

Written Testimony in Support of "HB-1143" "Safety, Not Status: Allowing ITINs in Background Checks"

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Bridget Sanchez. I am a mental health clinician, affiliate faculty member for master's-level students, clinical supervisor for post-master's clinicians, and a behavioral health leader with over a decade of experience in the field. I now serve as the Executive Director of the only nonprofit organization in the country solely dedicated to strengthening the mental health workforce pipeline. Through all of these roles, I see firsthand both the urgent demand for care and the barriers preventing qualified future providers from entering the field. I am writing in strong support of bill HB-1143, which would allow the use of an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) or a fingerprint-based background check in place of a Social Security Number (SSN) for non-employment background checks tied to educational opportunities.

Throughout my career, I have witnessed firsthand the immense and urgent need for mental health services in our communities. In my previous role as Director of Behavioral Health at a community health center, we had more than 300 individuals on a waitlist for therapy services at one time. Many of those waiting were living with serious and life-threatening conditions, including major depression, anxiety disorders, substance use disorders, and post-traumatic stress.

When mental health conditions go untreated, the consequences ripple far beyond the individual. People struggle to maintain employment, care for their families, succeed in school, and remain connected to their communities. Untreated mental health needs contribute to higher healthcare costs, increased involvement with emergency systems, and long-term social and economic strain on our state. Expanding the mental health workforce is not just a professional issue — it is a public health and community stability issue.

These challenges are even more severe for non-English-speaking community members. Language barriers significantly reduce access to care, delay treatment, and increase the likelihood that individuals disengage from services early. Research consistently shows that when patients cannot receive services in their preferred language or from providers who understand their cultural context, engagement drops and outcomes worsen. In contrast, when clients are matched with culturally and linguistically attuned therapists, they are more likely to stay in care, build trust, and complete treatment. This improves clinical outcomes, strengthens therapeutic relationships, and reduces costly cycles of crisis care.

One of the most effective ways to reduce these overwhelming waitlists — especially for bilingual and culturally responsive services — is to strengthen pathways into the mental health profession for master's-level students and trainees. Graduate students in counseling, social work, marriage and family therapy, psychiatric nurse practitioner (PMHNP) programs, and related behavioral health fields are required to complete internships, clinical rotations, and

supervised training in order to graduate and eventually become licensed or certified providers. These placements are not optional; they are the gateway into the workforce.

However, I have seen capable, committed students blocked from these required educational experiences simply because a site requires a Social Security Number for a background check, even when the role is unpaid and purely educational. Students who have an ITIN but not an SSN are left with limited — and sometimes no — options for completing their training. This creates an unnecessary barrier that has nothing to do with safety and everything to do with paperwork.

This bill addresses that gap in a practical and responsible way. It does not eliminate background checks. It ensures that background checks for non-employment educational opportunities can be completed using either an SSN, ITIN or fingerprint-based background check, while maintaining standard safety protocols and data privacy protections. This keeps the focus where it belongs: on actual safety and eligibility, not immigration status.

From a workforce perspective, this change is critical. Colorado, like the rest of the nation, is facing a significant shortage of mental health providers across disciplines — therapists, social workers, addiction counselors, and psychiatric prescribers such as PMHNPs. We cannot afford to lose future clinicians who are already enrolled in training programs, already committed to serving their communities, and already paying taxes through ITINs. Many of these students are bilingual and bicultural, and are uniquely positioned to serve communities that are currently experiencing the greatest barriers to care.

By allowing these students to complete their internships and clinical rotations, we are helping ensure that they can graduate, become licensed or certified, and start serving the many Coloradans who are currently waiting months for care — including those who have struggled to find a provider who speaks their language or understands their lived experience.

At its core, this bill reflects a simple and important principle: in Colorado, opportunity should be determined by safety and qualifications, not by immigration paperwork. By ensuring that ITINs and fingerprints can be used in these specific background checks, you are helping open the door for the next generation of mental health professionals our state urgently needs and improving retention and outcomes in care for historically underserved communities.

Thank you for your time, your leadership, and your commitment to the health and well-being of Colorado communities. I respectfully urge you to support this bill.

Sincerely,

Bridget Sanchez, LMFT, LAC
Executive Director
Latinx Therapist Project

Testimonio Escrito en Apoyo a "HB-1143" "Seguridad, No Estatus: Permitir el Uso de ITIN en Verificaciones de Antecedentes"

Estimado/a Presidente/a y Miembros del Comité:

Mi nombre es Bridget Sanchez. Soy profesional de la salud mental, profesora afiliada de estudiantes de maestría, supervisora clínica de profesionales con formación de posmaestría y líder en salud conductual con más de una década de experiencia en el campo. Actualmente me desempeño como Directora Ejecutiva de **la única organización sin fines de lucro en el país dedicada exclusivamente a fortalecer la fuerza laboral en salud mental**. A través de todos estos roles, observo de primera mano tanto la urgente demanda de atención como las barreras que impiden que futuros profesionales calificados ingresen a esta profesión. Escribo en firme apoyo a este proyecto de ley, que permitiría el uso de un Número de Identificación Personal del Contribuyente (ITIN) en lugar de un Número de Seguro Social (SSN) para verificaciones de antecedentes relacionadas con oportunidades educativas no laborales.

A lo largo de mi carrera, he sido testigo de la inmensa y urgente necesidad de servicios de salud mental en nuestras comunidades. En mi función anterior como Directora de Salud Conductual en un centro de salud comunitario, teníamos más de 300 personas en lista de espera para recibir servicios de terapia en un momento dado. Muchas de ellas enfrentaban condiciones graves y potencialmente mortales, incluyendo depresión mayor, trastornos de ansiedad, trastornos por uso de sustancias y estrés postraumático.

Cuando las condiciones de salud mental no reciben tratamiento, las consecuencias se extienden más allá del individuo. Las personas tienen dificultades para mantener el empleo, cuidar a sus familias, tener éxito en la escuela y mantenerse conectadas con sus comunidades. Las necesidades de salud mental no tratadas contribuyen a mayores costos de atención médica, mayor uso de servicios de emergencia y una carga social y económica a largo plazo para nuestro estado. Ampliar la fuerza laboral en salud mental no es solo un asunto profesional — es un asunto de salud pública y estabilidad comunitaria.

Estos desafíos son aún más graves para los miembros de la comunidad que no hablan inglés. Las barreras lingüísticas reducen significativamente el acceso a la atención, retrasan el tratamiento y aumentan la probabilidad de que las personas abandonen los servicios de manera temprana. La investigación demuestra consistentemente que cuando los pacientes no pueden recibir servicios en su idioma preferido o con profesionales que comprendan su contexto cultural, la participación disminuye y los resultados empeoran. En cambio, cuando las personas reciben atención de terapeutas cultural y lingüísticamente competentes, es más probable que continúen en tratamiento, desarrollen confianza y completen su proceso terapéutico. Esto mejora los resultados clínicos, fortalece la relación terapéutica y reduce ciclos costosos de atención en crisis.

Una de las formas más efectivas de reducir estas abrumadoras listas de espera — especialmente para servicios bilingües y culturalmente receptivos — es fortalecer las vías de acceso a la profesión de salud mental para estudiantes de maestría y profesionales en formación. Los estudiantes de posgrado en consejería, trabajo social, terapia de matrimonio y familia, **programas de enfermería psiquiátrica de práctica avanzada (PMHNP)** y otros campos de salud conductual deben completar prácticas, rotaciones clínicas y formación supervisada para graduarse y eventualmente obtener su licencia o certificación profesional. Estas experiencias no son opcionales; son la puerta de entrada a la fuerza laboral.

Sin embargo, he visto estudiantes capaces y comprometidos ser excluidos de estas experiencias educativas requeridas simplemente porque una institución exige un Número de Seguro Social para una verificación de antecedentes, incluso cuando el rol no es remunerado y es únicamente educativo. Los estudiantes que tienen un ITIN pero no un SSN se quedan con opciones limitadas — y a veces sin ninguna opción — para completar su formación. Esto crea una barrera innecesaria que no tiene nada que ver con la seguridad y todo que ver con trámites administrativos.

Este proyecto de ley aborda esta brecha de manera práctica y responsable. No elimina las verificaciones de antecedentes. Garantiza que las verificaciones de antecedentes para oportunidades educativas no laborales puedan completarse utilizando un SSN o un ITIN, manteniendo los protocolos de seguridad y protección de datos. Esto asegura que el enfoque permanezca donde debe estar: en la seguridad real y la idoneidad, no en el estatus migratorio.

Desde una perspectiva de fuerza laboral, este cambio es fundamental. Colorado, al igual que el resto del país, enfrenta una escasez significativa de profesionales de salud mental en todas las disciplinas — terapeutas, trabajadores sociales, consejeros en adicciones y profesionales prescriptores de salud mental como los PMHNP. En mi rol actual liderando una organización nacional enfocada en la fuerza laboral, trabajamos diariamente para abordar estas escaseces, y una de las barreras más frecuentes que observamos es que estudiantes no pueden completar su formación clínica requerida debido a requisitos de SSN que no están relacionados con la seguridad.

No podemos permitirnos perder a futuros profesionales que ya están matriculados en programas de formación, ya están comprometidos a servir a sus comunidades y ya contribuyen pagando impuestos a través de un ITIN. Muchos de estos estudiantes son bilingües y biculturales, y están especialmente capacitados para atender a comunidades que actualmente enfrentan las mayores barreras para acceder a servicios.

Al permitir que estos estudiantes completen sus prácticas y rotaciones clínicas, estamos ayudando a asegurar que puedan graduarse, obtener su licencia o certificación, y comenzar a atender a los muchos habitantes de Colorado que actualmente esperan meses para recibir atención — incluyendo a quienes han tenido dificultades para encontrar un profesional que hable su idioma o comprenda su experiencia de vida.

En esencia, este proyecto de ley refleja un principio simple y fundamental: en Colorado, la oportunidad debe estar determinada por la seguridad y las calificaciones, no por la documentación migratoria. Al permitir el uso de ITIN en estas verificaciones específicas, ustedes están ayudando a abrir la puerta a la próxima generación de profesionales de salud mental que nuestro estado necesita urgentemente y mejorando la retención y los resultados en la atención para comunidades históricamente desatendidas.

Gracias por su tiempo, su liderazgo y su compromiso con la salud y el bienestar de las comunidades de Colorado. Respetuosamente les instó a apoyar este proyecto de ley.

Atentamente,

Bridget Sanchez, LMFT, LAC
Directora Ejecutiva
Latinx Therapist Project

I am sharing testimony in support of HB-1143 on behalf of C, who would like to remain anonymous due to concerns about their safety...

Today, I want to share my story — not just as a personal experience, but as a reflection of what thousands of immigrants go through in this country every day.

I was born in Tijuana, Mexico, and moved to Colorado Springs in 2016 when I was eleven years old. In those first years, I didn't have a Social Security Number. And even though I was a dedicated, hardworking student with clear goals, I ran into a harsh truth: no matter how hard you work, if you don't have that number, many doors remain closed.

When I started looking for ways to grow, to work formally, or to gain professional training, I found that many programs, jobs, and fields required licenses — and those licenses often required background checks that couldn't be completed without a Social Security Number.

But this barrier doesn't just affect people looking for jobs. It also excludes individuals — especially youth — from volunteering and internships. Programs that require background checks end up rejecting highly capable, responsible people simply because they don't have an SSN. Without access to those stepping stones, people can't gain experience, build networks, or show the full extent of their potential.

A few years ago, I tried to work at UCCS through the Pre-Collegiate Development Program. I had already proven myself as a committed student and interpreter. But because I didn't have a Social Security Number at the time, I was left in limbo. They dragged me along for almost a year — asking me for documents, following up with HR, promising to “see what they could do.” And then one day, they simply told me: “We can't and won't do anything. Try again later.”

That moment crushed me — not just because I lost the job, but because I realized how powerless I was in a system that wasn't made for me.

That didn't just limit me. It made me feel invisible. Like no matter how qualified I was, I would never be enough in the eyes of the system.

And I wasn't alone. Many people I know — friends, family, community members — are still stuck behind that same wall. They are hardworking, skilled, and full of potential, but they have no path to fix their immigration status, no way to access licenses or better jobs, and no way to move forward economically.

I got lucky. I eventually received a work permit and legal status. That gave me access to opportunities. But I say that carefully — because “luck” should never be a requirement for dignity. I know millions of people will never have the chance I had. And it’s for them that I speak today.

I’m asking you to help us open doors for students like me to be able to access internships, volunteering, and pre-professional experiences.

- Help that 20-year-old intern at the company of their dreams.
- Help those who are doing everything they can to contribute positively to our community , but are being told “no” at every turn.

I deeply believe that access to a professional license, a job, a volunteer role, an internship, or a scholarship should not depend on a nine-digit number.

If someone has the skills, the drive, and the willingness to serve their community, we should be opening doors — not closing them.

- We should not require background checks that are impossible to pass for people without an SSN, especially when they’ve already shown their value.
- We should not block opportunities that build careers, purpose, and stability.

I’m not here just to share a story — I’m here to ask for change. We *can* build a more inclusive system — one that values human potential above immigration status.

A system where people can study, work, and grow with dignity and hope.

Please vote yes for HB-1143. Thank you for listening. And more importantly, thank you for being willing to be part of that change.

Senate Education

04/29/2026

HB26-1143 Non-Empl Educ Opportunities Background Check Info

Typed Text of Testimony Submitted

Name, Position, Representing	Typed Text of Testimony
<p>Enrique Orozco-Perez</p> <p>For</p> <p>Compañeros: Four Corners Immigrant Resource Center</p>	<p>Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,</p> <p>My name is Enrique A. Orozco-Perez, Co-Executive Director of Compañeros: Four Corners Immigrant Resource Center. We serve immigrant families across Southwest Colorado, including La Plata, Montezuma, Archuleta, Dolores, and San Juan counties. We write in strong support of HB26-1143.</p> <p>In rural Colorado, opportunity is already limited. Distance, lack of infrastructure, and fewer programs make access to education and workforce training difficult. For immigrant community members, those barriers are made worse by systems that require a Social Security number, even when the opportunity is not tied to employment. This is not about qualification. It is about exclusion.</p> <p>We see community members ready to step into healthcare training, certification programs, and continuing education, only to be turned away because they cannot provide a Social Security number. Many have ITINs. Many are already contributing to our local economies. Yet they are blocked from the very pathways that would allow them to grow, support their families, and strengthen our communities.</p> <p>In rural regions like ours, when one door closes, there is often no other door to knock on.</p> <p>HB26-1143 is a straightforward and necessary fix. It does not remove accountability or safety measures. It ensures that background checks and enrollment processes do not automatically exclude people based solely on documentation barriers.</p> <p>This bill is also about the survival of rural economies. Southwest Colorado is already facing workforce shortages across critical sectors. We cannot afford to shut people out of training pipelines that our communities depend on.</p> <p>At its core, this is about whether we believe opportunity should be real or conditional. Right now, for many in our communities, it is conditional.</p>

	<p>HB26-1143 moves us toward fairness, access, and a stronger rural Colorado. We urge you to support this bill.</p> <p>Thank you for your time and consideration.</p> <p>Sincerely,</p> <p>Enrique A. Orozco-Perez</p> <p>Co-Executive Director</p> <p>Compañeros: Four Corners Immigrant Resource Center</p> <p>Durango, Colorado</p>
<p>Liz Baylon Trejo</p> <p>For</p> <p>themselves</p>	<p>I am sharing testimony in support of HB-1143 on behalf of S&#226;</p> <p>Thank you for the opportunity to share my testimony. My words are being read today for me because, in this moment, fear outweighs my ability to stand before you myself. Fear of uncertainty. Fear of the high risk of losing the future I have worked tirelessly to build. While these words are shared, I am at clinicals, studying, training, and caring for patients, doing the very work that reflects my commitment to serve Colorado&#226;s communities.</p> <p>I am a fifth-semester nursing student at the University of Northern Colorado. By May 2026, I will have completed more than 1,000 required clinical hours. (1,035 to be exact) These placements are not optional; they are essential to becoming a safe, competent nurse. Like every nursing student, I have completed background checks, immunization requirements, TB screenings, and drug testing just to enter clinical rotations. The process is already complex and stressful. For undocumented and first-generation students, it can become an overwhelming barrier.</p> <p>I have seen qualified, hardworking students stopped from pursuing nursing and other healthcare careers because of background check policies tied to Social Security numbers or immigration status. These are students who grew up in Colorado, attended our schools, met every academic requirement, and want to serve their communities. The communities that raised them and inspired them to dream big. To be excluded at the final step after years of sacrifice is heartbreaking. This is often a hidden barrier, one that first-generation students are unaware of</p>

	<p>until they have completed every requirement, only to learn at the very end that the opportunity was never truly accessible to them all along.</p> <p>As a DACA recipient, I currently have work authorization. But I live with the uncertainty that it could be taken away. No student should have to carry that fear while working to give back to the state they call home.</p> <p>Colorado needs nurses. Our healthcare system is strongest when it reflects the diversity of the communities it serves. Preventing qualified students from completing clinical education does not protect patients; it weakens our workforce and limits access to culturally competent care.</p> <p>I urge you to support HB-1143. This bill is about fairness, opportunity, and strengthening Colorado’s healthcare system.</p> <p>Thank you for your time. Thank you to the strong voice reading my words today.</p>
--	---



To: Senate Education Committee

From: Kate Greuel, Policy Advocate, Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning

Date: April 28, 2026

Re: Support for HB26-1143-Non-Employment Educational Opportunities Background Check Information

Dear Mister Chair and Members of the Committee,

Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning urges your YES vote on House Bill 26-1143. Originally founded as an English language school for Denver's international students in 1979, Spring Institute now proudly offers a range of programs and services supporting civic engagement and socioeconomic mobility for linguistically and culturally diverse Coloradans. Our network of staff, volunteers, participants, and clients includes learners of all ages and those of numerous immigration backgrounds and diverse linguistic expertise. The personal histories of our many hundreds of annual program participants and their families vary greatly, yet all are striving for common aims—to develop in-demand skills, share talents, pursue personal ambitions and professional goals, and *contribute fully as Coloradans*.

Colorado is home to those from a number of the world's diasporas, including but not limited to countries of origin such as Mexico, India, Vietnam, China, and Canada. Diverse immigrant Coloradans engage in programs like Spring Institute's seeking to achieve educational aspirations, attain workforce objectives, be more involved in our social institutions, and cultivate successful livelihoods. These are ambitions we all surely respect and many of us share, so it is deeply disheartening and seems gravely unjust when administrative barriers deter or halt educational advancement. Yet, many of Colorado's institutions of higher education, healthcare facilities, nonprofit organizations, private contractors, and volunteer organizations require a Social Security Number (SSN) for non-employment background checks. This blocks thousands of Coloradans from participating in opportunities required for educational programs like clinical experiences for healthcare careers, internships, pre-apprenticeships, and even volunteer roles. Secure alternatives to SSNs, such as Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers (ITINs), already exist and can be used for screening for safety without excluding people based on immigration status. Notably, neither the FBI nor CBI require a SSN for their criminal background checks—name- and fingerprint-based checks can be used to search criminal records and databases like sex offender registries and child abuse and neglect records, for example.

At Spring Institute, we insist that everyone deserves the dignified chance to study, volunteer, and participate in civic life without being excluded because of immigration status. Colorado should be a place where consideration of safety—not status—determines opportunity and that safety is verified appropriately, not arbitrarily related to immigration paperwork. Updating our policies through enactment of HB26-1143 will ensure that fewer immigrant Coloradans are deterred from pursuing laudable educational goals or deprived of chances for crucial learning and skill development. Especially as we face ongoing healthcare workforce shortages and stand to benefit from increased linguistic and cultural competency in that sector, we should be amplifying efforts to embrace—rather than ignore or reject—immigrant talent. And at a time when protective federal policies like Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), Temporary Protected Status (TPS), and Parole are being eroded and menacing xenophobic tactics are harming so many communities, it is more critical than ever that we honor the commendable ambitions and invaluable contributions of immigrant Coloradans for the benefit of all who call this state home.

Please vote YES on HB26-1143. Thank you.

Good afternoon, Chair Kolker and Committee members,

Boulder County respectfully requests your yes vote on HB26-1143.

Boulder County is committed to adopting fully inclusive, anti-racist and culturally responsive policies. Requiring a social security number for background checks for non-employment opportunities creates an unnecessary, systemic barrier for individuals trying to advance their education and skills. Boulder County supports legislation that allows all individuals, regardless of their background, to obtain education, training, and hands-on experience for a specific industry or occupation, which will also create a more diverse and culturally responsive workforce.

Workforce Boulder County, which is a Colorado Workforce Center, serves individuals in Boulder County looking for career skills and growing one's financial stability. HB 1143 helps advance Workforce Boulder County's mission of driving educational opportunities that enrich individual growth, economic health, and community connection.

The legislature has already taken great steps to open career pathways. In 2021, Senate Bill 199 removed barriers to certain public opportunities and Senate Bill 077 specified that lawful presence is not required of any applicant for any state or local license, certificate, or registration.

Finally, Boulder County upholds economic security and social stability as fundamental values, which are realized when a person can create a livelihood through skill development and real-world experience.

Our community benefits when students are provided more opportunities and our higher educational institutions, nonprofits, k-12 schools, and certain health care entities have the clarity and authorization to truly include all their students regardless of status.

Boulder County respectfully requests your yes vote on HB 1143.

Thank you for your consideration.

Written Testimony in support of HB26-1143

Chair Kolker, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. My name is Katherine Stewart, and I am writing in support of House Bill 1143.

As a Coloradan, I value access to opportunity for all: for myself, for our neighbors, and for communities across our state.

I moved here in 2019 to start a new chapter. With a mix of youthful optimism that it would 'all work out' and terror that we'd fail, my partner and I quit our jobs, got married, packed up our lives, and drove to Colorado because we saw an opportunity not just to live somewhere, but to build a life. We wanted what so many Coloradans want – the opportunity to pursue our dreams, to be deeply grounded in community, and to contribute to the fabric of our state.

Since arriving, I've sought above all to be of service, a core value that informs my personal and professional life. Though I'm testifying as an individual today, this same value has guided my career in higher education and workforce development – supporting learner agency and pursuit of success on their terms. I know how daunting it can be to pursue a career path, but especially those in helping professions. The education and training requirements are rigorous, and with good reason. Nurses, counselors, social workers, and other health clinicians: these people take care of us and our loved ones on our worst days. They are the backbone of our communities and of our workforce. In my experience, the people who seek these opportunities are driven by the same commitment to service that motivates me. They seek to shape their lives by helping others and giving back.

With over 15 years of experience in education, I know a pointless administrative barrier when I see one. Right now, undocumented learners who seek the same opportunities I've had are being denied because background checks for critical non-employment education opportunities, like clinical practicums and internships, require a social security number. As a Coloradan, I believe my neighbors should have access to the same opportunity to build a meaningful life that led me to move here in the first place. I know that our wellbeing is bound together, and we all deserve to live in thriving communities.

The path to a more vibrant future is in front of us. Will you approve this bill to support access to opportunity for all of our community members? Please vote yes on this bill to make background checks inclusive for undocumented students seeking educational opportunities. Please vote YES on House Bill 1143.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Mario Ortiz. I've been in public education for 15 years now and I want to take a moment to talk about the value of work. The dignity of it. The purpose in it. The way it shapes who we are and how we care for each other.

My father just retired after 45 years of service in the federal government. Forty-five years. That's a lifetime of commitment. He was married to that work, not for the paycheck, but because it gave him a deep sense of purpose. He helped thousands of people on their path to citizenship—what an incredible legacy. Watching him taught me that work can be more than just labor. It can be service. It can be a calling. It can shape your identity and build your sense of belonging.

Many of us, especially in immigrant and working-class communities, grew up watching our parents grind every single day—sometimes two, three jobs—to make sure there was food on the table and hope in our hearts. Their example taught us resilience, but it also taught us pride. Pride in providing. Pride in contributing.

I've also seen the other side. I've been unemployed. I've felt that hollow feeling in my chest when I didn't know how I'd take care of my family. I've wrestled with that loss of self-worth, that ache of feeling stuck. It is one of the hardest things I've ever experienced. And I know I'm not alone in that.

Here in Colorado, we are facing serious labor shortages. Across construction, hospitality, healthcare, you name it. But here's the thing: We don't have a shortage of people. We have a shortage of access. We have Coloradans (hardworking, capable, talented people) who are ready to serve; Ready to work. But they're being locked out because of bureaucratic barriers, outdated immigration policies, and systemic discrimination.

The Colorado Workforce Development Council recently laid out common-sense solutions—like supporting skilled international talent and streamlining relocation assistance—but these can't take root unless we get serious about fixing the larger system.

So I'm calling on our legislators: Remove the barriers to employment. Break down the unnecessary delays in Social Security background checks for immigrants and allow for alternative forms of documentation for this process. Together, WE CAN create a clear, humane, and just path for work authorization. We need to stop acting like these are political talking points—they are real lives, real families, real futures.

Imagine the impact of unlocking that potential. More people working; More families thriving; More communities stronger. We're not just talking about an economic boost; we're talking about restoring dignity and purpose for thousands of people across our state.

Let's stop wasting potential. Let's invest in people. Let's build a Colorado where everyone who wants to work has the chance to do so. Thank you!

I am sharing testimony in support of HB-1143 on behalf of Ginny, who would like to remain anonymous due to concerns about their safety...

My name is Ginny. I am a mother of two children, an 18-year-old daughter and an 11-year-old son. I was born in Mexico City and raised in a small but loving family where compassion was not just taught — it was lived. My mother was our strength, and from her I learned that caring for others is both a responsibility and an act of love.

For as long as I can remember, I have been the one who stays when things become difficult. When my father was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis, I learned what it means to walk beside someone through illness. Later, my grandfather and other loved ones faced serious health challenges. Years afterward, my mother underwent two open-heart surgeries, and I stood beside her through fear and recovery.

Those long nights in hospital rooms shaped my heart. They inspired my dream of serving in healthcare and being present for people in their most vulnerable moments.

At the time I was pursuing my CNA education, my brother Paco, in Mexico, was diagnosed with stage 4 pancreatic cancer. Being far away and unable to care for him was heartbreaking. When I felt discouraged, he told me something I will carry forever: “When you become a CNA and care for others, you will be caring for me.”

I was accepted into a CNA program and awarded a scholarship. But I was unable to continue because a background check could not be processed without a Social Security Number.

This barrier is not about character or qualifications. It is about access — the ability to obtain a background check using an ITIN or fingerprints.

In a time when our healthcare system urgently needs compassionate, prepared individuals, removing this barrier would allow qualified people to meet the standards already required by the state.

I respectfully ask for your support of HB-1143. We are simply asking for fairness and equal access to comply with the law.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Support HB-1143 – Strengthening Colorado’s Workforce

Dear Representatives,

I am writing to respectfully urge you to support HB-1143.

From a workforce development perspective, this bill is about strengthening Colorado’s talent pipeline while maintaining strong public safety standards. Across our state, employers in healthcare and behavioral health continue to face significant workforce shortages. At the same time, there are qualified, motivated individuals who are ready to pursue education, training, and licensure in high-demand fields — yet are unable to complete required background checks solely because they do not have a Social Security number.

HB-1143 ensures that background checks remain focused on safety, not status, by allowing qualified applicants to use an ITIN instead of an SSN. The integrity of the screening process remains intact. What this bill does is remove an administrative barrier that prevents capable individuals from entering critically needed professions.

Workforce development is about access, opportunity, and alignment between talent and industry need. When we create clear and fair pathways into high-demand careers, we strengthen families, support employers, and improve outcomes for our communities. This legislation aligns with that mission by expanding access to credentialed professions without compromising standards.

Colorado’s economy depends on a skilled and inclusive workforce. By supporting HB-1143, you are helping ensure that our healthcare systems, behavioral health providers, and communities have access to the trained professionals they urgently need.

Thank you for your leadership and your continued commitment to building a strong and responsive workforce for Colorado.

Sincerely,

Maya Wheeler
Founder / Executive Director
WDC
yourwdc.org

Chairman Kolker and members of the Senate Education Committee: My name is Jean Demmler and I participate as a policy advocate in the work of the Interfaith Immigration Network and the Colorado Council of Churches' Voices for Justice group.

We walk along-side our immigrant neighbors and use our voices for justice at times when these neighbors request a need for anonymity. In that witness today, I provide testimony from an immigrant, M. C., who would like to remain anonymous.

M.C. writes,

I am a proud mother and grandmother. My eldest daughter is a DACA recipient, and while this is a temporary relief, laws passed in Colorado in recent years, such as SB21-199, have opened opportunities for my daughter and many other young people - with and without DACA - to obtain their professional, occupational, and commercial licenses. Unfortunately, SB21-199 wasn't enough. Obstacles remain, and some people still cannot obtain their licenses because they cannot pass a background check.

I've served my community since 2017 and have had the opportunity to listen to and learn from many other impacted community members. In every young person, in every story shared, I see my daughters and my granddaughter who could be in that situation. It's frustrating and makes me realize that no one should be left behind simply for not having a social security number.

Passing this bill would change the expectations of every person aspiring to further academic training in order to have better economic conditions. It would allow students to practice their craft and provide a service that meets the training requirements of their program.

As parents, we send our children to school so they can learn and hope they will attend university or college where they can develop the skills to pursue their desired careers. This law also provides an opportunity for people of all ages to rekindle a dream they were unable to achieve in their own countries due to various circumstances, but who now have the chance to pursue that dream.

Thanks to our legislators, institutions, and members of our state, Colorado has fairer and more inclusive laws, but there is still much to do together for the common good of all.

Thank you for your time and please vote yes to HB-1143."