

Testimony in Support of HB18-1156, Limit Penalties for Juvenile Truancy
Senate Judiciary – April 10, 2018 – Leslie Colwell

- My name is Leslie Colwell, and I lead the Colorado Children’s Campaign’s work on K-12 issues. We are a nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy organization committed to ensuring that structural barriers to opportunity for children are removed, and to ensuring all students in Colorado graduate from high school prepared for their next step. I’m here to testify in support of House Bill 1156.
- If we want the best for Colorado kids, juvenile detention should never be used as a means to address habitual truancy. Detention is costly, ineffective, and most importantly, it perpetuates the problem it intends to solve: *keeping students in school and on track to graduate*.
- We have ample evidence that detaining youth has a profoundly negative impact on their mental and physical well-being, their education, and their employment. National and state research demonstrate that once a child is introduced into the juvenile justice system, he or she is less likely to graduate from high school, less likely to find success in the labor market, more likely to be diagnosed with depression, more likely to engage in suicide and self-harm, and more likely to return to a detention facility than his or her peer who is not detained.
- Incarceration puts students at greater risk of never reaching graduation – and students with truancy court oversight are those who are already disproportionately facing adversity. In Colorado, 88 percent of truant students are living in poverty and 70 percent are youth of color, compared with 49 percent and 46 percent among the state’s general youth population, respectively. Truancy is linked to multiple disadvantages within students’ homes, such as alcoholism, abuse, and neglect. These students need interventions and supports that will help them spend more time in school, not punishments that mean they spend even less time learning.
- You’ve also heard today that the cost of confinement in juvenile facilities isn’t cheap, at \$331 per day, per youth. Detaining young people for truancy does not make communities safer, and the costs of needlessly doing so are simply too high.

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- House Bill 1156 creates reasonable limits on sending juveniles to temporary custody for truancy, which would mean savings could be reinvested in community and family-based interventions that have been proven to work to reduce recidivism rates and increase student success. We were glad to see Sen. Holbert bring this important bill and urge you to vote yes on HB 1156. Thank you for your time.