



STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF SB19-136

Dear Senate Judicial Committee:

The ACLU writes to support SB19-136. In the existing pilot program at Lookout Mountain Youth Services Center, the Division of Youth Services (DYS) has invested in needed culture change to improve outcomes for youth while keeping facilities safe. The Missouri Youth Services Institute (MYSI) is consulting with DHS to create, run, and evaluate this pilot program based on the Missouri model, the gold standard for effective treatment of incarcerated youth. This model promotes a culture that builds strong relationships between staff, youth, and their peers, which has been shown to effectively rehabilitate youth while also keeping facilities safe—Missouri youth corrections facilities have lower rates of assault, restraint, and seclusion than facilities in other states, and in particular, staff are less likely to be assaulted.

The pilot brings this culture of respect, care, and safety to Colorado. The ACLU was able to visit the existing pilot program and found a huge change from other DHS units. There was a more homelike environment for youth, with a culture based on relationship building and no use of seclusion. Youth were learning new ways to calm themselves, reduce anger and stress, and ultimately control their own behavior. The youth took pride in their new environment—staff reported that they kept it cleaner and tidier than ever before.

While MYSI is still available to consult with DHS and evaluate the efficacy of the pilot program, it makes sense to open a second pilot program in the southern part of the state. This type of culture change requires staff training and staff buy in—having staff who are trained in the pilot's techniques, and who can spread the word among other DHS staff that these techniques are effective and safe, is essential to continuing to promote culture change in DHS facilities across the state. This bill will take full advantage of the assistance MYSI is able to offer while still here in Colorado, and help DHS continue to make the changes we need to make our facilities more effective for youth and safer for youth and staff.

Sincerely,

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