

Senate Local Government & Housing

04/22/2026 Upon Adjournment

SB26-157 Determination of Town Abandonment

Typed Text of Testimony Submitted

Name, Position, Representing	Typed Text of Testimony
STEPHANIE CRUM For themselves	I support the SB26-157 BILL
Shawna Casey Against themselves	<p>Chair, members of the committee,</p> <p>Thank you for the opportunity to speak.</p> <p>My name is Shawna Casey, and I am here to address a structural issue in SB26-157 that directly affects rural statutory towns like mine.</p> <p>Residents in Hartman were told that the town was being abandoned because there was "no other pathway" for the state or county to help us. We were told that the only way to avoid industrial water tanks being placed in the middle of town "and the only way to bring in a certified water operator to guarantee water safety" was through the abandonment process. In other words, we were told that dissolution was the only option.</p> <p>What we were not told is that abandonment permanently transfers all long-term water system costs to the residents. Under SB157, the state provides temporary operational support, the county is shielded from liability, and the receiving water authority must recover every dollar of rehabilitation and compliance from ratepayers. That means the smallest, poorest communities end up paying the highest per</p>

	<p>household cost. None of this was explained to the people who were asked to make this decision.</p> <p>If this bill does not pass, the state’s simple plan of abandonment cannot move forward. But that does not leave residents without water or without options. The District Court already has the authority to restore our voting rights, appoint temporary election officials, and order a lawful election for a new board. Once a board is seated, the town regains the ability to hire a certified operator, enter compliance agreements, and access existing state programs that do not require dissolution.</p> <p>So, without SB157, the abandonment pathway disappears “ but the recovery pathway remains fully available. What rural residents need is transparency. They deserve to know that the abandonment process shifts the full cost of system rehabilitation onto them, and that safer, more affordable recovery options already exist under current law.</p> <p>I urge the committee to consider the long-term financial impact on rural households and to ensure that residents are fully informed before being asked to give up their town, their vote, and their future.</p> <p>Thank you.</p>
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Jammie Darrell
Denver, CO
SB26-157
April 22, 2025

Position: Oppose

Chair and members of the committee, thank you for considering my written testimony.

There is no question that Colorado needs to address the vulnerabilities facing its smallest communities. Hartman revealed real gaps in statute, real weaknesses in continuity, and real consequences when support systems fail. Addressing those gaps is necessary. However, SB26-157 is short-sighted because it responds to Hartman in isolation, without examining the broader pattern of statutory failure across statutory towns in Colorado. The Legislature has not conducted a statewide assessment of governance fragility, has not collected data on statutory failures, and has not evaluated the towns most at risk. Nor has it considered the population this bill impacts — most often communities that are aging, low-income, and administratively fragile. Without that information, SB26-157 is not evidence-based governance — it is reactive governance.

This bill uses the symptoms of statutory failure as grounds for dissolution, instead of fixing the statutory failure itself. The bill punishes towns for failures caused by the state's own statutory gaps. When a clerk quits, when a recall cannot be enforced, when elections cannot be certified — these are not local failures. These are failures of Colorado law, which provides no mechanism for law enforcement or accountability, no continuity requirements, and no oversight when governance collapses.

As written, this bill contains several critical flaws that create uncertainty, increase risk, and leave residents unprotected, including:

- It creates abandonment criteria that are undefined and unverifiable, making it possible for a town to be dissolved based on triggers no one can measure or contest.
- Because “critical water infrastructure” is not defined in Colorado law and no agency tracks which towns have it, the bill can be applied inconsistently and unfairly across communities.
- It provides no guaranteed hearing, no required community input, and no assured judicial review, allowing a town to lose its government without residents ever having a chance to speak.
- It dissolves a town without explaining what happens to property rights, contracts, debts, or ordinances, leaving residents and counties with unresolved legal and financial consequences.
- It responds only after collapse and offers no strategy to prevent future failures; it becomes ineffective as a long-term governance tool.
- It strengthens no oversight, funding, or technical assistance, leaving vulnerable water systems just as unsupported as before and no safer from collapse.
- It offers only temporary maintenance money with no plan for who will ultimately own, operate, or bring a failing system into compliance, ensuring instability continues after abandonment.
- It drives perverse incentives by making emergency support available only after abandonment, which encourages struggling towns to fail in order to receive help that should have been available long before crisis.

Colorado already spends millions through DOLA to support local governments, yet the state provides no statutory framework to prevent governance collapse. DOLA's role is advisory, not supervisory. It offers guidance, but no enforcement. It provides grants, but no continuity mechanisms. Instead of dissolving towns after the system fails, the Legislature should focus on modernizing municipal statutes, strengthening election oversight, and ensuring DOLA fulfills its intended purpose. Strengthening governance is cheaper than abandoning it. SB26-157 does not prevent collapse; it simply formalizes it. A bill that addresses the statutory failures would protect vulnerable communities and reduce long-term costs for the entire state.

This bill was rushed under the appearance of helping Hartman, yet it does not mitigate risks or resolve the issues that caused Hartman's collapse. It compounds them. If urgency is possible for a bill that dissolves towns, urgency should also be possible for a bill that protects them — one that aligns with public safety, provides a path to success, and offers actionable, effective, and impactful solutions. Statutory towns are not the only government type harmed by these gaps; these failures quietly affect residents across Colorado every day. This is simply the first time the consequences have become visible. Rural communities have been asking for help for years, and the agencies meant to support them did not act.

Colorado can do better than this bill.

Thank you.

Jammie Darell

Date: 4-21-26
To: Colorado Senate Local Government and Housing
From: Belinda Crum-Cano
Re: Support for SB26-157, Determination of Town Abandonment

Dear Colorado Senate Local Government and Housing,

I am writing to convey my support for Senate Bill 26-157, Determination of Town Abandonment. As a residential property owner in the Town of Hartman (208 E. Scott Avenue, Hartman, CO 81043), it is vital that a timely path be available for the town to have clean, safe water. This bill provides that path.

As you are aware, the town of Hartman has been placed in a dire position, left without a government body to carry out immediate actions to ensure safe water delivery to its residents. In addition, current Colorado law requires a 5-year gap for an abandonment determination before another entity can step up to address this issue. At the time this law was put in place, a situation like Hartman is currently facing was likely not on anyone's radar. However, failing infrastructure and lack of a responsible entity to address it, could very well be an issue that other small, rural towns will soon face.

I urge you to support this bill so residents in our first-world country are not treated like those in a developing nation, lacking basic services. The town of Hartman deserves to have safe, clean water and SB26-157 provide a path for long-term solutions to be taken to deliver that to the residents.

Thank you for your consideration!

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Belinda Crum-Cano', written in a cursive style.

Belinda Crum-Cano