

**Testimony as Submitted in Support of HB24-1286: Equal Justice Fund Authority by  
Hunter Nelson, Political Chair at Colorado Black Women for Political Action**

**House Finance Committee**

**March 25, 2024, 1:30 p.m.**

**HCR 0112**

Dear Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

My name is Hunter Nelson, and I am the Political Chair for Colorado Black Women for Political Action (CBWPA). CBWPA is a partisan, membership-based organization; we have been dedicated to engaging Black women in Colorado in policy and politics since 1977. We were founded by the first African American female state Senator, Hon. Gloria Tanner, along with 12 other women to provide a space for advocacy for the Black Community in Colorado. Today, we provide programs and services to help Black people make informed political decisions and grow their policy engagement skills. **We support HB24-1286: Equal Justice Fund Authority, and ask that you vote yes on this bill.**

According to most recent data from the Women's Foundation of Colorado (2018), 19.2% of Black women in Colorado live in poverty. This is primarily due to systemic inequities resulting from institutionalized gendered racism that perpetuates gender pay gaps and prevents Black women from achieving higher educational attainment and securing better-paying jobs. Economic insecurity threatens Black women's ability to afford basic needs, including housing, food and medical care. When Black women run into legal situations that further exacerbate barriers to accessing these basic needs, Black women may need to rely on civil legal aid organizations for assistance.

Nationwide, Black women are at the greatest risk of being evicted from their homes, with one in five renters behind on rent and likely to face eviction being Black women.<sup>1</sup> Access to medical care is also extremely critical for Black women, especially those who are pregnant or postpartum. According to the Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment (2023), Black birthing people in Colorado are twice as likely to die during pregnancy or within one year postpartum than their white counterparts.<sup>2</sup> Black Coloradans are also more likely to lack access to food - in 2019, one-fifth of Black Coloradans reported experiencing food insecurity, and those who reported experiencing food insecurity were also more likely to report worse health outcomes.<sup>3</sup> Also, data from the Institute for Women's Policy Research (2017) shows that 40% of Black women will experience domestic violence; however, due to low wages and higher rates of poverty, are less able to afford legal aid for these situations.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [The Disproportionate Burden of Eviction on Black Women - Center for American Progress](#)

<sup>2</sup> [FINAL 2023 MMPP Legislative Report.pdf - Google Drive](#)

<sup>3</sup> [An Uneven Burden: Food Insecurity in Colorado | Colorado Health Institute](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Violence Against Black Women – Many Types, Far-reaching Effects - IWPR](#)

HB24-1286 would create the Equal Justice Fund Authority with the purpose of administering the Equal Justice Fund, which would provide funding to civil legal aid organizations helping Coloradans with legal problems that threaten their basic needs, including those involving food, shelter, utilities, and necessary medical care, and helps those facing domestic violence. Coloradans facing civil cases do not have the right to an attorney like in criminal cases; therefore, if they are of lower incomes, which Black women in Colorado disproportionately are, they may rely on civil aid organizations for legal assistance and representation. Establishing a fund to support these civil aid organizations is critical to ensure that they can meet the needs of all who seek and need their services, so that low income Coloradans can have just and equal access to the justice system and court processes.

HB24-1286 would require certain court filings to incur an additional \$20 filing fee that would be deposited into the Equal Justice Fund. However, this fee is waived for individuals whom the court determines are unable to pay the fee. This ensures that Coloradans of lower incomes are not further cost-burdened during the court process.

All Coloradans, including Black women, deserve equitable access to the resources and support they need when faced with civil cases that threaten access to their basic needs. Establishing an Equal Justice Fund to invest in Colorado's local civil legal aid organizations is one more step toward racial equity and more equitable access to the court process for underserved communities. **Please vote yes on HB24-1286.**

Thank you,

Hunter Nelson, MSW  
Political Chair  
Colorado Black Women for Political Action