

My name is Andrew Barton, and I am the Programs and Engagement Manager at Colorado Common Cause, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that works for open, honest, and accountable government and seeks to strengthen public participation in civic life.

Common Cause has worked since 1971 to represent the public interest and to strengthen public participation in civic life.

For our citizen legislature to truly reflect the Coloradans it represents, public office must be a viable path for everyday people not just the independently wealthy.

This bill is an important step toward opening the path to public office to Coloradans who have been traditionally shut out. Working class Coloradans rarely make it to public office; nationally, about 3% of state legislators held working class jobs at the time of their election, compared to 52% of their constituents ([2018 study](#)).

Many would-be candidates who seek to serve and represent their communities are shut out of the possibility due to low wages that cannot support the high cost of living throughout Colorado. The amount that Colorado legislators make (~\$41-43k) is a major determinant of who can and cannot afford to run and hold office ([Colorado Sun analysis](#)).

To truly embody what it means to be a citizen's legislature, Colorado must be a place where young people, people of color, and working class people can run for office and support themselves financially through their terms once elected.

This bill is a step in the right direction. It will create a process through which fair pay can be determined for our general assembly.

[‘Splitting myself in half’: Colorado’s citizen-legislature clashes with financial realities | COVER STORY | Legislature | coloradopolitics.com](#)

HB1059_L.013

SENATE COMMITTEE OF REFERENCE AMENDMENT

Committee on State, Veterans, & Military Affairs.

HB24-1059 be amended as follows:

- 1 Amend reengrossed bill, page 9, line 1, strike "AND" and strike
- 2 "REPRESENTATIVES" and substitute "REPRESENTATIVES, AND TO THE
- 3 DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL APPOINTED
- 4 PURSUANT TO SECTION 2-3-304 (1)".

** ** ** ** **

Testimony on House Bill 24-1059
Seth Masket, Ph.D.
University of Denver

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of House Bill 1059. My name is Seth Masket. I am a professor of political science and director of the Center on American Politics at the University of Denver.

Colorado's legislature, like that of many other states, is a part-time, "citizen" or "amateur" legislature, meeting for roughly a third of the year. However, that does not account for the amount of legislative and political work that members do outside those four months. Additionally, the virtues of an amateur legislature – the idea that politics should not be a career, that it should not even be particularly desirable work – come with a number of costs. One of the main costs is that lower pay makes it difficult if not impossible for people to enter legislative service unless they have very flexible and well-compensated outside jobs, are retired, or are independently wealthy. Needless to say, this does not describe most Coloradans, meaning that public service does not truly represent the state's economic or social diversity.

For the most part, state legislators across the country are not terribly well-compensated. In 2022, among the forty state legislatures that pay an annual salary, the mean salary was just over \$40,000 a year.¹ Political scientists have examined some of the benefits of increasing legislative pay. There is evidence, for example, that when legislators' salary increases, they become more productive legislators, introducing more legislation and skipping fewer votes.² Another study suggests that legislators with higher pay tend to better represent their constituents, voting more in line with their districts' preferences.³ Other studies suggest that higher legislative pay can make legislative seats more competitive, since it encourages potential challenges to consider running.⁴

The evidence in the political science literature is mixed as to whether higher pay leads to greater economic diversity in the legislature. This is certainly an area that warrants addressing – officeholders tend to be substantially wealthier and better educated than Americans on average. And at least some studies show that higher pay can increase the percentage of working class

¹ <https://www.ncsl.org/about-state-legislatures/2022-legislator-compensation>

² Hoffman, Mitchell, and Elizabeth Lyons. 2015. "Do Higher Salaries Lead to Higher Performance? Evidence from State Politicians." May 29. <http://www-2.rotman.utoronto.ca/facbios/file/PoliticianSalaries.pdf>

³ Besley, Timothy. "Paying Politicians: Theory and Evidence." *Journal of the European Economic Association* 2, no. 2-3 (2004): 193-215.

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legislators, although other studies cast doubt on this.⁵ This is a relatively new area of study in political science and merits further study.

I am pleased to see that this legislation would create an independent legislative pay commission, consisting of members appointed by both the executive and legislative branches and by both the majority and the minority party. This is similar to how many other states have set legislative pay, and is far preferable to a system where legislators simply propose and vote on (or vote down) pay increases. This is invariably an unpopular vote and makes it harder for any legislator to make that vote.

I thank the members of the committee for their time. I would be happy to respond to any questions or concerns via e-mail at seth.masket@du.edu.

⁵ Carnes, Nicholas, and Eric R. Hansen. "Does Paying Politicians More Promote Economic Diversity in Legislatures?" *American Political Science Review* 110, no. 4 (2016): 699-716.

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