



COLORADO CENTER
on LAW & POLICY

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Legislative highlights

Necessary documents bill

- **HB 1386** will help thousands of low-income Coloradans obtain the documents needed to obtain a picture ID.

'Ban the Box' bill

- **HB 1388** would have removed a major barrier to employment by barring most employers from asking about criminal history on preliminary job applications.

Childcare for education

- **HB 1050** would have established an interagency and community task force to identify childcare needs and resources for low-income parents seeking education or skills training.

Affordable housing

- **HB 1466** would have invested \$30 million from Colorado's unclaimed property trust fund to help low-income tenants defray high rental costs and provide financing to developers of low-income housing units.

2016 Legislative Wrap-up: Family Economic Security

The Colorado Center on Law and Policy advances the health, economic security wellbeing of low-income Coloradans through research, education, advocacy and litigation. As a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, we work with a variety of stakeholders in supporting legislation that achieves our mission.

This year, CCLP's Family Economic Security team is focused on removing barriers to employment because the most direct pathway out of poverty is a job. To that point, we spearheaded and shepherded legislation to help Coloradans to obtain documents needed to be issued a state ID. We developed and supported legislation that would bar employers from asking about criminal history on preliminary application forms. We also developed and supported a bill that would form a task force designed to explore better ways to coordinate skills training and education with childcare. Furthermore, we are working to ensure that the needs of those experiencing homelessness would be served in the statewide implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

In an effort to ease the effects of Colorado's affordable housing crisis on low-income families, CCLP pushed legislation that would have brought millions of dollars of financial relief to tenants and to developers of affordable housing. We also supported a bill that would extend the "notice-to quit" period on month-to-month rental arrangements from seven to 28 days -- giving tenants a fair chance to transition to other housing.

Here's a recap of our family economic security issues for 2016:

Legislative highlights

Necessary documents program

It's nearly impossible to get essentials such as health care, housing, employment and public benefits without a state-issued identification card. Citizens need a picture ID when opening a bank account, cashing a check or picking up prescriptions. Unfortunately, obtaining an ID card can be equally impossible to obtain for some of Colorado's most vulnerable residents. The process often requires tracking down a birth certificate, a marriage certificate or a certified medical record. It takes time and money to secure such documents, some of which may need to be ordered from other states. It can easily cost \$50 for just one document – a price that is prohibitively expensive for many low-income Coloradans.

Fortunately, authorization of the Necessary Documents Program through **House Bill 1386** will help thousands of low-income Coloradans cover the costs of such necessary documents for the next five years. Older adults, domestic-violence survivors, those leaving corrections, those seeking shelter, victims of natural or man-made disasters and people with disabilities are among thousands of other Coloradans who will get help through this program. The bill received overwhelming bipartisan support in the House and Senate and is awaiting the governor's approval.

'Ban-the-box' bill

The ability to get a job is the best determinant of whether someone with a criminal record can stay out of trouble and earn an income to support a family. Developed by CCLP as part of the Responsible Re-Entry campaign, **HB 1388** would have removed a major barrier to employment by barring most employers from asking about criminal history on preliminary job applications – giving people with records a fair chance for a position that could help them get their lives back on track. Nationwide, the policy is known as “ban-the-box” legislation because it eliminates a common checkbox inquiring about a prospect’s criminal history.

Despite building a coalition of more than 50 organizations – ranging from the faith-based community to job-placement counselors and employers – and winning approval from the Colorado House, HB 1388 was killed by a Senate committee and failed to advance to the desk of Gov. John Hickenlooper, who would have likely supported it. Regardless, we will continue to push for ban-the-box hiring practices because such policies are needed and gaining public support in Colorado and nationwide.

Childcare for education and skills training

Through **HB 1050**, CCLP worked to establish an interagency and community task force to identify childcare needs and resources for low-income parents seeking education or skills training. The task force would have been charged with identifying resources, reducing silos, streamlining processes and recommending legislative changes if needed. Nationally, about one-quarter of adult students are parents. But in general, the education and training system doesn’t accommodate students’ childcare needs. While HB 1050 passed the Early Childhood and School Readiness Commission in 2015 and the House this session, it did not survive the Senate State, Veterans and Military Affairs Committee. Nevertheless, we will continue work on this issue.

Affordable housing and tenants’ rights

Colorado’s affordable housing crisis continues to consume a majority of wages for low-income Coloradans, pushing residents to the brink of homelessness or forcing them to skimp on food or health care needs to pay rent.

Developed by CCLP, **HB 1466** would have invested \$30 million from Colorado's unclaimed property trust fund to help low-income tenants defray high rental costs and provide financing to developers of low-income housing units. Introduced late in the session, the bill passed through the House with bipartisan support and even survived the Senate State, Veterans and Military Affairs Committee (notoriously known as the “kill committee”). Unfortunately, the bill stalled in Senate Appropriations by a vote of 4-3. Looking ahead, we’ll continue to make affordable housing a priority and work on ways to inject much-needed public money into this most essential need.

Due to the scarcity of affordable housing in Colorado, landlords currently have a strong upper hand. Increasingly, landlords are favoring month-to-month rental arrangements to give them flexibility to increase rent or move affluent tenants into the premises quickly. **HB 1461** would have increased the notification period to raise rent or terminate such arrangements from seven days to 28. Currently, Colorado has some of the weakest tenant-notice provisions in the country. Most states require at least 28 days’ notice and many require 60 days’ notice. Unfortunately, HB 1461 stalled in the Senate State, Veterans and Military Affairs Committee despite being approved in the House with bipartisan support.

Work Opportunity Income Tax Credit

On paper, **HB 1372** looked like a win-win proposition that gives businesses a financial incentive to hire low-income workers who face challenges in today’s job market. The bill would have created state Work Opportunity Income Tax Credits (or WOTC) modeled on the federal WOTC. Under HB 1372, these tax credits would have been available to employers who hire members of targeted groups — including public-assistance recipients, disabled or unemployed veterans and ex-offenders. The legislation appeared to address one of CCLP’s core priority issues: Jobs for Coloradans with barriers to employment.

In reality, though, WOTC does NOT have a strong record of effectiveness in affecting hiring decisions or wage or skill growth over time. A study commissioned by the U.S. Department of Labor found “the tax credits play little or no role in recruitment policies.” In fact, many third-party vendors make a lot of money gathering and processing paperwork from large companies to secure tax credits for the low-income workers their clients would have likely hired anyway.

CCLP was the only witness testifying against HB 1372, which passed through one committee but was ultimately killed at the request of the sponsor. Undoubtedly, the bill’s \$24 million fiscal note contributed greatly to its demise. In the aftermath of HB 1372’s failure, we resolved to explore ways to eliminate barriers for those who are truly challenged in the job market – such as people with disabilities or criminal records or those in desperate need of skills training.

Non-legislative work

Skills2Compete Coalition

CCLP continues to coordinate the Skills2Compete Colorado Coalition. This multi-sector policy advocacy coalition has developed a five-year work plan to build on its past success. Among the coalition’s priority issues:

- Review, provide input and track implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)
- Expand, fund and improve adult education and literacy
- Support career pathways that provide education and training for workers in high-demand occupations, with “on-ramps” for those below the first rung of the career ladder
- Increase credential attainment, from high school equivalency diploma on up
- Develop and improve workforce data quality

In December, 2015, Skills2Compete successfully advocated with the State Board of Education to adopt all three high school equivalency tests – the TASC and HiSet, in addition to the GED – to increase the options for attaining a High School Equivalency Diploma. Contracts with all three vendors were signed at the beginning of April.

In February, Skills2 Compete submitted two sets of comments on the proposed state WIOA implementation plan. One set of comments specifically addressed the need for public information and outcomes data related to job training by schools and training programs on the Eligible Provider Training List. The other set of comments stressed the need for more information on how workforce centers will shift business practices, outcome measures, recruitment efforts and the need for supportive services to reflect prioritization of service for populations with barriers to employment -- as required by federal law.

WIOA and Pathways from Homelessness

With the generous support of the Butler Family Fund, CCLP was awarded a one-year grant to work on a policy- and system-level to ensure that those experiencing homelessness are well-served through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Homeless individuals, families and youth are among the populations who are supposed to receive priority of service under WIOA. This grant allowed us to hire a person who is dedicated to this issue.

Since this initiative began, CCLP has submitted comments on the State WIOA Implementation Plan and proposed state performance measures. We also attended both the State and Central Region public hearings on the implementation plan. We submitted specific recommendations for rewording and suggested programmatic and policy priorities for a number of regional and countywide plans. CCLP presented the project at the State Workforce Directors meeting attended by representatives from at least 15 counties, as well as state and federal staff. Follow-up site visits are scheduled with a half dozen workforce directors and staff. To date, we have convened seven focus groups with service providers who provide employment services to homeless people to identify issues and themes; hear specific experiences and observations about what is needed for more effective coordination with the workforce system; and to gather potential recommendations for the Colorado Workforce Development Council. CCLP is working to develop specific recommendations, tools and strategies that will facilitate this increased coordination and collaboration. We are also partnering with Funders Together to End Homelessness, the Heartland Alliance, and the Butler Family Fund to present a webinar on this project. The goal of the webinar is to discuss how philanthropy can play a role in using this

new federal legislation and its implementation to increase opportunities for the homeless population.

Ballot initiatives

Minimum-wage increase

Wages have not kept pace with the drop in the unemployment rate or the increase in the cost of housing. CCLP advocated again this year for the right for localities to set their own, higher minimum wage, to no avail. This fall, we will join with other organizations in the ballot fight to increase the state's minimum wage (currently, \$8.31 an hour) to \$12 per hour by 2020.

Colorado Priorities

Efforts to invest much-needed funds in schools, mental health and social services, and basic infrastructure have been hampered by the amendment commonly known as the Taxpayer Bill of Rights (or TABOR), despite many years of economic recovery and positive revenue projections for the state. That's because TABOR triggers automatic tax rebates when taxes and non-exempt fees exceed the state's spending cap. CCLP has joined a bipartisan coalition working on a ballot initiative that would give Colorado a chance to decide whether they would like their refunds to be invested back into the state. If accepted into the November ballot and approved by voters, the proposal would invest more money into education, transportation, and mental health and senior services without raising taxes.