

Testimony in Support of HB21-1325 – Funding Public Schools Formula

House Education Committee – June 3, 2021

Leslie Colwell

- Good morning Madam Chair and members of the committee. My name is Leslie Colwell, and I lead the Colorado Children's Campaign's work on K-12 issues. I'm here to support House Bill 1325 as proposed under Amendment L.001.
- In the education space we believe our school funding system is **THE** most important challenge to address and the most exciting opportunity for change and innovation in the coming years.
- Our school finance formula is more than a quarter-century old, which means it was written when I was a third-grader at Highland Elementary in Littleton Public Schools. A lot has changed since the 90s! Yet we continue to finance public education through methods that have no demonstrable link to the cost of delivering a rigorous education that leads to high achievement for all students – despite the fact that we know a lot more about investments that lead to improvement in student outcomes.
- It's worth wondering – how many more of our students would reach their full potential if we allocated dollars in a fundamentally different way – one in which investments were targeted to meet the unique needs of our changing student population, instead of to fund archaic systems and district characteristics?
- With real progress made this year to actually grow the size of the K-12 funding pie through the property tax system reforms contained in HB-1164, we are encouraged that there is finally an opportunity to make these investments.
- House Bill 1325 proposes addressing specific issues that could materially improve and make more student-centric our funding formula, like, for example, determining better methods for identifying and providing resources to support students' economic disadvantage. Colorado's current proxy for poverty in school finance, eligibility for free lunch, is an increasingly inadequate and inaccurate measure, and we could learn a lot from states that have explored and adopted additional indicators.
- We're also glad to see the acknowledgement that mill levy override funding at the local level is a growing source of funding disparities between districts and that the committee will explore a state role for supporting low property wealth districts who are successful in passing measures.
- Modernizing and improving the way we resource our schools and students is the first and most fundamental step in ensuring that structural barriers to opportunity are removed, leading to more equitable outcomes for our students. We believe House Bill 1325 will move us further down the path to get there.
- Thank you for your time and thank you to the sponsors for their commitment to improving our school funding system.