education, and intervention. This bill will take the first step in this direction in Colorado – without a fiscal note.

We all know that we have to keep costs down today. We want to work with the legislature and the various departments of the state to reduce costs **in the future** – not to mention the toll that this condition takes on human lives. Please join with us in this effort.

Thank you.



NOFAS Colorado

Formerly The Colorado Fetal Alcohol and Substance Abuse Coalition

The Colorado Affiliate of the National Organization for Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (NOFAS)

P.O. Box 460594

Glendale, CO 80246

NOFASColorado.org

NOFAS Colorado provides a forum where professionals and families meet one another and exchange information. Through NOFAS Colorado we can share information on the spectrum of issues and disciplines involved in the prevention and management of maternal substance abuse and children with fetal alcohol spectrum disorders or other prenatal drug exposure.

NOFAS Colorado began in 1990 as The Colorado Fetal Alcohol and Substance Abuse Coalition developing out of a growing concern about the medical, educational and social problems due to prenatal exposure to alcohol and other drugs. The Coalition/NOFAS Colorado has changed and evolved over the years to meet the needs of its members. They have:

- Sponsored monthly meetings with speakers on relevant topics
- Served as a forum and catalyst for new ideas and ventures
- Organized and sponsored national and local seminars and workshops
- Sponsored parents and professionals at workshops and seminars
- Organized a speakers bureau and presented at conferences and professional meetings
- Maintained a monthly mail and e-mail list of 250 families and professionals
- Offered mini-grants and funding to encourage projects related to our mission
- Organized three regional conferences on fetal alcohol syndrome and perinatal substance abuse in 1991, 1992 and 1994
- Organized a national conference co-sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control in Breckenridge Colorado, September 1997, *The Prevention and Management of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Prenatal Substance Abuse*
- Collaborated on the development of six packets of information on fetal alcohol

syndrome targeted at specific audiences: prenatal care providers, pediatric health care providers, human services workers, educators, judicial system professionals and families

- Collaborated in the development of *The Source, A Directory of Resources for Human Services Workers and Families Concerned with Maternal Substance Abuse and Children with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome or Perinatal Drug Exposure.*
- Helped establish and sustain family support groups
- Supported the development of a multi-disciplinary evaluation and diagnostic clinic for fetal alcohol spectrum disorders based on the Washington State 4-Digit Code model
- Supported a five year cooperative agreement with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to develop and implement a intervention program targeted at women at high risk of having an alcohol exposed pregnancy, determine the prevalence of FAS in a defined area of Colorado, link families of children with prenatal alcohol affects with services and resources, and educate providers about working with affected children.
- Helped organize the First and Second Annual FASD Fun Run in City Park on September 9 in 2005 and 2006
- Joined in requesting that Governor Bill Owens issue a proclamation that September 9, 2005, be Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders Awareness Day
- Contributed funds to support the 17th Judicial District's sponsorship to bring Diane Malbin to Colorado to train over 250 professionals and parents in best practices in parenting and working with individuals with FASD
- Defined our mission and vision and developed a strategic plan to improve the Coalition's structure, function, and focus
- Incorporated into a non-profit organization to seek funding and resources
- Affiliated with the national organization as NOFAS Colorado
- Supported the 17 Judicial Districts project to screen, evaluate, and serve youth with FASD in the juvenile judicial system
- Developed a website: [NOFAS Colorado.org](http://NOFASColorado.org)

Our mission is to be a forum for agencies and families to collaborate on prevention, identification, and intervention of prenatal alcohol and drug exposure, and to be a unified voice in the community.

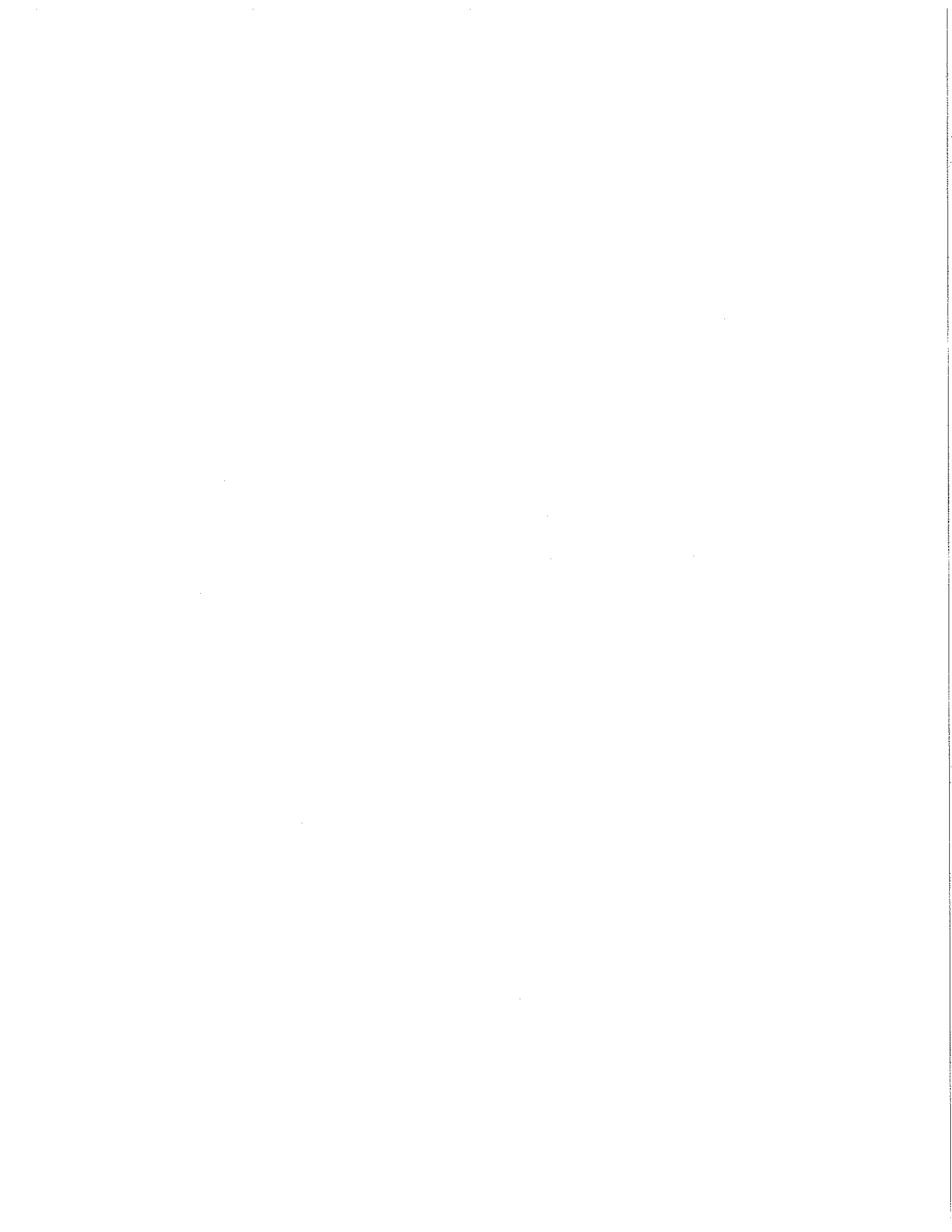
**Before the House Committee on Health and Human Services
Colorado General Assembly**

I am writing in support of HB 09-1139, *A Bill for An Act Concerning Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders*, known as FASD. I am the adoptive mother of a 13 year old child diagnosed with FASD. From the time I adopted my daughter as an infant, I have struggled to understand her neurological challenges and behavior problems. It was only last year that she was finally diagnosed with FASD. I believe widespread education about this preventable disability could greatly reduce the number of people suffering from FASD and would assist those like my daughter in learning to live with their disability with dignity and self-esteem. Early diagnosis and intervention could have prevented some of the secondary issues my daughter now suffers—depression, behavior problems and academic difficulties.

I strongly support the establishment of a commission comprised of individuals working in the field of FASD, charged with making recommendations to the legislature on how to educate the public about the dangers of alcohol consumption in pregnant women and how to utilize programs designed for early diagnosis and intervention. By raising public awareness concerning the irreversible neurological problems and social stigma suffered by children and adults exposed to alcohol *in utero*, the State of Colorado will be making an important first step in addressing this important societal and health issue.


Juliet Gilbert

Dated: January 29, 2009



1-28-09

Dear Colorado House of Representatives,

We have a six-year-old adopted daughter who has Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. She was also born addicted to heroin, crystal meth and cocaine. But FAS is the worst.

We watch our daughter struggle every day from the effects of things that were done to her by her birth mother before she was ever born. It's heartbreakingly sad.

She has emotional issues, sensory issues, ADHD, learning disabilities, social issues and other health issues that are related to prenatal abuse.

She's been in speech therapy, physical therapy, occupational therapy, behavioral therapy, and emotional therapy. She's currently undergoing several of these, along with attempting to modify her behavior with medication.

Our daughter is a beautiful, happy and loving child when her symptoms are under control. Needless to say, she doesn't deserve what was done to her before birth, but she has to live with it every day of her life. So do we.

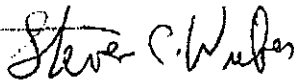
FAS is completely preventable. If more people were educated about this and knew the effects that it has on their children, we believe we would have less of this to deal with in our society.

Maybe if we could put out warning signs in any place that serves alcohol, that would help. If those signs showed actual pictures of a normal child's brain alongside one that has FAS, we believe the effect would be very dramatic.

Education is desperately needed.

Sincerely,

Steve Wieber



Westminster, Colorado

Rhonda Wieber



