

Hello and thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Favianna Oropeza and I'm here today to ask for your support of Senate Bill 24, Private Student Loan Cap Act, because it's time for a change in favor and consideration of the hard working students and future workforce of Colorado.

I'm a first generation college student from Denver who has always dreamed of enrolling and graduating from college my entire life. Like most I know, I always viewed a college education as one of the key elements in having a successful career and also the foundation for a good and happy life. However, I'm now faced with the reality that I'll someday graduate from college with a mountain of debt to deal with. It's frustrating and disheartening to face this reality because I have dreamed of college since I was a child, and it's always been a top priority in my life.

When I was 21 years old, I enrolled in Metro to study Broadcast Journalism after transferring from Front Range Community College. I grew up in the lower middle class, and I have paid my own way for my education by taking out loans, using grants I was awarded, and working multiple jobs this entire time. Unfortunately, it's just not enough. Coming up with the money for college is far and beyond one of the most stressful things I've ever had to deal with.

My first semester of college at Front Range I did everything I could to pay for college--but even with the grants it wasn't enough. I ended up taking a semester off after one year of college so that I could focus on working to save up enough for the following semester. I felt forced into making a decision between being in school and taking on more loans versus going straight into the workforce to start paying on my loans.

Unfortunately, it's a decision that I literally make every semester, along with other decisions, like fixing my car if it breaks down so it can run. I have worked 1-3 jobs a semester just to "get by." I cannot afford to move away from home, I cannot afford to even take on a full schedule every semester. I am now at the point in my college career where I need to take on internships, but most of the time I have to deny them because I can't afford to take an unpaid internship. These are choices that millions of students are faced with every year.

Throughout this process, I continue to have this running thought--that I just don't have the money to attend college, and *I'm an in-state student with a job*. The student debt crisis is of course a huge issue to tackle, but my question is--why aren't we doing everything we can to make college more attainable for in-state students such as myself? Why are we putting the needs of our students on the back burner when this is no longer an issue that can be ignored? The accumulated debt of our students is far beyond a second to last priority. We have an opportunity to move forward with this bill and while it's not going to solve everything by any means, it's a very important step in the right direction that would mean a lot for young people such as myself.

Students need more support and I am urging this committee to do everything you can to help make education more accessible to Colorado students. Please vote yes on SB 24 and thank you for your time.