



**Support HB21-1270: Increasing Investment into Colorado's SNAP Employment & Training Program,
Employment First**

Friday, April 23, 2021

On behalf of the Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO), the country's largest nonprofit reentry employment organization, please accept the following written testimony in support of increasing investment into Colorado's SNAP Employment and Training program, Employment First (EF), which serves EF participants through skills training and work-related education and training activities.

CEO's Colorado operations launched in May 2017 in Denver and September 2018 in Colorado Springs. CEO is the only reentry employment program in Colorado that focuses on the justice-impacted individuals with the highest barriers to employment, rigorously documents outcomes to maximize its effectiveness and has been shown to reduce recidivism and enhance long-term employment outcomes. According to CDPS, of the 20,000 people in state prisons, approximately 8,000 are parole eligible. Of those, CEO targets the 87% who are released to the community without a job and deemed at a "medium to high risk" to be reincarcerated. Reentry into the community after incarceration for these individuals can be a very challenging and difficult transition.

The most impactful component of CEO's program is that we provide participants with the opportunity to earn immediate and vital income on our transitional work crews, while also building the work experiences, job-readiness skills and confidence that will help them secure long-term employment. CEO has an existing relationship with the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) that creates opportunities for participants to get immediate access to transitional jobs with CEO as their employer of record. CEO's program immediately puts participants on a pathway to economic stability that will give them the ability to provide for their families, reducing intergenerational poverty.

CEO leverages state funding to draw down federal funds. For every \$1 of state investment, the ROI is \$1.50. CDHS and CDOT partnerships provide critical state investments in reentry services that maximize CEO's impact and ability to braid government revenue. By increasing investments in EF, CEO will be able to scale its service capacity in Colorado and deepen the program's impact by providing more comprehensive services. In order to pull down these federal resources, it is critical to increase state investment in targeted workforce programs to focus on providing employment services for formerly incarcerated people. Last year during the pandemic, CEO served 204 individuals and placed 119 into unsubsidized jobs in the community. Approximately 70 percent of Denver and Colorado Springs participants are typically enrolled in EF.

Increased investments in EF can support workforce services, education, transitional jobs and other skills training during the pandemic economic recovery efforts. EF helps participants access education and job training as well as critical supportive services and **is one of the few benefits that directly reach returning citizens within their first months of release, providing food security and access to vocational training during a critical period of reentry.** CEO is an Employment First 50-50 partner in both Denver and Colorado Springs and receives 50 percent reimbursement for providing employment and training to EF participants. CEO encourages the committee to support HB21-1270. Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony.

House Public & Behavioral Health & Human Services

04/23/2021 Upon Adjournment

HB21-1270 Approp To DHS For Suppl Assistance Nutrition Prog

Typed Text of Testimony Submitted

Name, Position, Representing	Typed Text of Testimony
Laura Ware For Self	<p>In Support of HB21-1270 "Appropriation to Department of Human Services for Supplemental</p> <p>Esteemed Members of the Colorado Public & Behavioral Health and Human Services Committee:</p> <p>My name is Laura Ware and I work with the Colorado Center on Law and Policy (CCLP) on job training and employment services issues. I am testifying today in support of 21-1270, for an appropriation to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment and Training program, also called Employment First. If passed, this appropriation will be a valuable additional resource for the numerous people across Colorado who are in need of job training and experience so they are able to re-enter the workforce in positions that pay living wages and offer future career opportunities.</p> <p>Part of my work at CCLP has included ongoing outreach to the diverse rural regions of Colorado where the level of resources and job opportunities vary depending on the area, and have been impacted in unique ways during the past year. In speaking with these regions, there have been many examples of individuals who have lost jobs temporarily or permanently due to the impacts of the pandemic. Staff from workforce centers in Ft. Morgan, Sterling and Burlington have been involved in these discussions, and have voiced the need for additional resources to support retraining activities and job retention assistance. An important element of this bill is to offer opportunities to regions of the state that have not had adequate resources, with an emphasis on offering support services, access to training and paid internships, and job coaching once someone identifies a position, all as a part of participation in the Employment First Program. This appropriation will provide additional resources to counties to provide support to individuals that has not been available due to limited resources.</p>

	<p>The passage of this bill can create new opportunities for participants to reach work goals. It would also create new options for Third Party Partners who have the knowledge of and relationships with local residents but have not had funds to use as match for Federal dollars. This bill would facilitate local organizations to provide greater assistance to job-seeking residents, and add significant resources to rural communities.</p> <p>For these reasons I urge you to please consider a vote in favor of 1270 today. Thank you.</p> <p>Laura Ware lauraware985@gmail.com 720-334-5430 (cell)</p>
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