



2018 Legislative Wrap-up: CCLP's Family Economic Security Program

This year, CCLP's Family Economic Security team focused on reducing barriers that make it more difficult for Coloradans to own or rent a stable home. We worked on legislation intended to make it easier for Coloradans with a criminal record to get a job. Also related to employment, we crafted a bill that would have created a limited fund to address low-cost hurdles that stand in the way of Coloradans completing job-training or achieving an employment goal. We also successfully fought a bill that would have extended the definition of "contract labor" in a way that would have excluded many Coloradans from receiving workers' comp or unemployment benefits.

It was a meaningful and productive session for the FESP team and our organizational partners. Many of our high-priority bills passed and we successfully fought other bills that would have had negative implications for Coloradans in low-wage jobs. We developed and strengthened partnerships with other advocacy and direct-service groups in the areas of manufactured housing, criminal records, worker rights, affordable housing and tenant's rights. These relationships built a foundation for even more effective advocacy in future years.

Here's a brief recap of CCLP's family economic security work during the 2018 legislative session:

Good News

Tenants' rights – CCLP led the charge for a bipartisan bill that will require landlords to provide tenants with a copy of their lease, plus a receipt when the tenant pays rent by cash or money order. Receipts would be given automatically if rent is paid in-person, and upon request if rent is mailed or deposited into a drop box. This commonsense measure ensures that tenants have the pertinent information about the obligations of their tenancy and can document their rent payments. **Senate Bill 10** received broad bipartisan support and was signed into law by Gov. John Hickenlooper in late March.

Manufactured housing – We developed and advocated for a bill that exempts the purchase of a new manufactured home from the state sales tax and makes the elusive dream of home-ownership more attainable for more hardworking Coloradans. CCLP convened a broad coalition of housing activists, industry members, lenders and manufactured housing community members in support of **House Bill 1315**. It had bipartisan sponsorship in both chambers and near unanimous support. Manufactured housing is the largest source of unsubsidized affordable housing in the state. The passage of HB 1315, now awaiting the governor's signature, will save about 1,000 families a year about \$1,000 on the purchase of a new manufactured home beginning July 2019.

Employment for justice-involved Coloradans -- People with criminal records should be able to work and support their families after they've served their time. Two bills developed with substantial input from CCLP will make workforce re-entry easier for many Coloradans. **HB 1418** prohibits a state or local agency

from taking adverse action concerning a license, permit or offer of employment based solely on an applicant's arrest record. It also provides the Department of Regulatory Agencies with the discretion to remove a person's licensing history—which often contains criminal record information-- from public access. A companion bill to HB 1418, **HB 1344**, allows a judge to grant limited relief from select "collateral consequences" of a criminal conviction, such as being barred from practicing certain professions. Too often, a single encounter with the law can result in a de facto sentence to a life in poverty -- not just for the offender but for that person's family as well. Policymakers on both sides of the aisle agree that government should not stand in the way of people who are trying to work. Both HB 1418 and HB 1344 remove barriers that keep people who've made past mistakes from supporting their families and contributing to their communities. Both bills were approved with nearly unanimous support from both chambers and are on the Governor's desk awaiting his signature.

Contract labor -- There has been much talk and speculation about how the emerging "gig economy" is transforming the way people work and support themselves and their families. **SB 171** would have statutorily classified people who get work through an online app as independent contractors when they do not fit that classification, thereby undermining job protections and social insurance coverage from many Coloradans. CCLP joined a broad coalition, including Colorado AFL-CIO, SEIU, COLOR and 9to5 Colorado in successfully stopping this legislation.

Debt-collection -- CCLP and its partners in the Financial Equity Coalition successfully amended a bill that would have allowed private debt collectors to bypass current court procedure and compel the Colorado Department of Employment and Labor to provide employment information on Coloradans in debt-collection cases. HB 1057 would have involved our state government in the collection of private debts and made it easier for debt collectors to garnish wages from individuals who owe money. But the broad scope of the bill was significantly narrowed after members of the coalition persuaded lawmakers to limit the bill the collection of public debts. The amended bill allows private debt collectors collecting public debt to charge the same collection fee that the government charges and capped that fee at 18 percent of the debt owed. The amended bill also includes provisions on attorney's fees for debt collectors that make the bill less financially devastating than it was originally.

Prison labor -- CCLP was successful in encouraging legislators to stop **SB 238**, which would have permitted county sheriffs to let those awaiting trial work outside of a jail. While we support work instead of sitting behind bars for those convicted of a crime SB 238 would have let people who have not yet been convicted, but are simply awaiting trial, be paid at Department of Correction rates of 32 cents to \$2.45 per day. If counties want to address jail overcrowding, bail or sentencing reform is a better option. The bill died in the House.

Other good news -- CCLP successfully advocated for a budget amendment to appropriate an additional \$1 million for the Division of Housing for rental vouchers and repairs and construction of affordable housing units. We also successfully advocated for a budget amendment that authorized using \$4.2 million reverted from Community Corrections programs for housing for Coloradans leaving correctional facilities. Finally, we actively lobbied on behalf of a Colorado Department of Human Services bill that extends ReHire Colorado, a transitional jobs program that largely serves noncustodial parents, veterans and Coloradans who are older and have struggled to re-enter the workforce since the Great Recession.

Disappointments

Employment Support Services Fund -- Despite bipartisan support in both chambers and passing through

the House, HB 1310 was killed by a Senate committee near the end of the session. Developed by CCLP and the Skills2Compete Coalition, the bill would have provided an emergency funding source to public and nonprofit organizations to address low-cost hurdles (such as replacing a flat tire) that stand in the way of Coloradans completing job-training or successfully obtaining and retaining employment. Over 70 organizations and businesses endorsed the bill. HB 1310 represented a small investment towards self-sufficiency that would have saved taxpayer dollars in the long-term and helped Coloradans get on their feet. We'll likely try again next year.

Local minimum wage – A bill that would have let Colorado cities and counties raise the minimum wage to a level that makes sense for their communities was killed along party lines by a Senate committee. Although Colorado voters in 2016 voted to increase the minimum wage to \$12 an hour by 2020, it's clear that the increased minimum wage still won't be enough for workers in parts of the state where the cost of living is high. **HB 1368** would have repealed a law enacted in 1999 that prohibits Colorado's cities and towns from establishing a higher minimum wage than the state minimum wage so that communities can adjust the rate to a level that would better support their residents.

Source of income discrimination -- Approved in the House, but killed in the Senate, **HB 1432** would have prohibited landlords from discriminating against tenants based on their source of income (such as income from governmental rental vouchers, student loans, disability insurance, etc.). This kind of discrimination promotes segregation and homelessness while exacerbating the state's housing shortage. Led by the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless, but developed with strong support by CCLP, the bill unfortunately died in a Senate committee late in the session.

Property tax, rent and heat rebates—**HB 1380** proposed a cost-of-living adjustment in the amount of the rebate available to seniors and people with disabilities. The current income eligibility limits are \$13,608 a year for an individual and \$18,343 for a couple. Currently the maximum grant is \$792. Senior Lobby led the effort, but CCLP provided research and testimony.

Criminal record sealing for housing applications -- Housing is a necessary ingredient for families to prosper. Yet for more than 1.5 million Coloradans with some kind of criminal record, securing stable and safe housing can be difficult when landlords require a background check that includes criminal history. **SB 57** would have limited the ability of landlords to consider sealed records and arrests that don't result in a conviction as a factor in whether to rent to an applicant. CCLP participated in the Collateral Consequences Work Group of the Colorado Civil and Juvenile Justice committee which developed this proposal.

Challenges and Opportunities

Automatic sealing -- Earlier this year, CCLP developed legislation that would automatically seal certain nonviolent criminal records so they are not available to the public. The proposal would have applied to nonviolent offenses that are already eligible for sealing under Colorado law. The bill would have eliminated costly and burdensome steps including court petition and filing fees for individuals who have remained free of misdemeanor and felony convictions for a specified period of time. The bill would have given people with criminal records a chance to move on with their lives and support their families. While we weren't able to introduce a bill this year due to operational details, there is increasing bipartisan interest in this issue and we will be working during the interim to prepare a bill for the 2019 session.

Jobs for working-age Coloradans -- In this time of low unemployment and worker shortages, 18.5 percent of Coloradans of working age are still not in the workforce. Many of these individuals want to work, but need help to overcome barriers. CCLP and Skills2Compete are exploring more bridges between programs that serve people with barriers to employment and traditional education and employment services.

The changing workforce -- As the economy shifts to more contingent workers, with sporadic or non-traditional work schedules and fewer benefits, lawmakers need to consider laws and policies that ensure that Coloradans have the tools and resources to build financial security.

Racial wealth gap -- As wide as the income gap is between White people and people of color, the wealth gap is far wider. How can public policy encourage asset development -- particularly among individuals with low incomes? Earlier in the session, we explored a bill to allow credit unions to offer prize-linked savings accounts, which has been shown to increase savings rates, but the bill did not move forward due to lukewarm interest from the credit-union association. While that particular approach failed to get traction, CCLP will continue to look at policies that will encourage Coloradans who are financially disadvantaged to build savings and accumulate assets to secure their financial future.

All eyes on Washington --The Federal Tax Cuts and Jobs Act along with continued economic growth created a bump in state revenue, which Colorado could use this year. But growing federal deficits could increase pressures to reduce federal funding for programs, which Colorado would either lose or have to backfill with state dollars. CCLP will closely monitor the implications of federal policy changes that might burden low-income Coloradans. We will work with state and national coalitions to help shape or defeat changes in federal services, policies and programs.