



TO: Executive Committee of the Legislative Council

FROM: Sarah E. Moss, MPA  
Director, Colorado Youth Advisory Council (COYAC)

DATE: February 5, 2026

SUBJECT: COYAC appropriation for FY 2026-27

### **Requested FY 2026-27 appropriation**

COYAC requests to continue the same appropriation with no increase.

\$50,000 total includes:

- |          |   |
|----------|---|
| \$26,000 | Nonpartisan staffing & coaching (year-round)  |
| \$15,000 | Supplies, materials, software, and in-person meetings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ August two-day overnight retreat (meals, meeting space, mileage, parking, lodging for all members)</li><li>■ Spring Day at the Capitol (meals, mileage, parking, lodging for rural members)</li><li>■ June Awards &amp; Senior Send-Off Dinner (meal, meeting space, mileage, parking, lodging for rural members)</li><li>■ July presentation to the <a href="#">interim Hugh McKean Hugh Colorado Youth Advisory Council Review Committee</a> (mileage, parking, lodging for rural members)</li></ul> |
| \$9,000  | Professional services: accounting, insurance, IT, website, photography  |

## Requested statute updates to honor the late Sen. Faith Winter

1)

Sen. Faith Winter was COYAC's biggest advocate and supporter during the last several years and sponsored multiple bills based on the students' ideas.

We had discussed with Sen. Winter a bill for the 2026 session that would remove the sunset clause of the legislation and make COYAC a permanent program.

*C.R.S. 2-2-1307: "Repeal of part. This part 13 is repealed, effective September 1, 2028. Prior to the repeal of this part 13, the council must be reviewed as provided for in section 2-3-1203."*



2)

To honor Sen. Winter, we propose renaming the "Representative Hugh McKean Colorado Youth Advisory Council Review Committee" to the "Representative Hugh McKean and Senator Faith Winter Colorado Youth Advisory Council Review Committee" in C.R.S. 2-2-1305.5.



*Rep. Brandi Bradley, Rep. Regina English, Sen. Faith Winter and COYAC members pose after the July 2025 interim Hugh McKean Hugh Colorado Youth Advisory Council Review Committee.*

## Background

- **Interim committee and legislative members** – C.R.S. 2-2-1305.5.(6)(b):
  - (1) *There is created in the legislative branch the Representative Hugh McKean Colorado youth advisory council review committee to review the council’s work. The committee is comprised of ten members, as described in subsection (2) of this section.*
  - (2)
    - (a) *The review committee includes five voting members, as follows:*
      - (I) *The four legislative members of the council, as described in section 2-2-1303 (1)(a); and*
      - (II) *One member of the legislative council, created in section 2-3-301, appointed pursuant to subsection (3) of this section.*
    - (b) *The review committee includes as nonvoting members five members of the council, appointed pursuant to section 2-2-1304 (6).*
  - (3)
    - (a) *Repealed.*
    - (b) *On or before April 20, 2023, and on or before April 1 of each year thereafter, the chair of the legislative council shall appoint the member serving pursuant to subsection (2)(a)(II) of this section to serve during the subsequent legislative interim.*
  - (4) *In odd-numbered years, the speaker of the house of representatives shall appoint the chair of the review committee and the president of the senate shall appoint the vice-chair. In even-numbered years, the president of the senate shall appoint the chair and the speaker of the house of representatives shall appoint the vice-chair. The appointing authorities shall make the appointments on or before April 20, 2023, and on or before April 1 of each year thereafter.*
  - (5)
    - (a) *The review committee may meet up to three times during each interim but may not travel unless authorized by the executive committee of the legislative council. A majority of voting members constitutes a quorum.*
- **In-person meetings** – During the 2021 interim committee meetings, Representative Hugh McKean – who sponsored HB18-1395 to create the interim committee – asked that COYAC students meet in person at least twice per year. Rep. McKean and Representative Barbara McLachlan sponsored SB22-014 Colorado Youth Advisory Council Updates, which required two of the council's four meetings each year be held in person.
- **Virtual meetings** – COYAC meets virtually each month for training. Policy committees meet either weekly or every other week.
- **Rural and Tribal participation** – Statute designates multiple COYAC seats for students outside the Denver metro area: 35 senate district seats, 1 Southern Ute Indian Tribe seat, 1 Ute Mountain Ute Tribe seat, and 3 at-large seats “to help ensure diversity on the

council, with an express concern for adequate rural representation.” Rep. McKean and Rep. Bri Buentello sponsored HB20-1021 to add COYAC representatives from Native American tribes with reservations in Colorado. Tribal and rural members have long drive times that require overnight stays in Denver. We recruit applicants from a wide range of backgrounds across the state, and some may be eligible for free/reduced lunch programs. Providing mileage, on-site food, and lodging supports the legislative intent of statewide participation.

- **Nonpartisan staffing** – COYAC’s contracted staff supports the students in the same way the Legislative Council staff supports the legislators: nonpartisan and policy-agnostic. COYAC staff provides:
  - Training on government roles and structures, the policy process, and research methods
  - Discussions about nonpartisanship and civility
  - Timelines and work plans
  - Coaching on chairing meetings, leadership, communication, and conflict resolution
  - Templates and examples
  - Recommendations for research sources and outreach across multiple viewpoints and geographic areas
  - Public speaking training and rehearsals
  - Planning and logistics for virtual meetings and in-person meetings
  
- **Student-led policy** – The students generate the policy priorities and recommendations. They discuss dozens of problems they experience as teenagers, divide themselves into committees to narrow their focus, and conduct research and outreach. The policy memos they present during the interim committee are the students’ viewpoints, research, outreach, and writing.

## Impact

“You guys are really on top of it - thank you for really good presentations, thank you for a lot of detail, thank you for being able to answer all the questions. Sometimes when we get presenters, we get that deer-in-the-headlights look, and then they’re like, ‘We’ll get an expert to tell you about that,’ but none of you guys did that. Terrific. Thank you.



“It is my greatest honor to be able to incorporate your voices here... and to bring you here at the right time [interim committee instead of a spring meeting] is actually the most important change we’ve made probably in the last few years, to have an actual concrete way for your voices to be heard through legislation. I’m delighted you’re here. Thank you for your preparation.”

- The late House Minority Leader and HD51 Representative Hugh McKean (Republican, Loveland) – who sponsored HB19-1024 to create the COYAC interim committee – speaking at the 2021 interim committee

“And even though we were starting to get some younger legislators, the world is changing so quickly that every decade younger people experience the world in a dramatically different way than those who came before them. It’s important to find a way to engage youth.”



- Former Senator (SD6) and Representative (HD59) Ellen Roberts (Republican, Durango), who sponsored HB08-1157 to create COYAC, speaking to The Colorado Sun in 2020 for the article "Voices of Colorado youth, amplified by activism and opportunity, find receptive ears with lawmakers"

In FY 2024-25, COYAC members presented 11 [recommendations](#) from these six policy committees to the legislators of the Hugh McKean Colorado Youth Advisory Council Review Committee:

1. Education: Access to preparation materials for SAT, ACT, and AP Tests; Funding for civic education programs
2. Environmental: Pollution from plastic waste, air quality issues, and water contamination; Unequal enforcement of environmental mandates
3. Healthcare: Inform and mobilize youth about public health and environmental hazards; Access to equitable healthcare and medical options in rural areas
4. Postsecondary education planning resources: Resource gaps for young adults with intellectual disabilities to transition into postsecondary institutions; Independent living skills for young adults; Statewide platform for Individual Career and Academic Plans (ICAP)

5. Substance abuse: Promoting the Colorado QuitLine; Nicotine labeling; Collecting and reporting data about oral nicotine pouch use
6. Teacher retention: Addressing Colorado's teacher shortage

In FY 2023-24, COYAC presented these [policy recommendations](#) to the interim committee:

1. Increasing Accessibility in School Buildings inspired bill sponsor Senator Faith Winter to include schools in [HB25-1030](#) Accessibility Standards in Building Codes the bill, which became law
2. Increasing Health Literacy for Youth
3. Piloting Innovative Options for School Transportation
4. Funding Solar Panels for Schools
5. Adding Youth Representatives to the Environmental Justice Advisory Board inspired [SB25-055](#) Youth Involvement in Environmental Justice, which became law
6. Educating Youth on the Transition to Renewable Energy
7. Reducing Food Waste in Schools inspired [HB25-1059](#) Food Waste Reduction in Public Schools, which became law
8. Distributing Naloxone to Prevent Overdoses inspired [SB25-164](#) Opioid Antagonist Availability & State Board of Health, which became law



*The bill signing for SB25-055 Youth Involvement in Environmental Justice on May 19, 2025 included COYAC members Ashna Shah (third from right) and Sophie Tipper (fourth from right).*

For the current FY 2025-26, the students have formed committees to:

- Review applications from new members
- Serve as small group leaders/mentors to welcome new members and design a yearbook
- Lead COYAC as an executive committee
- Plan and lead training sessions on outreach, testifying at the legislature, and more
- Research, outreach, and propose policy recommendations on the environment, healthcare, mental health, and technology/AI, and technology/regulation



*Left: At the bill signing for HB22-1052 Promoting Crisis Services To Students on June 8, 2022, SD27 representative Aimee Resnick (in yellow) shares the story of the policy idea with (left to right) Lt. Governor Dianne Primavera, Governor Jared Polis, Taleen Sample (SD32), and Skye O'Toole (SD33). Right: Taleen Sample (SD32) and Aimee Resnick (SD27) hold pens from Governor Polis.*

“The day I received the email telling me that I had been accepted into COYAC was one of the most life changing days of my life. Meeting all of the other incredible youth that have the same passion for change that I have made me realize I wasn’t so alone, as it commonly seems in such a rural area. COYAC has taught me so much in such a little time. I’ve learned how to conduct the most effective research possible, outreach to people and organizations to discuss our work, and work alongside other passionate youth. While many young people in Colorado may see the problems in their community, COYAC provides an opportunity to take an active role in creating solutions for those problems. This program teaches youth that they can create change, even at a young age, and that their ideas are always important, and should never be ignored. I will forever be grateful to COYAC for the incredible opportunity to provide a rural youth perspective to legislators.”



- Anabelle Pettinger, Senate District 35, Baca County

“Serving on the Colorado Youth Advisory Council has transformed how I understand civic engagement and the real impact youth can have on state policy. Through COYAC, I’ve worked on policy proposals addressing age verification for sexually explicit websites to better protect youth online, and previously helped advance efforts to implement life skills courses as a high school graduation requirement—work that showed me how policy decisions directly shape students’ safety, education, and future readiness across Colorado. COYAC taught me how to research complex issues, collaborate with legislators and stakeholders, and advocate thoughtfully on behalf of my generation, even on difficult or sensitive topics. These experiences strengthened my confidence, critical thinking, and commitment to public service, and they equipped me with skills I will continue using to engage in policy and community leadership. Continued investment in COYAC is essential because it ensures youth voices are not only heard, but meaningfully included in shaping policies that affect young people statewide, creating a stronger and more inclusive future for Colorado.”



- Monique Sanchez, Senate District 6, Alamosa County

“I vividly remember the day I got accepted into COYAC. I had always yearned to create large-scale change, and it was extremely gratifying to be able to do so. Youth face a lot of issues in any area, but few areas offer the opportunity to allow youth to express their views, and more importantly, be involved in legislative processes to fix those issues. Today, I have the opportunity to work with a team of incredible students from all walks of life across Colorado in efforts to solve problems the youth, and other populations, face. I’ve learned communication skills, collaboration, and most importantly, I’ve further developed genuine empathy and care for the struggles of everyone in our state. I specifically have the chance to work towards overcoming environmental challenges: an issue I’ve been long passionate about. Nowhere else do I get that chance. COYAC provides not just undeniable value to its members, but it has also instigated serious change. For example, COYAC policy recommendations were passed as law: providing higher education for foster youth, preventing substance abuse in secondary schools, and even creating new positions for youth voices in other areas of the government. One bill was the reason that the mental health crisis hotline number is now printed on student IDs across the state. It’s changes like these that youth specifically have championed and have undoubtedly prevented crises and saved lives. COYAC is a program that I truly hope other youth across the state get the chance to experience. It has offered me to create change in an area I truly care about, and be a servant leader. I sincerely believe that COYAC is a special part of Colorado. Continuing to support a huge population and represent youth in a way very few places do should remain a top priority.”



- Ayush Vispute (he/him), Senate District 9, El Paso County; COYAC representative to the Colorado Suicide Prevention Commission

“Serving as the Senate District 8 representative on COYAC has been one of the most impactful and unique experiences of my life. On the Substance Abuse Committee, I developed and presented a youth nicotine-prevention policy proposal - the process of research, outreach, and drafting taught me more than I would have ever expected, and I learned skills that I likely wouldn’t have learned elsewhere. More than that, it showed me that youth can make a meaningful impact and contribution to policy without having the ability to vote. COYAC has given me a lifelong value for and commitment to civic engagement and leadership. COYAC is an irreplaceable opportunity to develop real civic leadership skills, understand how democracy actually works, and become part of a statewide community working toward meaningful change for our future.”



- Judah Turner, Senate District 8, Eagle County

“I remember the day I was filling out my COYAC application with my mom in our kitchen, talking about hundreds of ideas I wanted to discuss and have input on, everything from homelessness and public safety to substance abuse. A month later, I received the news that I had been accepted and would be representing my hometown, something I am proud of and will continue to be proud of.



“No words can fully express how much COYAC has changed my life. One of the biggest lessons I learned is that outside of my city, my values and beliefs are not universal. This taught me that I must consider everyone’s point of view in order to truly understand others. I am beyond grateful for learning this lesson, because before COYAC I was a naïve young adult who thought I knew everything. Now, I know that I don’t, and that growth has made me a better leader.

“Beyond the lessons, meetings, and laughter, my favorite part of COYAC is being able to advocate for issues that affect my life every day. Last year, I worked to ensure legislators understood the dangers of youth substance abuse, and this year my committee plans to make sure legislators understand the real effects of social media on youth. COYAC has been nothing but a blessing to me, giving me the confidence to advocate, meet with legislators, and help give the youth of Colorado a voice in the lawmaking process.”

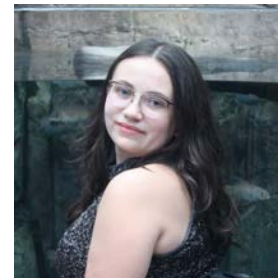
- Brandon Martinez, Senate District 3, Pueblo County

“COYAC is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to become civically involved before the age of 18. While we as youth might not be able to vote, we are able to directly influence policy for our generation. I’ve learned lifelong skills in research, outreach, public speaking, media training, etc. COYAC opens the floor for deep debate on issues facing youth and allows members to critically think about problems facing our state. The support network created by COYAC encourages students to think outside the box and constructs a lifelong community. As a member of COYAC, I am able to see problems in my community, bring them to legislators, and work with my committee to reach a beneficial resolution. COYAC gives a voice to all youth wanting to be heard, and teaches youth how to become civic leaders long into the future. It has been a life changing experience that I wish every youth was able to receive. I am truly not the same person I was when I started COYAC. ”



- Sophie Tipper, Senate District 16, Arapahoe County

“My first year serving on COYAC has been more meaningful than I ever expected. This organization provides a unique and unparalleled platform to advocate as a young person. We have the opportunity to bring our lived experiences to changemakers and share authentic youth perspectives. My skills in outreach and networking have also grown immensely through COYAC, and I’ve been able to hear many perspectives not represented in my community. This council is a diverse, supportive, intelligent group of people, and I am so grateful to be a part of it. A sense of community is present in all our committee meetings and events, and I will maintain connections with these people for years to come. COYAC shows what passion and hard work can achieve. I will carry these lessons with me for a lifetime.”



- Kate Glover (she/her), At-Large, Larimer County

“Serving as a Colorado Youth Advisory Council (COYAC) representative for Senate District 24 has been a once-in-a-lifetime experience grounded in public service, policy engagement, and civic education. COYAC provides youth a meaningful and structured opportunity not only to advocate for themselves, but to elevate the real and evolving needs of youth across Colorado. As a new member this term, I have gained practical skills in leadership, outreach coordination, professional communication, and systems-level thinking. More importantly, COYAC has deepened my understanding of the foundational principles of our democracy and how those principles are exercised within state government. This is not just learning, it’s experiential civic engagement. COYAC has also given me access to a diverse and supportive network of peers across the state, representing different backgrounds, regions, and lived experiences. That diversity has broadened my perspective, strengthened my ability to collaborate, and helped me grow as both a leader and a responsible civic participant.



“COYAC plays a major role in empowering youth to be informed, engaged, and effective contributors to their communities and to state government. COYAC supports Colorado in creating & shaping the next generation of civic leaders, and is truly a once in a lifetime experience. I am truly grateful for the opportunity, and hope to continue to broaden my knowledge and understanding as this term continues.”

- Andre Martinez, Senate District 24, Adams County

“Being a member of the Colorado Youth Advisory Council provides an opportunity for students to learn and create a civic base for themselves, oftentimes before they can even vote. For me, observing the government that I will one day be a part of has given me role models in deeply motivated people invested in Colorado’s future. The encouragement from COYAC to observe my community and the people around me has been a skill I wish to take into my future. Beyond the hopeful level, COYAC applies true complexity to difficult systematic issues. Personally, producing everything from environmental recommendations for a polluters pay law and healthcare proposals centered around School Based Health Centers has provided me with an internal emphasis on systems thinking and unintended consequences. Thinking critically and learning to appreciate the debate that often plagues the legislature allows us as students to go past simply boiling down and reiterating the most crucial issues—it allows us to have an effective youth voice, which we can only hope makes its way through the rungs of government.”



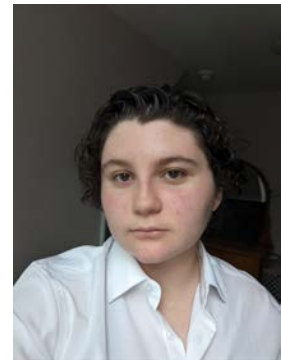
- Ainslie Mohr (she/hers), Senate District 33, City and County of Denver

"Being a Colorado Youth Advisory Council representative has been a life-changing opportunity to learn, grow, connect, and explore my future career. In 2022, I joined COYAC blind to how much I would learn and grow. Over the past two years, I helped pass a bill and a budget amendment and found a love for public health and public policy. COYAC has changed my future to something bright. Joining COYAC was the first time I felt heard, inspired, and hopeful for change. This council has created partnerships between state and local government while giving youth a voice, which is so often stifled. Being in COYAC opens your eyes to a world of lived experience and real-world applications of research, analysis, networking, and presenting. The entire process changed my perspective and is a part of the person I am today."



- Mason Evans (he/him), alumni advisor and former COYAC Senate District 3, Pueblo County

"I have served on COYAC for 2 years, and in that time, I learned a lot about the state and how it runs, but also myself and how I run. I joined as a 15-year-old burnt out from doing everything for other people, and COYAC taught me how to create mindful legislation that I believe actually matters and how to take care of myself in the process. I would not be going to college this year with the mindset towards learning new things and experiences if not for my invaluable experience on this council. COYAC taught me that really, not all group projects are bad."



- Meghan Taylor, former Senate District 12 and COYAC representative to the Colorado Suicide Prevention Commission, El Paso County