

Madame Chair and Members of the Public Behavioral Health & Human Services Committee,

My name is Jordan Smith, Strategic Initiatives Manager at Illuminate Colorado. Illuminate is a statewide nonprofit working to strengthen families, organizations, and communities to prevent child maltreatment. **I am providing testimony on behalf of Illuminate Colorado in support of SB21-25 to ensure that families get off to the best possible start.**

Investing in preventative services yields a significant return on investment and long-term cost savings.¹ In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, families are balancing health and social stressors, unemployment, uncertainty, and more, and understandably are increasingly wanting to delay having children.² SB21-25 will allow even more Colorado families to plan their pregnancies by **leveraging a common-sense approach to draw down federal dollars that are currently being left on the table.**

Women of color are disproportionately bearing the brunt of this public health crisis.³ When surveyed, black women and hispanic women were more likely than white women to say that because of the pandemic, they want to have fewer children or would like to have children later.² Expanding women's and families' ability to determine and exercise their own reproductive choices extends to advancing broader economic equity and social justice for women and families for generations to come.

Access to contraception has significantly contributed to increasing women's earning power and to decreasing the gender pay gap.⁴ Delaying the birth of one's first child has been widely found to contribute to a **family's strengthened economic stability.**⁴ Having a child tends to decrease a woman's earnings in both the short and long term, a phenomenon known as the family gap.⁴ By delaying having a first child until her late 20s or 30s, the family gap can be mitigated.⁴ Furthermore, mental health can be supported as women and men who experience unintended pregnancy and unplanned childbirth are more likely than those who do not to experience depression, anxiety, and lower reported levels of happiness.⁴

In times of stress, such as the current COVID-19 pandemic and economic downturn, there is a direct correlation between families' economic and social struggles and increases in cases of child abuse and neglect.⁵ Child neglect often occurs when parents are overwhelmed with an array of systemic stressors and is directly linked to financial security.⁶ Delaying of birth or spacing between births can allow individuals time to consider readiness, number of children they wish to have, and promote the health, safety, development, and care for the children they may already have.⁶

This bill will help maintain the state's success at reducing unintended pregnancy and ensure that families get off to the best possible start. Please join Illuminate Colorado in our pursuit of strengthening families by voting yes on SB21-25.

Sincerely,

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Building Brighter Childhoods

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4. The Social and Economic Benefits of Women's Ability To Determine Whether and When to Have Children (March 2013). Guttmacher Institute.
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5. What the Economic Downturn Means for Children, Youth and Families. (2021). American Psychological Association.
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6. Preventing Child Neglect Position Statement (2016). Prevent Child Abuse America.
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