

February 3, 2021

Dear Joint Budget Committee Members,

Thank you for your thoughtful approach to the complicated work of building a balanced state budget, particularly during this fiscal challenge. We are eager to partner with you as we all work together to ensure careful stewardship of the limited resources available to support and protect Coloradans each year.

Colorado Counties Inc., the Colorado Association of Community Corrections Boards, and the Colorado Community Corrections Coalition, submit to you our concerns regarding the Governor's proposed budget cuts and the redesign of the Community Corrections system. As community and government partners, we recognize the difficult budget environment in which the state finds itself. Nonetheless, we believe the proposed changes to Community Corrections funding will be harmful and lead to reduced services, public safety risks for our communities, and negative impacts on a vulnerable population. While we welcome a discussion about how to achieve meaningful service and funding innovation in the future, we feel the existing budgetary and redesign proposal comes with a variety of concerns. The concerns shared by Counties, Community Corrections providers, and Community Corrections boards are described below:

1. **No Stakeholder Engagement:** The proposal was made without stakeholder engagement from critical entities including community corrections programs, community corrections boards, counties, and representatives from judicial, probation, public defenders, district attorneys, parole, public, criminal justice involved individuals and others.
2. **Disruption in Existing Program Improvements:** There has been an on-going pattern of instituting significant programmatic changes designed to take up to a decade to reach maturity, and then only providing a few years of implementation with little evaluation of the effectiveness of those changes. Providers have worked diligently to implement a variety of evidence based and evidence informed practices, proven through research to provide long term behavior change, thereby decreasing the likelihood of recidivism.
3. **Cost shift to Counties:** The Governor's proposal would shift a significant portion of the State's financial responsibility for these programs to local governments, whose budgets are already strapped. The exposure for local governments is simply too great, particularly at a time when budgets and staffing are already stressed beyond what is appropriate. In addition, it takes considerable time to evaluate and bring programs online to provide new services that still have not been determined.
4. **A local community-based solution:** Community Corrections clients are supported in quickly obtaining employment, participants receive mental health and substance use treatment as appropriate, they pay victim restitution, and pay child support. Community Corrections allows justice-involved people to remain in their community and continue to be productive. It serves as a low-cost residential option for transitioning inmates at a time when homelessness is poised to be higher than it's ever been in Colorado.
5. **Alternative to mass incarceration:** Community Corrections offers an alternative to institutional incarceration and a chance for appropriate individuals to avoid the trauma and isolation of prison time. It also solves the transition problem associated with being out of society for extended periods of time. Community Corrections is a community-based second or third chance before prison.
6. **Expansion of Department of Corrections Capacity:** This proposal contemplates an expansion of the Department of Corrections (DOC) by adding 765 beds at a time that DOC has a vacancy of approximately 26%. This proposal would also drive-up costs for jails and would lead to increased incarceration in state institutions.

- 7. Cost Effectiveness:** If the Joint Budget Committee chose to reappropriate the predicted under-expenditure of the Community Corrections budget for this year, we believe that it would be difficult for providers, but that the system would ultimately be able to rebuild critical services in subsequent years. A cut any deeper than the existing under-expenditure may threaten the solvency of smaller and non-profit providers throughout the state. Moreover, a funding reduction beyond the current fiscal year reversion ignores the probable if not inevitable system recovery, which will create much greater demand for these valuable services.

It's been a year that none of us could have predicted which requires flexibility and innovation to ensure the most critical public safety and re-entry supports are preserved. However, the budget proposal to dramatically redesign and cut Community Corrections services would have a long-term negative impact on the criminal justice system. We believe a fiscal crisis is not the appropriate time to make programmatic decisions that could, and we believe will, have long-term negative implications for justice-involved individuals, Community Corrections providers, Counties, and our Colorado communities overall.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter. We are available for any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



Colorado Counties, Inc. (CCI)

<https://ccionline.org/>

Signatory: Fremont County Commissioner Debbie Bell, CCI Board President

Contact: Kyle Burress, CCI Legislative & Policy Advocate, kburress@ccionline.org



Colorado Community Corrections Coalition (CCCC)

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Signatory: Brian Hulse, CCCC Board President

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Colorado Association of Community Corrections Boards (CACCB)

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Signatory: Steve Reynolds, CACCB Board President

Contact: Steve Reynolds, CACCB Board President