Dear Representative Jackson, April 20, 2018

We are Aurora West College Preparatory Academy high school student advocates with Young Aspiring Americans for Social and Political Activism, we, and our families reside in your district. On April 4, 2018, the Colorado Senate joined the House in adopting a budget amendment, which approved $35 million for school safety. As we understand, the investment will be on building security upgrades in schools and an increase of officers within our space to ensure school safety. However, the notion of "safety" is incredibly different based on the intersectional identities of students. The rhetoric of "safety" for students most importantly depends on a student's race, gender, sexuality, citizenship status, socioeconomic status, and ability.

The idea that a group of representatives would decide what "safety" would be for students without student input greatly concerns us. Therefore, we would like to take this opportunity as YAASPA youth to let you know what safety looks like to us and hope that you will keep us in mind when thinking about what "safety" means:

Safety means that the voice of students are heard. Students don't want more guns. We want access to information and help with mental awareness. Safety is not giving attention to just certain students; it's about making sure we have equal access to mental health. Leilani Gomez 10th Grade

Safety means that I can get equal access to education, public spaces, and help from the police. Safety means not having to look over your shoulder every few seconds, being able to talk comfortably and being able to be yourself in a community. Mayleen Alvarez 9th Grade

To me safety is guaranteed success. I want my education to be protected. I want the same access as white students. Julliette Gonzales 10th Grade

I am a student in YAASPA that works to inform students of their civic literacy and understanding their rights. We learned that $35 million dollars that was approved to ensure safety. And in order to do this, I feel the need for you to know what safety is to me. Safety for me is equal access. For example, everyone to have access to security from the police without bias based on my race. Ruby Alvarez 10th Grade

Safety means: Having a space where we can share our beliefs and ideas without feeling judged. Having teachers who come from similar backgrounds who can relate and understand us. Being given equal access to opportunities in life. Jocelynne Farfan 10th Grade

Safety means to have a connected community where people feel safe with each other and don't have to worry about anything. To have teachers check exits and enters in schools and to have a space where you can share your opinions. Elizabeth Ortiz 10th Grade

As a student, safety means not living in fear. I shouldn't have to live in fear every time I go to school or simply to go hang out to hang out with friends. Safety means having equal rights. As a mix raced student, a lot of times I don't have people who understand me so it doesn't make me feel safe. Safety means not being scared because of my race. Nevaeh Goodman 9th Grade

Safety means that nothing is sugar-coated for students. So that we know the real world and can be ready for anything. Rachael 6th Grade

To me, safety means clarity. I need to know what is going on around me. Laws that are being passed should be better explained to students if it effects students. Audrey 11th Grade

Being able to freely walk around without having to look over my shoulder in my neighborhood. Lizeth Zamudio 11th Grade

Safety means being comfortable being alone outside of my house, in places like buses, the street, and at school. Aissata Watt 11th Grade

Safety for me means having stricter regulations on who can access guns as a whole not just about safety in schools. Shukri Mahamud 10th Grade

As you can see, safety means so much more to us than just increasing security in our schools. We hope that you can take our stories and represent us during your decision when speaking on what "safety" means for schools and how the $35 million will be utilized. Please keep our voices in mind when making decisions for us!

Sincerely,

Students at Aurora West College Preparatory Academy & YAASPA