

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

Leslie Colwell – House Education – April 21, 2022

- Good afternoon/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.
- The bill will also bring greater transparency and accountability when schools report discipline incidents, and specifically require more information about two discipline categories that comprise the majority of incidents. The latest data available show that more than HALF of discipline incidents are classified as either "disobedience" or "other violations of code of conduct." With HB-1376, schools will need to reasonably describe the behavior that led to discipline and what other interventions or de-escalation tactics were used. We have heard some concerns that this will increase administrative burden, but when an adverse action is taken against a student, we believe it is important to know why through documentation.
- We’ve also received some questions about the feasibility of timelines in the bill for the data standardization process and the development of district profile reports with school climate data. CDE has confirmed that these timelines are reasonable and feasible and that they will comply with the bill and fully consult with stakeholders.
- I want to thank CASE, the Rural Alliance, the League of Charter Schools and the Consortium of Special Education Directors for meeting with us several times over the past 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.