



# The Bell Policy Center

## Information on Private Occupational Schools

### Senate Bill 17-118

Testimony to the Senate State, Veterans, & Military Affairs Committee  
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Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony.

I am Frank Waterous, senior policy analyst with the Bell Policy Center. The Bell is a non-profit, non-partisan, progressive research and advocacy organization dedicated to making Colorado a state of opportunity for all.

**The Bell Policy Center supports Senate Bill 17-118. Colorado students and families need the best and most comprehensive information possible in order to choose among the variety of postsecondary education and training options available to them in our state. Senate Bill 17-118 contributes to this goal in two significant ways. First, the bill expands the specific information that private occupational schools must provide to prospective students prior to their enrollment. Second, it directs the Colorado Department of Higher Education to make comparative information on a broad range of program outcomes available through a free, public, online resource.**

The evidence is clear that success in education and training programs leading to postsecondary and workforce credentials is a key gateway to economic opportunity for both youth and working-age adults. In fact, by the year 2020, 74 percent of all jobs in Colorado will require some level of postsecondary education – the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest percentage of any state in the nation.<sup>1</sup> As the Working Poor Families Project notes, “postsecondary education is increasingly central to America’s ability to compete in a global marketplace, to the productivity of employers and to the livelihood of individual adults who hope to earn family-supporting wages.”<sup>2</sup>

But at the same time, paying for postsecondary education is a real concern for students and families in Colorado and throughout the country. Many find that taking on student loan debt is a necessity for pursuing the credentials needed for success in a particular occupation or profession. While having student loan debt is not in itself a problem, unmanageable debt leading to failure to repay the loan and default can have negative long-term impacts on students’ and families’ opportunities to achieve economic self-sufficiency.

Research shows that there are major differences in costs, completion rates, employment and earnings outcomes, and student loan debt levels across programs and institutions in our state.<sup>3</sup> It is critical that students and families have easy access to the complete, comparative information they need to make informed choices among their many postsecondary program options. Senate Bill 17-118's information disclosure and comparability requirements are fundamental to achieving this goal.

The bottom line is this: Coloradans need postsecondary training and credentials to enter or stay in the middle class. And Colorado employers need more people with the postsecondary education and skills required for business productivity and growth. This is particularly true for "middle-skills" jobs that require some postsecondary education and training but less than a four-year degree. Private occupational schools are part of these efforts.

**Senate Bill 17-118 will not reduce or restrict student and family choice in any way. Instead, it will ensure that more students have the information they need to make the best choices for them about their postsecondary options, and that they can join the workforce with the skills, know-how and stable financial footing needed to succeed.**

**Based on all these facts, the Bell Policy Center supports Senate Bill 17-118 and urges your support, as well.**

We thank Senator Fields for bringing this bill to you today and thank the committee for the opportunity to share our thoughts.

If you have any questions, or if I can provide further information, please contact me at (303) 297-0456 or [waterous@bellpolicy.org](mailto:waterous@bellpolicy.org).

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#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Colorado Department of Higher Education, *Legislative Report On The Skills for Jobs Act*, January 2016, [http://highered.colorado.gov/Publications/Reports/Legislative/Workforce/2016\\_SkillsforJob.pdf](http://highered.colorado.gov/Publications/Reports/Legislative/Workforce/2016_SkillsforJob.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Hilliard, Tom, *Graduating to College: Three States Helping Adult Education Students Get a College Education*, The Working Poor Families Project, Policy Brief Summer 2012, [http://www.workingpoorfamilies.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/policybrief-summer2012\\_2.pdf](http://www.workingpoorfamilies.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/policybrief-summer2012_2.pdf). The Bell Policy Center is the Working Poor Families Project's Colorado state partner in its efforts to better prepare America's working families for a more secure economic future.

<sup>3</sup> See for example Howarth, Robin, "Colorado's For-Profit College Students Struggle to Graduate, Pay Off Steep Debt Burdens," Center for Responsible Lending, January 2017, [http://responsiblelending.org/sites/default/files/nodes/files/research-publication/crl\\_colorado\\_jan2017.pdf](http://responsiblelending.org/sites/default/files/nodes/files/research-publication/crl_colorado_jan2017.pdf).