Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute
Roshni Koli — Testimony on House Bill 1537, April 17, 2023

The “Handle With Care” program enables law enforcement to easily notify schools if an officer encounters a child at a traumatic scene, so schools have better awareness of events that may affect student behavior and can provide trauma- and grief-informed support, if necessary.

Trauma and Grief

Childhood trauma occurs when kids experience stressful events (such as witnessing domestic violence or experiencing the death of a loved one) that can lead to significant long-term mental health challenges. In fact, some of society’s most significant problems, including domestic violence, community violence and mass shootings, can be traced to unresolved childhood traumas and losses. Approximately two-thirds of U.S. children will experience at least one traumatic event before age 16. After experiencing such an event, children return to class, often carrying a burden of traumatic stress and/or grief that interferes with their learning and behavior—without the school being aware that anything has happened.

A crucial component of Handle With Care is responding to bereavement, or the death of a loved one, which is:

- The most frequently reported type of trauma among clinic-referred youth and the most common form of trauma in the general population;¹
- The most distressing form of trauma among adults and youth in the U.S.;² and
- The strongest predictor of poor school outcomes beyond any other form of trauma.³

Bereavement is a significant factor with justice-involved youth. Most detained youth report the death of a close loved one, with over 70% experiencing at least two or more significant

---

losses.^{4} Detained youth report experiencing their first loss, on average, by age five.^{5} Deaths experienced by this population are most frequently characterized as violent losses.^{6}

**Handle With Care Prepares Schools to Help Students**

Handle With Care provides an elegantly simple but impactful solution:

1. When law enforcement officers (LEOs) encounter a child at a traumatic scene, they send a "Handle With Care" notification to the child’s school. LEOs are trained to send a confidential notification with the child’s name, age, and a message to “Handle With Care.” **No details about the traumatic incident are shared with the school.**
2. The school then notifies the child’s teacher, who is trained to recognize signs of trauma, if any occur. The teacher may **only make a referral for mental health services within the existing school support system** (including requirements for parental consent).
3. If additional services are needed, **mental health professionals will provide trauma- and grief-informed care**, with **parental consent**, to further support the student.

---


^{5} Ibid.

^{6} Ibid.