

Good afternoon. My name is Denise Padilla. I am a married mother of three. I graduated from White Pine High School and for the last 22 years I have been an educator in Clark County SD, White Pine County SD, and Elko County SD. For the last 6 years, I have been a professor and Elementary Education Program Supervisor for Great Basin College. Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine that over the course of the last year, our family would be the poster family to explain the stigma of mental health combined with the difficulties and outrageous expenses that occur with accessing mental health care across rural Nevada.

In 5th Grade Allison began showing signs of anxiety as we were moving to Elko. Panic attacks, fight or flight, and anger issues continued weekly through middle school. There was a lot of test/homework anxiety, spending time alone in her room and problems with friends. We kept telling ourselves she would just grow out of it. This was typical teenage behavior, so we tried school counselors but no luck.

October 2020 Allison had a panic attack over homework. A neighbor must have called Elko PD who arrived on our doorstep. This event finally moved Allison to agree to see a therapist. We called and began working with LifeQuest here in Elko. That February her therapist suggested we have her evaluated for ADHD with the local pediatrician's office. Luckily my insurance covered most of these visits and evaluation. We then set up a 504 with Elko High School for ADHD related accommodations and Allison continued to see a therapist until she moved early that summer. We then found out through an acquaintance phone call that Allison had been self-harming and it had been going on for about a year. But we did not recognize the signs and just thought she was covering up with long sleeves to be comfortable. We immediately tried a therapist in Reno a couple of times in person and then a couple of times with teletherapy but after online classes during COVID, it just didn't work, and Allison quit seeing her. We tried getting her back into someone at LifeQuest but ended up on a waiting list.

In February 2022, I saw a Facebook post about a new therapist in Elko and one of her specialties was ADHD and adolescents. She did not take insurance, so we had to pay \$90 out of pocket for weekly appointments. By that spring, Allison was coming home from appointments and crying that she knew it should be helping but the sessions just were not helping her get better with her anxiety and ADHD.

At the end of May 2022-Phone call from Allison's therapist that we needed to put a safety plan into place. On a phone call, Allison and the therapist talked me through what that entailed: locking up medication, sharp objects, cords, anything else that could be used for a suicide attempt. Suddenly it felt like I was living in the Twilight Zone. We also discussed the possibility of having to take her to an in-patient treatment center if things did not improve since the therapist felt her depression and self-harm were significant.

Just a few days later I found letters and journal entries indicating that Allison was making a plan to take her life. With all of this information, we decided that Allison should be taken out of school. While Allison and I were talking to the school counselor about rescheduling her finals, she asked to take a break from the conversation. The counselor went to the bathroom with her and was pushing and prodding Allison and in her depressive state and she went into fight or

flight mode and left the EHS campus. The school counselor and school resource officer could not diffuse the situation. It took a local K-9 officer with de-escalation training, a puppy in training, a bottle of water and a stern voice to the other adults in the situation to get back to get the situation under control.

After arriving home, I had to make plans with a family friend to take our two younger children. They had to pack their bags and say goodbye to their sister not knowing much of what was happening. All the while I was working that evening with her local counselor to pack her bags to be admitted to an inpatient facility. It is an absolute chore to work with your child to prepare clothes without drawstrings, slip on shoes, appropriate personal hygiene products that will be allowed in for them to use. We drove to SLC and admitted her to Primary Children's ER. From leaving Elko to a bed opening up, Allison had about 36 sleepless hours. She was then admitted to Salt Lake Behavioral Health for approximately 8 days. The stay ended up being covered about 80% by insurance but we still had to cover multiple days of hotel bills, gas, and food. We were able to check in daily and she was able to call us, but it was a heart wrenching experience to leave her in another state and hope that people would take care of her. We also left books, puzzles, and a community volleyball donation to supplement the lack of free-time options on the adolescent floor. Most puzzles are missing pieces and are frustrating for the kids to never be able to finish. They lacked sufficient physical equipment to play with when they were able to go outside on well-staffed days and books from the closet were old or missing pages. The staff rediagnosed her with ADHD and added MDD.

Back home in Elko, I had to work with EHS administration to solidify her grades for the year, pick up a yearbook, return her Chromebooks and textbooks and talk with them about her diagnosis to have adjustments made to her 504 while trying to support children and a husband through this terrifying situation. Through all the emotional turmoil and uncertainty, never once was a discussion initiated by the by any EHS administration or counselors about Allison leaving campus. Nobody from the school ever reached out to check on Allison or on us. After 8 days SLBH felt like she was stabilized, and she was sent home with a safety plan which included a plan to return to see her regular therapist and an appointment with a local family dr. to take care of her medication. Coming back to Elko, there were no step-down services available as we were too far away to engage in the in-person programs that were only accessible by residents.

After 3 weeks, Allison gave up on the first medication because of horrible side effects including rapid weight gain and increase suicide ideation. I had done research and found genesite testing. The GeneSight test analyzes clinically important genetic variations in your DNA. Results can inform doctors about how you may break down or respond to certain medications commonly prescribed to treat depression, anxiety, ADHD, and other psychiatric conditions. The GeneSight cheek swab test is ordered by a doctor or nurse practitioner. No one in Elko was registered to give the test. Through more research, I found Battle Mountain Clinic was registered and multiple physicians' offices in Utah. Utah was where we could get in the fastest, so we added more miles to the van and more doctor and hotel bills. The doctor gave Allison a prescription for a new anti-depressant while we waited for the genesite results to come back, but the side effects from the first medication made her say no to anything else. She swore that she was going to manage holistically with the right diet, lots of exercise and better sleep. No such luck.

No matter how hard Allison tried to get better, she could not make her mind do what she wanted it to do. Allison asked in a panic one night for help with medication for depression and anxiety and she knew it was something that she needed to do with professional help. I reached out and discovered SLBH's adolescent facility was closed. Allison's therapist gave us the name of a facility in Reno, but they did not know when a bed would open up. I spent hours on the computer researching facilities and decided on one in Boise. You don't really know what kind of facility you are getting your child into as there is no real data or people to talk to with lived experiences. You can just see pictures and company testimony about facilities to make your choice. Luckily, we were able to admit her without another traumatic ER visit. During her stay, the adolescent psychiatrist confirmed ADHD, MDD, but also took the time to observe and get to know Allison and was able to realize that she was suffering from OCD which needs a different treatment protocol than just talk therapy.

Throughout her stay, we encountered many of the same struggles as the first facility: consistent lack of staff to implement the prescribed daily routine and therapy sessions, disrespect toward patients from nurses and behavior techs, and lack of books, games, and supplies to help engage kids during free times in their schedule. Here Allison began to stand up for herself and she learned how to use the patient advocate and file a formal complaint when a nurse continually refused to allow her a paper and writing utensil that was given to her to use by the psychiatrist to use when her anxiety caused her to become selectively mute. I began researching OCD specialists as Elko has no one who can deliver the gold standard for OCD therapy which is Exposure and Response Therapy. I found the IOCD website and used their therapist finder to find the closest provider who happened to be in Twin Falls. By some miracle she had an opening in her private practice that Thursday as we were going to be headed home to Elko from Boise. Kelsie also helped to put us in touch with a colleague from St. Luke's Hospital who would set up her new medication that was prescribed from Cottonwood Creek based on her genesite testing so we would not have to guess at medication with a family doctor who was not a specialist in this area.

In August, we were driving weekly to have Allison see her therapist in person to be able to set up a good patient therapist connection that is difficult for teens to develop via video therapy. More miles on the van. Again, our weekly appointments were not covered by insurance and rather than \$90 for the general therapist in Elko, we were paying \$225 a week for the specialized therapy plus travel and hotel costs.

Throughout all of this, Allison worked hard to get better and start her senior year at Elko High School. She made the varsity volleyball team for the 3rd year and had a promise from the coach to do whatever it took to help Allison get better and be healthy. Unfortunately, this promise never materialized.

Allison and I met with the coach to discuss accommodation and support she might need as approved by her therapist. We gave her the letter from her therapist and the coach agreed to have Allison give a short presentation about depression and OCD so the girls on the team would know a bit about what was going on with her and how they could support her as teammates. Then when Allison showed up on Monday to present to the team the coach said no. She said the

same thing Tuesday and then said she could not present at all because this information was too much for the teammates to hear.

Before their first travel trip of the season, I was asked to attend a meeting at the school. They notified me that Allison would not be able to travel with the team or stay in a hotel room with teammates. They stated that she could not travel on the bus because they were afraid she would leave the bus at a stop like she had left campus the previous school year. This issue was never addressed by the school the previous year when it was relevant, during summer open gyms, before tryouts or during tryouts. After some additional conversation, they finally agreed to let her travel on the bus if we followed directly behind the bus and stopped at all of their stops to intervene if she left, but they would not agree to her to stay in a hotel room under any circumstances because she had not made enough progress.

When I informed Allison of what would happen, she wanted to state her case and talk to her coaches and administrators about why should be able to travel and stay with her team. They let her talk for a few minutes. They again said they needed to see more progress and then would discuss the travel arrangements at another time. At the time, Allison had informed the coach that she was able to use headphones to block out extra sound and decrease anxiety as suggested by her therapist. She discussed being able to use them to go to sleep at night for the same reasons. The coach only agreed to allow Allison to use headphones during warmups in a large crowd but she was not allowed to use them at night as phones were collected and stored in the coach's room so her headphones would not work. Not implementing this accommodation related to her mental health recovery was in direct violation of her 504 plan.

Allison stayed with us at the volleyball tournament but at the same hotel as the team as she needed to ride to and from the tournament on the bus. She had her own hotel room that she shared one night with her sister and one night with a friend. She was always on time, had no issues with health/mental health, and was one of the most frequently played athletes of the weekend.

Within days of coming home and school starting, Allison came home upset and in tears every night about her treatment from the coach and teammates. She felt like a student on the team was bullying her as well as the coach with pointed attacks and belittling her in front of the team. Every week in her therapy sessions she had to focus on the mistreatment which was causing her mental health to suffer rather than recover. Rumors were shared by teammates after the trip about why she didn't stay in a room with them. We tried to help Allison address the behaviors and rumors with the coach and captains, but all attempts fell on deaf ears at the school.

Before Allison's next travel trip, we stopped by the VP's office to discuss traveling with the team. We were told that Allison still had not made enough progress so she could not stay with the team in the hotel. Allison got up from the meeting and calmly expressed that she needed a break because she was getting frustrated. She calmly walked out of his office like she had been practicing with her therapist for how to leave a high stress situation to recollect your thoughts. As she left the room the VP said see what I mean. Her getting up and walking out means that she will do the same thing from the bus or a hotel room. I tried to advocate for my daughter and

let them know that they could not continue to discriminate or punish Allison for her diagnosis or an incident that happened 3 months prior.

I had to explain to the principal what was happening. Prior to this, no one had notified him of Allison's travel exclusion. I explained how Allison had been excluded and discriminated against based on her health diagnosis. He said she was a student who was at risk because of her past incident at school. Never before this incident had Allison ever been in trouble with school administration. Again, I brought up her 504 and how she was cleared for all school/work activities and that documentation had been provided to the school. He said we just needed to slow the roll and he didn't know much about this kind of thing so he should set up a meeting with central office and special services and they would get back to me. I reminded them that if they were going to force her to stay away from the team they could no longer expect us to pay for the hotel room and they needed to cover the cost. A couple of hours later, VP notified me that Allison had been cleared to travel if 1) we provided documentation from her current therapist that she was cleared and would not be a danger to herself or others (it had to be that wording) or 2) if we could not get a letter, they would pay for a hotel room for Allison to stay with me next to the team. A letter was provided to the district and Allison was cleared to travel.

While traveling, Allison was only allowed to stay with 3 team captains, not other teammates. They told Allison later that night that they were instructed by the coach to report back anything Allison did or said when she was in the hotel room. Allison stopped being the starting setter and played only a couple of minutes of the entire game. This was the start of the coach's retaliation toward Allison playing because we fought for her rights against the school and district office. Each game from here on out Allison pretty much sat on the bench. No matter what happened at practice, the Coach just said she needed more effort or needed better communication skills even though her volleyball skills were really good.

Shortly after this, teammates began coming forward and we discovered that the coach had talked to girls on the team about Allison's mental health diagnosis and treatment facilities. She had talked to team members about Allison being a liability to the team. She mocked Allison's health status in discussion with teammates. Throughout these incidents, the stress continued to get worse, so Allison's depression did not significantly improve, and her anxiety got worse. She tried to seek help and support through her weekly therapy visits, but they were not enough. Then we were informed by a parent that teammates were being pulled into the coach's classroom and asked to write letters against Allison to get her kicked off the volleyball team. Allison was devastated to find out her own teammates and coach were writing letters against her based on her mental health and we saw another significant downward shift in her mental health. She tried to share information to the school through SafeVoice. No adult at EHS followed up with her. Upon hearing this information, we immediately put together our concerns and filed a 504 grievance. Two investigations were started at the district level.

After the investigation started at EHS, the principal called in the coach to talk about the situation. Multiple students named in our paperwork were called in to answer questions. Never once did the EHS administration reach out to see how Allison was affected or how she was doing. By mid-November, no representatives from the school district had attempted to contact Allison.

Allison had to be taken out of the volleyball program at Elko High School. Allison began showing more frequent signs of self-harm, major depression and panic attacks started increasing. With our lack of resources here in Elko and not wanting to take her back to a hospital setting, I reached to out a friend in Arizona who had shared with me about a place called Avery's House where they had taken their 17-year-old son who had major depression. I reached out to Avery's House as a last resort. Their caring staff helped us to navigate insurance, offered us a \$5000 scholarship and helped us to set up a payment plan for the final \$5000 in less than 48 hours. This enabled me to help get Allison packed for a 3rd time in less than 5 months to head into the scary unknown of mental health treatment. 2 days before Thanksgiving, I drove my daughter to Phoenix, Arizona.

Over the next 4 weeks, we adjusted to life as a family of 4 instead of a family of 5. We had daily calls from Allison, weekly family therapy sessions, and parent support sessions. Over the 4 weeks, Allison worked with an amazing therapist and behavior techs in daily therapy sessions to address the bullying/trauma. They worked with her new medications and dosages from her genesite test and started on the path to using DBT. This was the first time in months, adults in Allison's life outside of her parents show up for her in a trusting and respectful manner day after day. She was also able to engage in community outings, equine therapy and yoga, sound bowls and she used her baking talents almost daily. She was not able to focus on schoolwork while she was focusing on therapy during her stay at Avery's House, so Allison had to ask for an incomplete to her GBC dual credit course and make-up work was sent from EHS.

I contacted the Office of Safe and Respectful Learning at the Nevada State Department of Education asking for help to get a resolution to the Section 504 violations, FERPA violations, bullying policy violations, and emotional misconduct by the Elko High School volleyball coach and administration. They reached out to the district to see where the investigation stood. She was told by Central Office that the school investigation had been completed and that we could appeal the outcome to district office. Finally in December, just days before coming home, Allison was finally interviewed by the school district for 90 minutes through a phone conversation with her therapist Marie present to support her.

Two days before Christmas it was back to Phoenix to pick up Allison and head home for the holidays. There was such a big change after having been gone 30 days and the support that she had been given. She was also excited to see her family and the service puppy she had gotten in September at the beginning of this journey.

Her discharge instructions asked for her to continue with equine therapy, which is not available here in Elko, so we had to travel bi-weekly to Boise, ID to start this therapy. She continued her weekly visits with her previous therapist via telehealth. We tried to find a DBT group, but still today cannot find one here in our area or any that are online that we can determine are reputable. They also suggested EMDR therapy to work through the bullying and trauma, so Allison has been on a waiting list for this too.

Allison was supposed to go back to Elko High School, but was unable to return due to extreme anxiety about having to interact with the coach or the other volleyball girls. It was decided that

Allison would finish up her first semester course work at home and then complete two classes for second semester via homebound services and Edgenuity. The district also stated that they understood that because of everything, Allison never had to set foot on campus again and they were ok with that. They hoped that she would walk for graduation at the end of the school year but would also set up an individual graduation for her and our family if needed.

The district investigation stated that they could not find any evidence of bullying and just stated that some mistakes had been made by adults regarding the procedures and that they had been taken care of according to district policy. Because of this we reached back out to the Office of Safe and Respectful Learning for an appeal. At about the same time, we also decided to file legal action against the ECSD for multiple state and federal violations.

Instead of just focusing on Allison and her recovery efforts, our family had to spend from January-April in legal negotiations with ECSD for a settlement to be reached. The Office of Safe and Respectful Learning provided a reply to our Appeal in April that stated The Nevada Department of Education (NDE or Department) overturns the outcome of the bullying investigation conducted by Principal Wickersham and finds evidence of bullying behaviors on the part of Elko High School as defined by Nevada Revised Statutes (NRS) 388.122. Specifically, bullying occurred when Allison 1) was denied the opportunity to explain her disability to her teammates in general terms, causing rumors to fester among her peers; 2) was denied 504 accommodations (headphones for anxiety) on overnight trips despite medical documentation, and 3) was disallowed from traveling with the team again despite medical documentation.

The Department's investigation into the appeal further found when the parent brought the bullying/discrimination concerns to Elko High School (EHS) staff, staff did not respond and thus violated NRS 388.1351 in the following areas: a. Elko High School varsity volleyball coach did not follow NRS 388.1351 (1) which mandates that staff who receive information that a bullying violation has occurred shall report upon receiving information regarding the occurrence of a violation. b. EHS administration did not follow NRS 388.1351 (2) which mandates immediate action once a bullying report has been received. c. EHS administration did not initiate a safety plan NRS 388.1351(2). d. EHS administration did not meet the investigation timeline mandated by NRS 388.1351 (5). e. There is no timely documentation of the written report of the findings and conclusions of the investigation as mandated by NRS 388.1351 (6). In what should have been a milestone year for our daughter, instead turned into the following:

More mental health appointments for Allison, myself, her sister, and dad than I can even count
1 ER visit, 2 inpatient hospital stays, 1 residential treatment facility, more than 10,000 miles traveled across 4 states, \$2500 in hotel costs and \$1000 in food costs and \$2000 in gas, thousands of dollars in medical appointments and therapeutic medications, almost \$6000 in therapy bills for Allison and other members of our family, and A semester of homebound learning for Allison to finish her senior year so she could heal and grow,

Almost a year ago today, we were putting a safety plan into place for our daughter terrified of what the future would hold. Today, she is 3 weeks from graduating with Honors from Elko High

School. She turned 18 in March and is now learning to navigate Nevada's mental health care system as a legal adult. She attended her senior prom with her service dog Artemis. She attends therapy sessions virtually, so we don't have to do weekly drives to Twin Falls any more. She is learning how to responsibly take medication on a regular schedule as the positive effects on her health and well-being have been significant. We are still having a challenge to find a local psychiatric nurse or another provider that connects with Allison to take over all of her medication management. But day by day our brilliant and strong daughter is learning to take care of her mental health. Our family is learning day by day how to struggle and thrive in this newfound life that we did not expect to be in. We are also learning the power of sharing our story in hopes of showing parents across our community that our children with mental health struggles deserve respect and love and support just like any other child. They do not deserve to be thrown away and forgotten by school, family, or friends. We need to stand up and educate others that we are not alone in this journey and that more must be done to support families across rural Nevada that do not have access to the resources that we were able to find and secure for Allison. Thank you.