

SB 26-036 | Prison Population Management Measures

Senators J. Gonzales, M. Weissman | Representatives Y. Zokaie & J. Bacon

Good afternoon, Chair Mabrey and members of the House Judiciary Committee. My name is Bri Buentello, and I am the Associate Executive Director for Stand for Children Colorado. We stand in support of Senate Bill 26-036.

At Stand for Children, we are committed to ensuring that every child and family in Colorado has the opportunity to thrive in a safe and supportive community. We believe that the state's fiscal priorities should reflect an investment in the success of our families and the well-being of our neighborhoods. When our state faces the prospect of unnecessary and costly prison expansion, it represents a long-term financial commitment that can limit the state's ability to be responsive to other critical community needs like health insurance, emergency services, or county social services.

SB 26-036 offers common-sense updates to our existing **Prison Population Management Measures**. These laws were designed to be an early detection system, ensuring that the state takes practical, safe steps when our prisons approach unsafe capacity. However, as we saw when these measures were triggered in August 2025, the current law lacks the transparency and accountability needed to be effective.

This bill strengthens that framework in three critical ways:

1. **Accountability:** It requires the Department of Corrections to report on the specific actions they are taking when the system is over capacity, ensuring that the oversight process is functional and transparent to the public.
2. **Safe Pathways:** It prioritizes the review of individuals who have already been granted conditional parole or who are past their parole eligibility date and are considered lower-risk, non-violent offenders. This helps clear the "parole backlog" and manages the population without compromising public safety.
3. **Fiscal Responsibility:** By managing our current population more effectively and utilizing existing pathways to release, we can avoid the massive costs associated with opening and operating new prison facilities.

Most importantly, this bill protects the safety of correctional staff and incarcerated individuals while remaining in full compliance with the **Victims' Rights Act**.

We want a Colorado that manages its resources wisely and prioritizes the health and stability of our communities. We urge a "YES" vote on SB 26-036.

Thank you, Chair. I am happy to take any questions.