

Hello Chairperson and Committee Members,

My name is Teva Sienicki, and I serve as the Chief Executive Officer at Metro Caring, Colorado's leading anti-hunger organization. We work with our community to meet people's immediate need for nutritious food, while also working to address hunger at its root.

On behalf of our more than 75,000 community members across the state, I ask you to support House Bill 21-1117.

Too many Coloradans struggle to afford the bedrock of their wellbeing - their home, or spend so much on their housing, that they don't have enough left to put food on the table for their families.

The affordable housing crisis is a multifaceted issue, but a key piece in beginning to solve it is providing local governments a necessary tool to expand the supply of affordable housing in their community. As local governments are not currently allowed to require that a certain percentage of new developments include affordable housing options, Local Government Authority Promote Affordable Housing Units HB21-1117 would provide more local control to meet the needs of residents in their community and respond to local economic pressures.

Gentrification describes the arrival of wealthier people in an existing urban district, and the related increase in rents and property values, coupled with changes in the district's character and culture that typically involve the displacement of the communities that were there before. For the past few years throughout Colorado, gentrification has become more dramatic, and many historic communities of color have been ripped apart. Many Coloradans, nearly 40% of them, now spend at least a third of their income on housing which does not leave a lot of room to cover other essential expenses or for saving.

Access to affordable housing adversely affects rural areas of the state, mountain communities, and urban communities. It affects young and elderly people, individuals with disabilities, and Black and Brown communities. Families paying excessive amounts of their income for housing often have insufficient resources remaining for other essential needs, including food, medical insurance, and health care. These tradeoffs can threaten the health of all family members, particularly children.

As rents and property values spike in Colorado, we need to ensure that every Coloradan has a place to live. This bill works to make sure that local governments have the authority to ensure that new developments, which may ultimately contribute to gentrification, are required to include affordable housing options.

The clear connections between race, wealth, and housing are unavoidable and unacceptable. When Metro Caring conducted root cause analysis with our community about the drivers of hunger in our families and communities, housing ranked in at the top of the list. Disparities in access and cost directly contribute to hunger in our state, which is why it's critical that we support legislation to help end hunger at its root.

I thank you for your time today and ask you to support this critical bill during this pivotal moment in our state's COVID recovery.

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