

**Tim Hernández | UNC Student Body President**

My name is Tim Hernández and I am the Student Body President at the University of Northern Colorado. I am here today to testify as a student at the University of Northern Colorado in support of the Colorado Votes Act which would expand access to the Voter Service Center on my campus. As the Student Body President at the University of Northern Colorado, I represent over 10,000 students who come from a variety of backgrounds and voting experiences.

In 2018, an on-campus VSPC wasn't open until Election Day and dropbox the final two days. The students I represent were working through long ballots, and did not want to make early decisions. But also, the issue of returning their mail ballot was particularly challenging due to a dorm mail-system inefficiency, and many students ballots were delayed in delivery. Before Election Day, students that needed to vote in person had to go off campus to vote in person. This was a tremendous barrier for many UNC students because the closest VSPC was about an hour walk from campus, and many of us don't have access to a car for transportation. This bill would create more access by providing a Voter Service Center throughout the early voting period.

On Election Day, I showed up to the Voter Service Center on campus, like countless other students, and got in line to drop off my ballot. Because there wasn't a VSPC on campus until Election Day, the scene was chaotic. I waited in line for two hours only to realize I could have just dropped by ballot off at the dropbox at the front of the line—but no one had let me know that was the case. Had there been a VSPC and dropbox earlier in the voting period, more students would have been able to vote earlier and Election Day would have been a smoother experience. Once the poll worker finally announced to the group of over 100 people waiting in line to vote, the line immediately split in half for those waiting to vote and person and those waiting to drop off their ballots. It's clear that the voter service center needs to be open longer for the poll workers to be prepared for the influx of students they see in the final few days to prevent these issues—and regardless, the line to vote was too long. Not every UNC student can wait in line for two hours. I was lucky enough to be able to drop off my ballot and leave, but many of my peers were forced to wait even longer. UNC is home to over 10,000 students who deserve fair access to our democracy.

Voting for the first time is a powerful experience for young people and we deserve to have our voices heard. Please support HB19-1278 in order to ensure access to voting services on campuses like UNC.

## **AnnaMarie McCorvie | Durango Organizer**

My name is AnnaMarie McCorvie and I registered and turned young people out to vote at Colorado Mesa University, Adams State University, Western State Colorado University, and Fort Lewis College during the 2018 election. I am here today to support the Colorado Votes Act, House Bill 1287, because having VSPCs and dropboxes on college campuses is imperative to young voter accessibility and turnout.

Last fall, I spent the majority of my time at Western State in Gunnison and Fort Lewis in Durango, neither of which had a VSPC or dropbox on campus for the midterm. This created several challenges that prevented students from voting. While hundreds of students registered to vote on both of these campuses, many of these students did not ultimately receive their ballot in the mail, or did not have enough time to mail it back. Returning a mail ballot is particularly challenging because mail on the western slope takes days longer than the front range, as it goes through New Mexico or Denver before heading back to the west slope. That meant for many students, by the time they received their ballot it was already too late to mail it back in and be sure it would be counted.

Many didn't receive a ballot, meaning they needed to visit a voter service center to register, vote in person or get a replacement ballot. Students falling into any of these categories were deeply disappointed when I informed them there was no VSPC on campus.

For most students, their main form of transportation is by foot or bus, so access to the VSPC and dropboxes in town was bleak. In Gunnison, the walk from campus to the nearest dropbox or VSPC was 20 minutes. In Durango it takes 2 buses to get to the nearest VSPC and the walk from campus to the nearest dropbox was 26 minutes, and an hour to the VSPC, down a butte and three steep roads, one of which is often closed because of snow and ice. Students, like many other voters, are juggling full schedules and many of them cannot afford to take an hour and a half, or more, to vote.

We drove over 100 students to the polls in Durango and Gunnison but were limited by a 4 passenger car and 20 minute drive. The last person I drove at 6:52pm on Election Day never received his ballot in the mail, and had we not been there ready with our car, he would have missed his opportunity to vote completely.

Communities on the Western Slope already feel disconnected and disenfranchised from the political institutions dominated by the Front Range. Requiring a VSPC and dropbox on many college campuses will be a monumental step in improving voters' access and experience across all of Colorado. I'm invested in this because of how important voting in person is to a good chunk of my generation. Please vote YES on this bill. Thank you.

## **Declan Talley | Red Rocks Community College Student**

My name is Declan Talley, I'm a student at Red Rocks Community College and I want to thank you all for giving me the opportunity to speak. I'm speaking in support of the Colorado Votes Act, as a student who believes in the power of this state to be a role model for democracy reform. Colorado has a long history of repeatedly working to make our electoral system more fair and accessible. This bill will keep up with this tradition by establishing more Voter Service Polling Centers and drop box locations in underserved communities, including community colleges.

Currently, the nearest VSPC to my campus is a few miles away. As a result, at the Jefferson County Fair Grounds VSPC, which was the closest location from campus, long lines formed with hundreds of people trying to cast their votes at the same time. The lines seemed so long that I decided to go to a different location. This is not fair to students who may have busy schedules, or who need to get to their jobs after class. In fact, a wait time of 30 minutes or longer isn't really fair to anyone. Establishing a voter service center on campus would require very little in terms of resources on the behalf of my college, and would directly benefit the nearly 9000 students who are currently enrolled. It would not only reduce wait times, but would also encourage those who are not typically part of the process to think about voting for the first time.

Many of our state's major colleges already have easy access to these services, and because of that we have had some of the highest young voter turnout in the country. If we want to continue that trend, it is so important that we expand this kind of voting infrastructure to community colleges like mine as well as expanding access on existing campuses with these services.

I know the entire student body at my school would be positively affected by the passage of this bill as the lack of voter services currently on campus is both part of the reason why many Coloradans experienced longer wait times at the polls last year, and why many Coloradans didn't have the time to vote at all. I urge you all to support this bill today as it will be a victory in Democracy for not only my fellow students, but for so many people around this state.

## **Katie Lea | Colorado State University Student**

My name is Katie Lea, and I am a sophomore in the Political Science program at Colorado State University. This is an incredibly important issue to me, but I am not able to deliver my own testimony today because of my busy school schedule. I am urging a strong YES vote on House Bill 1278.

My inability to be here today is demonstrative of a serious barrier young people have with participation in our democracy. Young people don't have a lower voting rate because we don't care, but because the current electoral system is not accessible to us. It is time that our state modernizes our election code to make voting more accessible for *all* Coloradans.

Students at CSU are lucky: so far, there has been a voter service center centrally located in our Student Center that returns to the campus year after year and is one of the most used voter service centers in the state. That's why I support guaranteeing campus voter service locations for schools of various sizes—I've seen how important it is that it's on my campus, both that it's centrally located, and that it is consistent. Unfortunately, there are *still* many students on my campus who are discouraged from voting because of long lines and unreasonable wait times. Research and experience show that college students are not typically the voters who vote by mail, and we surge into the voter service centers during the final few days before the election. The result is a growing, unacceptable line that discourages people from voting. I have seen it myself, and I have talked to an unsettling number of my peers that simply don't vote because they don't have time in their busy schedules to wait before rushing off to class or work. House Bill 1278 offers a fix to this problem by extending the hours of voter service centers during the final day of voting.

Our election law not only does not accommodate young people voting -- it discourages it. Last year, I was incredibly engaged in Colorado's elections. I turned 18 in August, and voted for my very first time in the November general election. Unfortunately, despite being eligible for the November election, I was not able to *fully* participate in the 2018 elections. Throughout the year, I was asked to sign countless petitions for pieces of legislation or candidates that I supported wholeheartedly, but was unable to because I was 17. This also meant I was unable to vote in the March primaries to have a say in the candidates I'd be voting on in November. Why should I be expected to support one candidate or another when I didn't have a say for who was on the ballot? Under house bill 1278, I would have been able to participate fully in Colorado's elections, including the primaries.

The key to increasing the rate at which young people vote is access. Accommodating the unique situation of college students and young voters -- especially those living on campus -- is the only effective option to increase young people's voting rate, interest in politics, and decrease the intimidation factor of participation. You have the opportunity today to modernize our elections and make them accessible for all Coloradans. Please vote yes on HB 1278.

## **Julie Grossman | Columbine High School Student**

Thank you for taking the time to hear from me today. My name is Julie Grossman and I'm a senior at Columbine High School. I am here today with strong support for House Bill 19-1278 because I believe that every individual that has the ability to vote in a general election should also have the ability to voice their opinion within the preceding primary election.

In AP Government last fall, I learned the ins and outs of what is arguably the most important civil liberty within our democracy: the right to vote. Because my eighteenth birthday fell two months prior to the November 2018 election, I was granted with the privilege of voting in my first election. While I am incredibly grateful for the ability to vote and to live in a nation which is founded upon the idea that individual's should have a say in who governs them, I became further aware of an inherent flaw within our democracy: I was voting in a general election for candidates whom I had no say in voting for in the primary election because I was not 18 at the time. House Bill 19-1278 would allow 17 year-olds to vote in primaries if they're going to be 18 by the general election.

If you're voting in the general election, you should have a say in the primary—and young people, like myself, have made it clear that they want to participate in the important decisions made in primaries. Young Coloradans are already participating in elections at historic rates, some of the highest in the country. This bill is vital to building a more representative and reflective democracy. I strongly urge you to support this bill so that we can lead the way as a state and provide more opportunities for political engagement.

## **Natasha Lee | Colorado State University Graduate**

My name is Natasha Lee and I recently graduated from Colorado State University. As accessibility for voting and voter turnout is important to me personally and vital for a strong and healthy democracy, I strongly urge a YES vote on House Bill 1278.

In my final semester as a college student, I became closely involved with the 2018 midterm election cycle due to my personal passion for politics. I helped with both voter registration and get-out-the-vote efforts throughout the Fort Collins community, including primarily on CSU's campus. I was able to see first-hand how vital VSPCs are to the voting process for both people of color and young voters. In the final days leading up to the 2018 midterm election, I experienced many student voters whose ballots never made it to their homes or apartments. Having the VSPC on campus at Colorado State University allowed these individuals to go and vote in person, right then and there, as well as update their voter registration and change of address in a one-stop, convenient and easy location. VSPCs are vital for allowing and encouraging young people and people of color to participate in democracy and allow their voices to be heard and counted. Unlike drop boxes, they also allow voters to register to vote for the first time, or update their voter registration. I also witnessed how long the lines get in the days leading up to the election at the VSPC. If VSPCs opened earlier and stayed open later, especially in the final days leading up to the election, more students, young people, and people of color would have the opportunity to vote, as this would allow them not to have to miss work or class to cast their ballots.

VSPCs, like the one on CSU's campus, help young people participate in democracy by conveniently meeting them where they are at or in a centralized location. In fact, according to America Votes, data from 2018 shows that the VSPC located on CSU's campus helped turnout 43% of the voters in that specific precinct (2019). Imagine how expanding the hours of operation leading up to election day could have increased voter turnout even more. By expanding the number of VSPCs available, as well as extending the hours of operation, HB 1278 ensures that people who want to vote, can, without the hassle or intimidation of waiting in long lines and without having to miss work or school to cast their ballot. In the final days leading up to the election, I was on campus at CSU daily and witnessed first-hand the long lines, and also observed how the lines discouraged some individuals from voting. Additionally, some young people could not vote due to conflicting scheduled commitments, be it for school or work. This is unacceptable and HB 1278 would help provide a solution to the barrier of accessibility that too many young people and people of color face in Colorado. By extending the hours of VSPC in the final few days before the election—when most young people vote—it ensures that every person's voice is heard and counted and voting is made easy and less intimidating, exactly how it should be.

## **Lana Morgan | Colorado State University Graduate**

Hello, my name is Lana Morgan and I am a recent graduate of the University of Colorado Boulder with degrees in history and political science. This is an important issue to both myself and college students around the state, which is why I am here delivering this testimony today. I am urging a strong YES on House Bill 1278.

Students at CU are lucky when it comes to voting. There has been a permanent ballot drop off on campus for years, and each year there is a large and centrally located Voting Service Center that returns to the CU campus each year. That's why I support having Voting Service Centers on all college campuses throughout Colorado—I've seen how accessible voting is at my alma mater, but there were still long lines to vote during my years on campus. In 2016, I waited in line for over 30 minutes to vote for the presidential election. I saw many around me worried they would miss class if they stayed in line, and folks who eventually ended up leaving because they "knew they would vote later" (this was already in the afternoon, and the voting center would close at 7pm). In 2018, I spent election day at CSU and the story was much the same: young people were being discouraged from voting by the long wait time at the on-campus VSPC. Young people care about voting, and they care who represents them and what happens in their communities. Long wait times make it more difficult for young people to vote, and this barrier needs to be eliminated.

This bill will expand the voting hours during the final days of voting to improve access to student voters and working people. While I was in college, I worked in the restaurant industry to help support myself. I worked on election day in 2017, but I had been able to mail in my ballot early. When I walked into work that morning and began talking with coworkers, many realized that was the last day to vote, and they hadn't been able to cast their ballot. Many of our shifts would not end until 7 or 8pm, which meant that despite caring about issues in our community, they weren't able to voice their concerns because they had to provide for themselves. Under House Bill 1278, my coworkers would be able to finish their shifts and vote in person.

We want all eligible voters to have the opportunity to cast their ballots, and the best way to do that is through access: more VSPCs, longer hours of in-person voting, 24-hour ballot boxes. The voices of college students and young voters matter in Colorado, especially in a system that prides itself on being a national leader in elections. This bill will modernize elections and make it easier for all Coloradans to vote. I urge you to vote YES on House Bill 1278.