

Testimony in support of HB22-1259 – Modifications to Colorado Works Program (Duran & Jodeh/Moreno) by Sarah Barnes, Manager of Special Policy Initiatives at the Colorado Children’s Campaign to the House Public and Behavioral Health and Human Services Committee on April 12, 2022

- Madam Chair and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of HB1259, and a sincere thank you to Reps. Duran and Jodeh for your incredible leadership on this bill.
- We have been very proud to co-convene the TANF Coalition, a group of over 30 organizations, direct service providers, and directly impacted people, that has been working for years to improve the TANF program in Colorado.
- We have worked for months with stakeholders to design policy changes to address the most significant issues in the program for families, including members of the coalition, the Department of Human Services, and Denver Human Services, who have all been incredible partners in this effort.
- We have also worked for months with counties to address their feedback on the policy and we were glad to incorporate numerous changes in the bill in response to county requests. With the amendments to the bill today, including protections for the TANF reserves, we believe counties will still be able to offer the work supports and services they provide to families.
- TANF serves families who are living far below the poverty level. For a family of three, living in extreme poverty means getting by on only \$10 per person per day. This has a profound impact on the health, well-being, and development of children and on the ability of families to meet their most basic needs.
- Families in extreme poverty were struggling to make ends meet before the pandemic and are likely still the furthest from economic recovery.
- Yet, during the pandemic, TANF caseload numbers in Colorado declined, and the amount of money in Colorado’s TANF reserves increased. This indicates that the TANF program, as currently constructed, is not responsive to economic swings or the needs of families. The TANF program in Colorado is not serving families the way that it should.
- HB1259 will help fix that.
- The bill will increase basic cash assistance, or BCA, in the TANF program. BCA is the most targeted approach we can take to reducing extreme childhood poverty, by helping families cover the cost of the most basic necessities – food, clothing, rent and diapers. BCA payments have not kept up with inflation or the high cost of living in Colorado.
- The bill will also improve the way TANF serves Colorado families by reducing punitive sanctions, which are ineffective, by updating work requirements, and by easing drug felony restrictions on access to the program.
- In addition, the bill will help to smooth the “cliff effect” in the program to allow families time to get their feet under them and figure out housing, transportation, and child care.
- Finally, the bill improves outreach about the program to families, communication with families when they are enrolled, and ensures that families have a voice when decisions and recommendations about the program are being made.
- When children live in predictable, stable environments and have connections to responsive caregivers, this supports their healthy development and improves their outcomes into adulthood. This bill will help ensure that Colorado’s TANF program helps families meet their basic needs so that they can provide the care they want to give to their children.
- We urge your support of HB1259. Thank you.