

House Education

05/13/2021 01:30 PM

HB21-1304 Early Childhood System

Typed Text of Testimony Submitted

Name, Position, Representing	Typed Text of Testimony
<p>Elizabeth Szymanski</p> <p>For</p> <p>MyVillage</p>	<p>Dear Chairwoman McLachlan and Members of the House Education Committee:</p> <p>As the co-founder of MyVillage, a national network of home-based educators based in Colorado and Montana, I'm intimately familiar with the barriers to helping people start quality home-based child care programs. Most MyVillage members are women, many women of color and many in rural areas with no child care centers that desperately need the option of home-based programs. This important workforce needs a streamlined solution to do the important work of educating our youngest learners.</p> <p>MyVillage strongly supports House Bill 1304 because it would provide greater access to affordable, high quality, home-based child care across Colorado by consolidating the many efforts currently happening around the state. Our state is well-positioned to lead the nation in early childhood education, and MyVillage supports HB 1304 and the creation of a cabinet-level office of early childhood education for the following reasons:</p> <p>The bill ensures Colorado is a place where a supportive array of childhood experiences, across a variety of settings, are available to all families who want them</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It would improve the experience of ECE providers and help them be more effective in their important work - It would ensure a seamless experience for families to get their ECE needs met. - It would help properly compensate the early childhood workforce

	<p>- It would end fragmentation and misaligned and duplicative standards and requirements</p> <p>- Reduce bureaucracy by reducing the fragmentation and the governance oversight roles that multiple state agencies currently play in the system.</p> <p>Thank you for voting yes on HB 1304, and for your tireless advocacy for early childhood education in Colorado.</p> <p>Sincerely,</p> <p>Elizabeth Szymanski</p> <p>Co-Founder and CFO</p> <p>MyVillage</p>
<p>Heather Tritten For Parent Possible</p>	<p>Madam Chair and Members of the Committee. My name is Heather Tritten and I am the Executive Director of Parent Possible. We equip parents with the tools and information to be their child's most valuable teacher, trainer, and mentor in life through evidence-based home visiting and family support programs for families from pregnancy through kindergarten. I want to voice our support for HB 1304: Early Childhood System. We know that the first five years of a child's life are a critical period of growth and learning. During this time of a child's life early education and family support are key to setting a path to success, so creating government structures that support this unique time of life is truly important. This new department will create a whole child, whole family approach to early childhood services and supports that doesn't currently exist. We urge your support of this bill as a critical first step in creating a unified governance approach to early childhood in a cabinet level agency.</p> <p>Thank you.</p>
<p>Vail McCole For Self</p>	<p>Legislators,</p> <p>Last November, I celebrated when Coloradans overwhelmingly passed Proposition-EE to fund universal preschool across our state. Personally, as an advocate for early care and education and business owner I knew this was an important first step so children across the state could access preschool. This change will start in 2023 when funding for Prop EE is implemented and there is much work to be done both locally and statewide to prepare.</p>

	<p>Early childhood is one of the most important periods in life, with nearly 90 percent of brain growth occurring before the age of five. When children, families and teachers are supported then children have a great chance for success in life and building strong communities in the future.</p> <p>Help make Colorado a great place for young kids by supporting House Bill 21-1304 to create the Colorado Department of Early Childhood. This will allow Colorado to align early childhood programs, promote equitable delivery of resources, support parents in accessing programs for their children, and help give kids a strong start in life.</p> <p>Thank you,</p>
<p>Lauren Noser For Children's Hospital Colorado</p>	<p>Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on House Bill 1304. Children’s Hospital Colorado is testifying today in support of House Bill 1304. Here at Children’s Colorado, we know that what happens to children in their early years of life impacts lifelong health and well-being. Throughout our organization, we support and lead a myriad of programs related to child development and infant mental health and family health and well-being through early childhood behavioral health integration, home visiting in the context of the medical home, psychosocial screening for young children and families, and more. All of these efforts promote early childhood development, health, and wellbeing, which are critical elements of ensuring children have the best possible outcomes in health, home, and learning environments. We are particularly excited about the opportunity for the new Department of Early Childhood to enact the vision and mission of the Early Childhood Leadership Commission (ECLC), which is to improve outcomes for young children birth to age eight and their families by advancing the alignment, coordination and efficiency of programs and services. A new department focused on ensuring young children are valued, healthy and thriving is an incredible opportunity for our state, and we hope that you will vote in support of House Bill 1304 today. Thank you for your time and consideration of our testimony.</p>
<p>Pamela Harris For Mile High Early Learning</p>	<p>Good afternoon. My name is Pamela Harris, President & CEO of Mile High Early Learning (MHEL) and Co-Chair of the Early Childhood Leadership Commission. I'm writing in support of HB1034 Anna Jo Garcia Haynes Early Childhood Act.</p> <p>MHEL is Denver’s largest provider of subsidized child care serving more than 600 families annually through our six early learning centers. More than 90% of families that we serve live at or below the federal poverty level, with two-thirds working full-time. To provide high quality child care to children and families farthest from resources, MHEL seeks multiple funding opportunities to make services accessible. We blend funds from: Head Start and Early Head Start, City and County of Denver, Denver</p>

	<p>Preschool Program, Colorado Preschool Program, grants, donors, and revenue generated from our workforce development programs. Eligibility criteria vary for every funding source and families may qualify for more than one. A provider’s work is to determine every family’s eligibility and match them with available funding. Funders require reporting and accountability to different standards. We are continually navigating Colorado’s child care licensing regulations, Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS), Colorado Preschool Program requirements, Denver Preschool Program rules, and others. Colorado has HSPPS as the foundation for Colorado Shines QRIS and Colorado Early Learning Guidelines. As a community-based child care provider, MHEL partners closely with Denver Public Schools to provide services to children with special needs. We have staff with expertise in disabilities. MHEL and other Head Start programs maintain at least 10% of our enrollment to serve children with identified needs. We believe in a continuum of development for children and inclusive, transdisciplinary services to support children with special needs is best practice for all children. HB 1304 provides us with an opportunity to build upon our current successes in early childhood and create an even more effective, comprehensive early care and learning system that provides choice and accessibility for parents and guardians, is responsive to local communities’ unique needs, and ensures that our children thrive. I urge you to support on the Anna Jo Garcia Haynes Early Childhood Act that will help us create such a system named after our President Emeritus and Founder, Thank you for this opportunity and for your work on behalf of children.</p> <p>Sincerely, Pamela Harris</p>
<p>Kiki McGough For Self</p>	<p>Chair McLachlan, Vice Chair Young, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to share testimony with you in favor of House Bill 21-1304. My name is Kiki McGough and I have worked in Special Education and Early Childhood Education for more than 40 years. I worked as the Disabilities and Mental Health Coordinator for Denver Great Kids Head Start for 5 years and oversaw supports for children and families in over 30 classroom and homebased programs. I have been a SCAN Advocate for the past 4 years and am passionate about young children receiving the support they need to be successful in life. Ninety percent of brain growth occurs by the time a child is five years old, and early childhood experiences can shape the long-term outcomes for children in school and in life. Despite the importance on early childhood, young children and their families, do not have the support they need to thrive. In fact, young children are more likely to live in poverty, experience homelessness and least likely to have access to quality childcare and preschool. I celebrate recent victories for</p>

	<p>young children such as passage of Proposition EE to support universal preschool and state funding for full-day kindergarten, but we must do more. House Bill 21-1304, which would establish the Colorado Department of Early Childhood, and require a plan to implement universal preschool statewide is a decisive step forward for early childhood. With a mission to expand access to high-quality, affordable early care and learning opportunities, a Colorado Department of Early Childhood can help to ensure all Colorado young children have the support they need to thrive. I believe that by creating the Colorado Department of Early Childhood, our state will be better able to align services, reduce fragmentation in early childhood services, and reduce burdens on families and early care and education providers. I know how critical the first years of life are. Many of the families that I have worked with experience significant challenges and are actively trying to navigate multiple systems, including screening and special education evaluations, mental health supports for challenging behavior and trauma, quality child care, housing and adequate nutrition and reunification in the foster care system. I urge you to support House Bill 21-1304, and in doing so help to bring young children in our state the recognition, support, and resources they need to learn, grow, and succeed.</p>
<p>Becky Edwards For Self</p>	<p>Chair McLachlan, Vice-Chair Young, and members of the committee thank you for the opportunity to share testimony with you in favor of House Bill 21-1304—Concerning measures to establish a unified early childhood system in Colorado.</p> <p>My name is Becky Edwards and I am the Early Childhood Specialist for Healthy Childhood Colorado, a statewide non-profit dedicated to promoting health and safety in early childhood programs and I have worked in the child care field for over 30 years.</p> <p>90% of brain growth occurs by the time a child is five years old, and early childhood experiences shape the long-term outcomes for children in school and in life. Research tells us, for example, that children who receive a quality early education are 20% more likely to graduate from high school than their peers who do not, and, on average, earn 50% more than their peers.</p> <p>Despite the importance of early childhood, many young children, and their families, do not have the support they need to thrive. In fact, young children are most likely to live in poverty, experience homelessness, and least likely to have access to child care and preschool.</p> <p>Colorado is making strides in early learning. I celebrate recent victories for young children such as the passage of Proposition EE to support voluntary universal preschool and state funding for full-day kindergarten, but we must do more. House Bill 21-1304, which would establish the Colorado Department of Early Childhood, and require a plan to implement voluntary</p>

	<p>universal preschool statewide. By creating the Colorado Department of Early Childhood, our state will be better able to align services, reduce fragmentation in early childhood services, and reduce burdens on families and early care and education providers. With a mission to expand access to high-quality, affordable early care and learning opportunities, a Colorado Department of Early Childhood can help to ensure all young children in our state have the support they need to thrive.</p> <p>As both an educator and mother I have witnessed the impact that quality early childhood programming has on children. My youngest will be attending the California Institute of Technology this fall and I know that she was inspired to go into the sciences from experiences she had in preschool. I urge you to support House Bill 21-1304 so that early childhood has the recognition, support, and resources necessary to help children learn, grow, and succeed in life.</p> <p>Thank you for your consideration.</p>
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May 11, 2021

Colorado House of Representatives
House Education Committee
Colorado State Capitol
200 East Colfax Avenue, Room 346
Denver, CO 80203

Re: Hearing Item: House Bill 21-1304 (Early Childhood System: Sirota, Garnett, Fenberg, Buckner)

Dear House Education Committee,

We are writing on behalf of the 56 EPIC members consisting of Colorado business executives and organizational leaders, urging your support of HB21-1304 to create a new department of early childhood, which will provide the greatest opportunity to put Colorado's children and families first. After many conversations with business leaders and early childhood stakeholders over the past year, we feel this legislation will effectively meet [business community priorities](#) for the design and implementation of universal preschool and an effective early childhood system in Colorado.

Underinvestment, complicated processes for families and early care and education providers, and fragmentation of regulatory standards have been longstanding problems in Colorado's current early childhood programs. Despite the state's attempt to resolve these challenges, a systematic approach to early childhood still ceases to exist. To promote alignment and improve access to high-quality early childhood programs, a new cabinet-level department of early childhood that can better govern programs serving young children and families is needed.

As the business voice in support of early childhood investments in Colorado, EPIC emphasizes early childhood is not only an important education issue, but also affects Colorado's economy. Business leaders have taken note of the increased need for access to affordable, quality early childhood care and education for the workforce, and a new state agency will establish state and community partnerships for a mixed delivery model of child care and early childhood programs through school and community-based providers. This will ensure access to preschool for all families of Colorado and we urge your strong support.

EPIC is proud to have our newest Board member and Executive member, Adeb Khan, Vice President of Corporate Social Responsibility & Executive Director of the Delta Dental of Colorado Foundation, testifying on our and the business community's behalf during the committee hearing. We ask for your support of this bill and stand ready to provide any additional information that would be helpful to the members of the House Education Committee.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nicole Riehl", written in a cursive style.

Nicole Riehl
President and CEO
Executives Partnering to Invest in Children

Cc: House Education Committee Members

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May 13th, 2021

To the members of the House Education Committee,

My name is Andrea Stojisavljevic and I am the policy manager at Healthier Colorado. Healthier Colorado is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that seeks to provide every Coloradan the opportunity to live a healthier life through policy-oriented solutions.

Healthier Colorado urges your support for HB21-1304, as there are lifelong positive health implications when ensuring we support and advance child and family-focused needs in the early years of development. This bill will promote alignment and quality, improve access to high-quality early childhood experience, and thoughtfully implement Proposition EE in our state.

We know that the early years in a child's life are some of the most critical for positively effecting their academic, health, and life outcomes. Yet this is also the time when most families have the least support and children face the greatest hurdles to opportunity. This bill represents an opportunity to support children's development in the early years, beginning with addressing the fragmented governance of our early childhood system by setting up a new, cabinet-level state agency focused specifically on early childhood.

This bill and future process to set up the state agency will ensure that Colorado is supporting an array of childhood experiences, across a variety of settings, and that they are available to all families who want to utilize them. As well as, it will take steps to improve provider support that will only strengthen our early care and education system. It will also impact other areas of early child care and education by supporting and compensating Colorado's early childhood workforce. The system level changes will work to end fragmentation and duplicative standards, and reduce fragmentation in the system. All these aspects will only positively benefit our state's families and their children to better set them up for lifelong success and health.

In closing, we see this bill as a monumental and essential step towards positively benefiting all of Colorado's families and children by striving to set them up for success in their early development and learning. Healthier Colorado urges your support for HB21-1304, and thanks you for your time and thoughtful consideration of this bill today.

Sincerely,

Andrea Stojisavljevic
Policy Manager
Healthier Colorado

Chair McLachlan, Vice Chair Young, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to share testimony with you in favor of House Bill 21-1304—Concerning measures to establish a unified early childhood system in Colorado, and, in connection therewith, creating the Department of Early Childhood.

My name is Jennifer Spires. I am an early childhood educator and policy advocate. I have a degree in Early Childhood Education and over fifteen years of experience working with children and families in elementary schools, preschools, family child care homes, and a variety of other settings. I am a legislative advocate with Save the Children Action Network in Denver.

In my time as a first grade teacher, I could easily point out which children had access to quality early childhood experiences. Those who had access to such experiences were resilient, engaged in pro-social behaviors, and came to school ready to learn. Those who did not faced more academic and emotional challenges than their peers. Any early childhood educator could tell you the same of their classrooms. That's because 90% of a child's brain growth happens by the age of five. Investing in children before they enter the K-12 world pays dividends when they grow up. Research shows that children who receive a quality early education are 20% more likely to graduate high school and earn 50% more than their peers who do not.

Knowing this, it is essential that Colorado invests in our children for the future of our state. We have had many recent victories for children, families, and educators including funding full day kindergarten and the passage of Proposition EE to create a universal preschool system for all of Colorado's children. However, there are still gaps in our system. Many families struggle to find quality early care and learning programs for their children and those who would benefit from early interventions are often missed in the fragmentation of services between state departments.

HB21-1304 requires the development of universal preschool policy statewide and establishes the Colorado Department of Early Childhood. With all the fragmentation that currently exists for early childhood services, this Department will streamline this valuable work by aligning services and reducing burdens faced by our families and early care and education providers.

I believe that in order to ensure a better future for our children, we must invest in our children. House Bill 21-1304 does just that. I urge you to vote yes.

Thank you for your consideration.



HB 21-1304: Enhancing Parent, Child, and Provider Experiences with a New State Department of Early Childhood

Rep Sirota & Speaker Garnett / Sen. Buckner & Majority Leader Fenberg
May 13, 2021

Madame Chair and Members of the House Education Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of HB 21-1304. My name is Christine Benero and I have the honor of serving as President and CEO of Mile High United Way. We were the very first United Way in the world. And for over 130 years, Mile High United Way has been uniting the full force of the community to fight for the education, health, and financial stability of everyone in Metro Denver. **We stand with community leaders, parents, educators, and small business child care providers in asking for an end to the fragmented early childhood system through: 1) creating of a Department of Early Childhood, 2) initiating a community-informed process to streamline services, and 3) implementing voluntary universal preschool.**

We see first-hand how the lack of alignment across funding streams and programs negatively impacts families and young children living in Metro-Denver's most under-resourced communities. In our commitment to amplifying too-oft overlooked community voices, starting in the Globeville and Elyria-Swansea neighborhoods, we heard this feedback loud and clear through the Preschool Development Process: **things are just too hard for children, families, and providers to navigate and that we need to lift up early childhood to a more systemic level of governance.** These sentiments are consistent with the voices of nearly 1,000 Coloradans who engaged in this robust stakeholder process. With multiple state agencies simultaneously advancing different funding, regulatory, and policy-making decisions, the experience on the ground of families seeking opportunities for their children, and providers trying to serve them, is overly complex.

These changes are critical to improving the family experience during a critical time that dramatically shapes a child's subsequent education and life experiences. The research is clear that the early years of life are when the foundation of brain architecture is being put into place and the quality of a child's early experiences can either positively or negatively change their academic and life outcomes. **A more efficient and effective child care system is also critical to ensuring that Colorado emerges from the pandemic stronger than before, parents are able to return to work, and contribute to our state's economic recovery.**

Thank you for your consideration and we strongly urge a "yes" vote on HB21-1304.

Sincerely,

Christine Benero
President and CEO
Mile High United Way

Chair McLachlan, Vice Chair Young, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to share testimony with you in favor of House Bill 21-1304—Concerning measures to establish a unified early childhood system in Colorado, and, in connection therewith, creating the Department of Early Childhood.

My name is Susan Hill. I am an early childhood education instructor and an early childhood consultant in the Denver metro area. I have over 40 years of experience in the field. I am also an advocate with Save the Children Action Network in Denver.

The importance of quality early care and education programs cannot be overstated. These programs are critical to the future of Colorado. Ninety percent of brain growth occurs by the time a child is five years old, and early childhood experiences can shape the long-term outcomes for children in school and in life. Research tells us, for example, that children who receive a quality early education are 20% more likely to graduate from high school than their peers who do not, and, on average, earn 50% more than their peers.

We know that children who attend quality early childhood programs enjoy greater academic success in school. It isn't only the academic success that is important, though. We also know that quality programming positively influences the social and emotional development of young children and that impact is long lasting! In a study that spanned 19 years, researchers at Penn State and Duke University interviewed kindergarten teachers and asked them about children's social and emotional competence. Teachers weighed in on who well the children shared, listened to others, resolved problems and were helpful. Then researchers followed up on these children once they became adults. They discovered that the kids with the highest social and emotional competency scores in kindergarten fared better overall. For every one-point increase in children's social competency scores in kindergarten, they were twice as likely to obtain college degrees. They were also more likely to have full-time jobs by age 25. But the kids who had trouble cooperating, listening, and resolving conflict were less likely to finish high school—let alone college. They were more likely to have legal problems and substance abuse issues. For every one-point decrease in social competency at age 5, a child had a 67 percent higher chance of being arrested in early adulthood. A one-point decrease also meant a child had a 52 percent higher rate of binge drinking and an 82 percent higher chance of living in public housing (or at least being on the waitlist). Early childhood experiences count!! In our field, we have a saying that "Eight is too late" because we know that the first years are critical!

Despite the importance of early childhood, young children, and their families, do not have the support they need to thrive. In fact, young children are most likely to live in poverty, experience homelessness and least likely to have access to child care and preschool.

Colorado is making strides in early learning. I celebrate recent victories for young children such as passage of Proposition EE to support universal preschool and state funding for full-day kindergarten, but we must do more. House Bill 21-1304, which would establish the Colorado Department of Early Childhood, and require a plan to implement universal preschool statewide is a decisive step forward for early childhood.

With a mission to expand access to high-quality, affordable early care and learning opportunities, a Colorado Department of Early Childhood can help to ensure all Colorado young children have the support they need to thrive.

I believe that by creating the Colorado Department of Early Childhood, our state will be better able to align services, reduce fragmentation in early childhood services, and reduce burdens on families and early care and education providers.

Throughout my career, I have worked to elevate early childhood because I know that early childhood is a critical period of development that shapes a child's educational and life experiences. I urge you to support House Bill 21-1304, and in so doing help to bring young children in our state the recognition, support, and resources they need to learn, grow, and succeed. This truly is an investment in the future of our state.

Thank you for your consideration.



May 12, 2021

Dear Honorable Members of the House Education Committee,

I am writing to you today to express The Kempe Foundation's support for HB21-1304: Measures to Establish a Unified Early Childhood System in Colorado. We applaud the sponsors, Representative Sirota and Speaker Garnett, and all of the many parties and stakeholders for their efforts over many months, and years, for the well-being of Colorado's vulnerable children 0-5.

We fully support HB21-1304, but would like to highlight two provisions in the bill related to the education and training for recognition of child trauma and support for a trauma-informed approach to early childhood learning and care: p. 14, lines 24-26, regarding strategies to be developed as a part of the transition plan; and p. 23, lines 11-13, as a part of the legislative declaration for improving outcomes for children and families.

Exposure to trauma can lead to toxic stress, which inhibits brain development and impacts children's learning, behavior, or both. A large body of research has demonstrated negative effects of trauma on a child's cognitive, academic, behavioral, and social-emotional functioning.

*The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a spotlight on the care and protection of Colorado's children and families. It has hit our most at-risk communities the hardest. Children and families in many communities are experiencing increased stress from loss of income, instability in housing, distance from social supports and an increasing inability to cover their basic needs. **The trauma children are experiencing as a result is certain to have major, long-term adverse impacts for them individually, for their families and for our communities and state.***

The recognition of this trauma and the need to address it is paramount to achieve the goal of HB21-1304 to improve outcomes for the well-being of Colorado's children and families.

We appreciate the opportunity to submit these written comments and urge a yes vote of HB21-1304.

John D. Faught
Executive Director of Public Policy
The Kempe Foundation
p. 303.864.5304 c. 303.884.7611 f 303.864.5302
John.Faught@Kempe.org www.Kempe.org



The Women's Foundation of Colorado

Women Thriving. Colorado Rising.®

Support for HB21-1304 Enhancing Child, Parent, & Provider Experiences with a New State Department of Early Childhood

ROOTED IN RESEARCH, CONNECTED IN COMMUNITY, ADVANCING EQUITY AND INCLUSIVE PROSPERITY

The Women's Foundation of Colorado (WFCO) works for a future when **women of every background, age, and identity prosper**. WFCO is the only community foundation in our state focused exclusively on economic mobility and security for women. Our perspective is:

- rooted in research;
- informed by deep relationships with grantee partners, supporters, and collaborators across the state; and
- committed to advancing equity.

WFCO believes women's race, class, age, ability, sexual orientation, or other elements of social and/or physical identity should not define our opportunities.

ACCESS TO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE SUPPORTS ECONOMIC SECURITY

Do you think access to high-quality and affordable early care is just a problem for working parents? Everyone relies on someone who relies on child care and it's an essential ingredient for the growth of women's economic mobility and all businesses.

It creates a ripple effect to the health of our economy and this has never been more true following the COVID-19 global pandemic. In fact, [Colorado mothers aren't returning to the workforce as quickly as men](#) and in many cases this is due to lack of access to child care.

Colorado has a unique opportunity to be a nationwide leader by establishing a department that will strengthen and grow our early childhood sector. A more streamlined approach to early care and education will promote alignment and quality, and improve access to high-quality early childhood experiences.

On behalf of all 2.8 million women and girls in Colorado, WFCO thanks you for your consideration of this bill and your service to our State. Please vote yes to advance HB21-1304.

Alison Friedman Phillips, she/her
Director of Programs
alisonp@wfc.org.

OUR MISSION

Catalyzing community to advance and accelerate economic opportunities for Colorado women and their families.

WFCO.ORG



May 12, 2021

Colorado General Assembly
200 E. Colfax Avenue
Denver, CO 80203

Re: HB 21-1304

Dear Members of the House Education Committee,

Please accept this testimony on behalf of Council for a Strong America. Our bipartisan nonprofit organization unites five membership groups, including the law enforcement officials of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, retired admirals and generals of Mission: Readiness, and the business leaders of ReadyNation. Our members believe that protecting public safety, strengthening national security, and building a stronger workforce and economy relies heavily on evidence-based investments in early childhood to give our children the right start in life. This is why we support HB 21-1304.

There is scientific consensus that the birth to age five time frame is the most dramatic period of brain development and this early foundation informs children's cognition, health, and behavior throughout life. The stakes are enormously high for the vast majority of Colorado families, who depend on our early childhood system, but lack the support they need. The stakes are high as well for our children, who depend on nurturing, stimulating environments both at home and in care for healthy brain development during the first three years of life, yet that opportunity is often out of reach.

Addressing Colorado's disjointed oversight of its early childhood system is the right place to start to provide the support our children and families need. Administration, programming, and varying eligibility requirements from multiple state agencies, coupled with funding from a variety of sources, are just a few pieces of a complicated governance structure that is resulting in unnecessary burdens on families.

To address these challenges, and at the recommendation of the Early Childhood Leadership Commission (ECLC), HB 21-1304 would create the Colorado Department of Early Childhood to better govern the multiple programs serving young children and families in Colorado. The legislation would unify the fragmented administration of early



childhood services, thus reducing duplicative oversight and the administrative burden on families, providers, and educators. If passed, HB 21-1304 establishes the framework for the new department and sets the stage for a transition process that is inclusive of the ECLC, state agencies, community and business leaders, parents, and educators.

With the unprecedented passage of Proposition EE which paves the way for preschool for all four-year-old children in our state, now is the time to align early childhood services into a single state agency, creating a systematic approach to governance and financing.

We urge your support for HB 21-1304.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M. Michael Cooke". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

M. Michael Cooke
State Director



To: House Education Committee
From: Khatira Amn, Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning
Date: May 13, 2021
Re: Support for HB21-1304

Madam Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Khatira Amn and I work with Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning as an Early Childhood Education (ECE) Policy Advocate, helping to create opportunities for dual language learner families in accessing early childhood education. Spring Institute is a nationally-recognized provider of effective intercultural learning programs and services with the mission of empowering people and organizations to succeed across languages and cultures.

I see everyday that early childhood education access is a major concern and challenge for the dual language learner, immigrant and refugee population. Early childhood is a critical period in child development that dramatically shapes a child's subsequent education and life experiences. The early years of life are when the foundation of brain architecture is being put into place and the quality of a child's early experiences can either positively or negatively change their academic and life outcomes. Despite the long-term impact of the early years, this is the time when families often have the least support and children face the greatest hurdles to opportunity.

Our youngest children are most likely to live in poverty, most likely to experience homelessness, achievement gap, and least likely to have access to child care and preschool. Access to child care and preschool is crucial for all children, especially for these most vulnerable ones for whom effective programs can lead to academic success and reduce achievement gaps. Quality ECE can help build language and literacy skills in the home language and prepare for English language and literacy development that will continue throughout their education.

Continued



Dual language learner children are defined as children ages 0-8 who have at least one parent who speaks a language other than English at home. They comprise 28% of children ages 0-8 in Colorado. Like all parents, immigrant and refugee parents want the best for their children and understand that quality education is tremendously important for their children's development and cultural integration. And, like all parents, immigrants and refugees also need to balance their career goals and work responsibilities with child care needs. Unfortunately, the shortage of quality, affordable, culturally competent early child care programs in Colorado means that nearly 60% of dual language learner children ages 3-4 are *not* enrolled in a pre-K program. This limits parents' workforce opportunities while kids miss out on early learning experiences and brain development that are foundational to Kindergarten readiness.

An investment in early childhood care and education is truly an investment in Colorado's future. By supporting these policy changes, we can help to promote alignment and quality, expand access to high-quality, voluntary, affordable early childhood opportunities, support parents in accessing programs and services, coordinate the availability of services, promote equitable delivery of resources, and unify the fragmented administration of early childhood services to reduce duplicative oversight and administrative burden on families, providers, and educators.

Thank you for your consideration and commitment to Colorado's families and please vote YES on HB21-1304.

To: House Education Committee

From: Taran Schneider, Executive Director at Healthy Child Care Colorado

Date: May 13th, 2021

Subject: House Bill 21-1304 Written Testimony

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony. My name is Taran Schneider and I represent Healthy Child Care Colorado. We are a nonpartisan, statewide nonprofit with the mission to build safe, supportive, and healthy early childhood settings and systems where children and professionals learn and grow. We provide programs and services for the early childhood workforce and programs across Colorado.

I appreciate the chance to testify in support of House Bill 21-1304 Early Childhood Systems. Early childhood is the most important period in life, with nearly 90 percent of brain growth occurring before the age of five. Despite the long-term impacts of the early years, this is a time when families have little support and children are more likely to live in poverty.

The creation of a state agency for early childhood is critical. This will allow Colorado to align early childhood programs and funding streams, promote equitable delivery of resources, support parents in navigating and accessing programs for their children, and most importantly, ensure that all children can succeed in school and life. The Early Childhood Colorado Framework outlines the importance of strategic thinking, collaboration, alignment, and public-private partnerships and these elements are being considered by stakeholders broadly.

The planning and transition process, as outlined in this bill, requires multiple perspectives, programs, and funding streams to be thoroughly analyzed to ensure we propose a strong plan for the Department of Early Childhood. This process must look closely at all domains within the Early Childhood Colorado Framework: early learning and development, health and well-being, and family support. Creating a Department of Early Childhood with these domains in mind will put us on the path to achieving our shared vision of all children being valued, healthy, and thriving.





Building safe, supportive, and healthy early childhood settings and systems where children and professionals learn and grow.

Voters showed how much they value early learning with the passage of Proposition EE. Now, let's show our youngest children how valuable they are by creating a state agency to help ensure equitable, quality, affordable early childhood experiences for all children in Colorado.

Thank you and please feel free to reach out to me with any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Taran Schneider".

Taran Schneider, MA
Executive Director
Healthy Child Care Colorado
taran@healthychildcareco.org



Chair McLachlan, Vice Chair Young, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to share testimony with you in favor of House Bill 21-1304—Concerning measures to establish a unified early childhood system in Colorado, and, in connection therewith, creating the Department of Early Childhood.

My name is Jennifer Spires. I am an early childhood educator and policy advocate. I have a degree in Early Childhood Education and over fifteen years of experience working with children and families in elementary schools, preschools, family child care homes, and a variety of other settings. I am a legislative advocate with Save the Children Action Network in Denver.

In my time as a first grade teacher, I could easily point out which children had access to quality early childhood experiences. Those who had access to such experiences were resilient, engaged in pro-social behaviors, and came to school ready to learn. Those who did not faced more academic and emotional challenges than their peers. Any early childhood educator could tell you the same of their classrooms. That's because 90% of a child's brain growth happens by the age of five. Investing in children before they enter the K-12 world pays dividends when they grow up. Research shows that children who receive a quality early education are 20% more likely to graduate high school and earn 50% more than their peers who do not.

Knowing this, it is essential that Colorado invests in our children for the future of our state. We have had many recent victories for children, families, and educators including funding full day kindergarten and the passage of Proposition EE to create a universal preschool system for all of Colorado's children. However, there are still gaps in our system. Many families struggle to find quality early care and learning programs for their children and those who would benefit from early interventions are often missed in the fragmentation of services between state departments.

HB21-1304 requires the development of universal preschool policy statewide and establishes the Colorado Department of Early Childhood. With all the fragmentation that currently exists for early childhood services, this Department will streamline this valuable work by aligning services and reducing burdens faced by our families and early care and education providers.

I believe that in order to ensure a better future for our children, we must invest in our children. House Bill 21-1304 does just that. I urge you to vote yes.

Thank you for your consideration.



May 13th, 2021

Madam Chair McLachlan and Members of the Colorado House Education Committee:

Education Reform Now (ERN) and affiliate Democrats for Education Reform (DFER) respectfully submit this letter as written testimony to share our strong support for HB21-1304 Early Childhood System.

We applaud Speaker Garnett and Representative Sirota as well as their Senate sponsors Majority Leader Fenberg and Senator Buckner for bringing forward such bold policy to truly build an accessible universal preschool system for **all** of Colorado's earliest learners.

At ERN we aim to expand what works and change what's broken in the public education system, with the interests of students and families first and foremost. Overwhelming this legislation does just that: expands access to early childhood education because we know it works for kids, especially to even the playing field for historically marginalized students who have faced barriers to high-quality early childhood education and effectively streamline the early care and education system to ensure families, parents, and providers can focus on students rather than the bureaucratic hoops we know they currently must jump through to access sustainable, high-quality early childhood education. HB21-1304 creates a new state department of early childhood, creating a streamlined transition process to thoughtfully implement a strong coordinated effort of early care and education in Colorado, creating a mixed delivery model through schools and community providers while building a plan to blend and braid all funding streams to ensure early learners gain equitable access to high-quality options. After the passage of Prop EE this November, it is imperative to unify the administration and services of early care and education as we build a true voluntary universal preschool program in Colorado.

The Colorado Preschool program, only one of many funding streams that provides early childhood education in the state, has seen successful results for decades – improving long-term academic outcomes and increasing high school graduation rates. We support HB21-1304 as it is a thoughtful plan to ensure all of Colorado's earliest learners have meaningful access to this same opportunity. The transition plan includes meaningful community engagement, strong cornerstones of seamless alignment for families and providers, a commitment to focus on high-quality and quality improvement, and ultimately the goal to serve students who need it most.

Thank you, Speaker Garnett and Rep. Sirota, for your bold vision for long-term investment in Colorado's students.

Sincerely,
Jen Walmer
Colorado State Director
Education Reform Now & Democrats for Education Reform

Sarah Redder
Director of AA KindiePrep
shalbert@yahoo.com
303-815-3204

May 12, 2021

Dear House of Education Committee,

Thank you for taking the time to hear the thoughts and concerns of educators that are passionate about Early Childhood Education. I have spent my entire career working with children 5 years of age and younger. The first 5 years of a person's life are pivotal. The education and experiences children receive during these years can shape their life long view of school and a being a lifelong learner. Research shows that access to early education improves social-emotional well-being; as well as, cognitive abilities. Early Childhood Education should be a priority in every state.

Being its own department allows for better understanding of issues, and more focus on those issues from the department heads. This also allows for the issues to be solved quickly and more effectively. Being part of two different agencies can lead to misinformation, micro-management, and a pass the buck situation. The Departments heads of the agencies my intentionally or unintentionally disregard our programs as they might not take precedence in their eyes over other parts of their agencies.

I don't mean to disparage the leaders in those positions. I know they have a lot on their plates and they must prioritize their time, money, and energy. That is the main reason that Early Childhood should be its own agencies. It will allow for a target focus on the most important people in our state. Please vote yes on House Bill 1304. Help give our children the best education at an age when their minds are like sponges.

Sincerely,

Sarah Redder



Colorado Head Start Association



Thank you to the House Education Committee and Representatives Garnett and Sirota for this opportunity to provide written testimony for HB21-1304 Early Childhood System. Today I, as president of the Colorado Head Start Association, am representing Head Start programs in Colorado and submitting testimony to demonstrate our support for HB21-1304. Head Start has 56 years of service in early childhood in Colorado and nationally. The Head Start program, as the longest standing national and statewide two generation model, is highly invested in the potential increased efficiencies and effectiveness in early childhood systems this bill can create.

Head Start and Early Head Start have a proven history of providing responsive, community-based infant, toddler, and preschool services for young children whose families who earn the low wages in our community. Head Start programs promote comprehensive child development through home- and center-based services that support early learning, health and overall family well-being through authentic partnership with families. In 2019, more than three percent of Colorado's total 0-5 population (11,031 children) were served in one or more of Colorado's 66 Head Start, Early Head Start, Migrant, Seasonal and Tribal Head Start programs. In 2019, 87% of CO HS enrolled children were served for a full school or working day, 6 hours or longer 4-5 days per week, program dependent. This allows a majority of HS programs to provide stable, safe and high quality environments with a focus on continuity of care which allows parents to rest assured their child is in a safe and caring educational setting during their work day.

Head Start programs prioritize service to children who are most in need of early supports and interventions, such as children experiencing homelessness, speak a language other than English in the home, migrant and immigrant populations and children with disabilities. In 2019 throughout the state, nearly 75% of HS enrolled children were identified as of color by their parents; 20% of all children spoke a primary language that was not English. Fifty-five percent of parents in our CO HS programs identify as single parents, of which 90% are single mothers. 10% of the entire HS population experienced homelessness in 2019 and 4% were involved in the foster care system at some point during 19-20 school year. In short, HS programs serve CO families most in-need of reduced cost childcare to financially stabilize their families.

Head Start (HS) programs enroll children with diagnosed or suspected disabilities at a minimum rate of 10% annually. In 2019, Colorado's HS programs were the primary educational and care program for more than 12% of the enrolled population. HS programs not only meet the requirement to serve children with disabilities, they do so in accordance with their Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) or Individual Education Plan (IEP) goals. Many programs provide educational supports beyond the minimum service hour requirements through a partnership between therapists and Head Start educators. HS staff are highly trained professionals, with education and experience in adaptive and specialized educational activities to align with and enhance children's progress toward their IEP and IFSP goals. These partnerships also ensure that therapeutic services are provided to children with disabilities in the least restrictive and primary care environment. Through robust MOUs and partnerships with local school districts and other therapeutic providers, HS programs provide services on location as part of the school day, or where warranted through dual enrollment between a school district and Head Start program with transportation. These creative strategies allow working families to rest assured their children with disabilities have high quality education, care and safe transportation service throughout the full day. In our experience many working families, especially those living with low wages, seek



Head Start and other community-based programs as they serve children with a high quality full working day, defined as 8.5 hours or longer. Most school district preschool programs, such as CPP, serve a child for up to 3 hours per day, 4 days a week. The school district programs that provide full day services for preschoolers typically cap their school day at 6.5 hour per day and have teaching staff turnover midday, resulting in less continuity of care. Head Start and other center-based preschool providers often provide 8.5 or more hours of preschool 5 days per week to meet working parents' childcare need.

As you can see, the Head Start is dedicated to serving and advocating for children and families with the most need for stabile, high quality, full-day care that ensures families and children have a strong holistic network and continuity of care. We believe in parent and community choice in offering early childhood services, from home visiting to center-based care. We recognize the need for new parents and young children to have supports in creating family self-sufficiency goals and accessing services, as they see fit. For these reasons, we believe that a single department dedicated to our youngest residents and their families provides an opportunity to ensure dedicated supports o this unique time in life and family development. With one department, many opportunities exist, such as universal preschool applications which can minimize the paperwork burden from our lowest income working families while also allowing for systematized longitudinal data tracking through unique child identifiers.

On behalf of the Colorado Head Start programs and community, we support HB21-1304, as it is our belief that by creating a department of Early Childhood, there is a unique opportunity to look at the system of early care and education beginning with pregnant moms through the early school-aged years. We believe that with this department and restructure, together we can create a more holistic approach to services most needed by families with young children in Colorado.

Respectfully submitted,



Olivia R. Coyne, MA
President, Colorado Head Start Association
Submitted on behalf of the Colorado Head Start Association and CO Head Start membership



Testimony in Support of HB 21-1304: Early Childhood Systems

To Chair McLachlan and Members of the House Education Committee:

We are writing today on behalf of Clayton Early Learning, an early childhood nonprofit that supports a whole child, whole family approach to the earliest years – serving about 500 children, birth to Kindergarten entry across the state. We believe that healthy early childhood development offers one of the most powerful levers for ending inequality and creating thriving communities. Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony to share our support for House Bill 1304.

Well-documented research on human brain development shows that the prenatal-to-age-5 period offers the highest potential for development. With 90 percent of brain development occurring before the age of 6, it is necessary that we invest in policies and programs that support healthy child development and family economic security. The creation of a cabinet-level early childhood department in Colorado will signal to the families throughout our state that policymakers value our young children and want to provide parents with the supports they need to raise a healthy and thriving family.

With the passage of Proposition EE in November 2020, voters across the state signaled to policymakers – at a 2-1 margin – that they want more investment in the early years. Since Fall 2020, Clayton has partnered with the Colorado Children’s Campaign to engage with community members throughout Colorado for listening sessions, asking parents, community members, expecting families, early childhood educators, providers, K-12 stakeholders, and others what we should consider in order to successfully implement the expansion of universal preschool for 4-year olds. Overwhelmingly, what we heard is that a part-time, free, universal preschool program is great – but it’s not enough. Working families with young children ages 0-5 need quality care and learning opportunities for their young children so that they can go to work while giving these children the early childhood experiences they need for healthy development.

Parents also shared that it is overwhelming and often impossible to navigate the current, fragmented “system” of programs and supports for pregnant people and families with young children. And providers and early childhood programs shared that they are challenged by the multitudes of funding streams that they must blend and braid together in order to provide affordable early childhood programs. We face this issue at Clayton every day – focusing our staff time on navigating these systems and blending/braiding funding to support the families we serve. But we are a large institution with many privileges, such as the security of federal Head Start grants and the backing from a financial trust from our founder. Smaller programs and providers without the resources that we have are often unable to successfully navigate these systems and funding streams.

This new department gives us the opportunity to create and implement policies that incorporate and center the diverse needs of parents and providers from the beginning. If we maintain the status quo of this fragmented system, we risk ongoing harm to families furthest from

opportunity, particularly those with low incomes and families of color. We need policymakers to be intentional about listening to the voices of those community members that are asking for a more supportive, comprehensive, and holistic approach to serving Colorado families with young children.

The research is clear that the early years are the most effective time to invest and lay a foundation for future learning and achievement. Colorado has made great strides supporting our state's youngest children and their families, but we have more to do to ensure that all children are healthy, valued and thriving. We at Clayton Early Learning believe this bill will signal that Colorado supports the needs of our youngest children, their families, and the early childhood workforce across our state.

Thank you for your time and please do not hesitate to contact us should you have any questions.

Best,

Paula Smith
Vice President, Educational Services
Clayton Early Learning
PSmith@claytonearlylearning.org

Kia Abdool
Executive Director, Educational Services
Clayton Early Learning
kabdool@claytonearlylearning.org

Christina Walker
Director, Policy & Advocacy
Clayton Early Learning
cwalker@claytonearlylearning.org



May 12, 2021

Colorado General Assembly
200 E. Colfax Avenue
Denver, CO 80203

Re: HB 21-1304

Dear Members of the House Education Committee,

Please accept this testimony on behalf of Council for a Strong America. Our bipartisan nonprofit organization unites five membership groups, including the law enforcement officials of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, retired admirals and generals of Mission: Readiness, and the business leaders of ReadyNation. Our members believe that protecting public safety, strengthening national security, and building a stronger workforce and economy relies heavily on evidence-based investments in early childhood to give our children the right start in life. This is why we support HB 21-1304.

There is scientific consensus that the birth to age five time frame is the most dramatic period of brain development and this early foundation informs children's cognition, health, and behavior throughout life. The stakes are enormously high for the vast majority of Colorado families, who depend on our early childhood system, but lack the support they need. The stakes are high as well for our children, who depend on nurturing, stimulating environments both at home and in care for healthy brain development during the first three years of life, yet that opportunity is often out of reach.

Addressing Colorado's disjointed oversight of its early childhood system is the right place to start to provide the support our children and families need. Administration, programming, and varying eligibility requirements from multiple state agencies, coupled with funding from a variety of sources, are just a few pieces of a complicated governance structure that is resulting in unnecessary burdens on families.

To address these challenges, and at the recommendation of the Early Childhood Leadership Commission (ECLC), HB 21-1304 would create the Colorado Department of Early Childhood to better govern the multiple programs serving young children and families in Colorado. The legislation would unify the fragmented administration of early



childhood services, thus reducing duplicative oversight and the administrative burden on families, providers, and educators. If passed, HB 21-1304 establishes the framework for the new department and sets the stage for a transition process that is inclusive of the ECLC, state agencies, community and business leaders, parents, and educators.

With the unprecedented passage of Proposition EE which paves the way for preschool for all four-year-old children in our state, now is the time to align early childhood services into a single state agency, creating a systematic approach to governance and financing.

We urge your support for HB 21-1304.

Respectfully,

M. Michael Cooke
State Director



May 12, 2021

Dear Chair McLachlan and Members of the House Education Committee:

The Early Childhood Council Leadership Alliance would like to express our support for HB21-1304: Enhancing Child, Parent, and Provider Experiences with a New State Department of Early Childhood. We support this bill as step to addressing the fragmented governance of the state-wide early childhood system.

The Early Childhood Council Leadership Alliance's mission is to advocate for and strengthen the accessibility, quality, and equity of local services and supports through a responsive statewide system of Early Childhood Councils to benefit Colorado's young children, their families, and early childhood professionals. We serve as the membership organization for the state's 34 Early Childhood Councils. Our members have been working tirelessly for over 20 years at the local level to ensure comprehensive and coordinated early childhood services. We believe that HB21-1304 has the potential to create greater alignment and efficiency at the state level, elevate local services, and reduce burdens on families and early childhood service providers.

While much progress has been made in Colorado, ensuring a single state department, working towards a common goal, and engaging with stakeholders and families has the potential to ensure equitable and accessible services across the state for every child. We look forward to working with our state partners to support strong implementation of this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maegan Lokteff".

Maegan Lokteff, PhD
Executive Director
maegan@ecclacolorado.org