

## Testimony in support of HB 22-1376 – Supportive Learning Environments for K-12 Students

Leslie Colwell – Senate Judiciary – May 3, 2022

- Good evening members of the committee. My name is Leslie Colwell, and I lead the Children’s Campaign’s work on K-12 Education. I’m here to testify in strong support of HB-1376.
- This bill represents the collective work and shared priorities of a broad coalition of almost 20 education, health and youth-serving organizations. This group has been meeting regularly since last summer, when we co-convened an event with Colorado Youth Congress about a national school climate report published by The Aspen Institute and Excel in Ed. At that point, it was the end of the second school year disrupted by the pandemic, and we were optimistically looking ahead to kids returning to in-person school in the fall. We saw opportunities in the report’s recommendations for ways that Colorado could elevate the importance of school climate.
- Research shows that students master academic content most effectively when they experience trusting and affirming relationships with their peers and adults, and when they feel emotionally and physically safe so they can focus on learning. We also know that students, families and communities care about aspects of the school experience and learning environment besides academic performance, which is where a lot of the current emphasis in our data systems lies.
- Our coalition’s long-term vision is that every student in Colorado receives targeted support and learns in a positive, safe, inclusive environment. This bill lays the foundation for that objective by:
  - Making existing information about students’ experiences at school more consistent, transparent, and accessible
  - Allowing for a better understanding of the availability of school health professional supports and workforce challenges
  - Assessing school climate from educator perspectives
  - Establishing a model policy for the hiring, training, and evaluation of SROs, and
  - Limiting the use of restraint unless absolutely necessary and ensuring safe, appropriate spaces for use of seclusion.
- I want to thank CASE, the Rural Alliance and the Consortium of Special Education Directors for their engagement and stakeholding for the past several months. At their request, changes were made to the bill that we believe results in even stronger policy for schools and students.
- We encourage your full support of HB-1376. Thank you, committee members.