



February 2026

To: House Education Committee

Re: AAUW SUPPORTS HB1055--My Colorado Card Pilot Program.docx

Dear Committee Members,

The American Association of University Women (AAUW) is one of the oldest women's organizations in the country, empowering women since 1881. The mission of AAUW is to advance equity for women and girls through research, education and advocacy. More than 700 community leaders are members in local AAUW branches around the state.

AAUW has led the fight for economic empowerment for women, and we have made progress over the years. Yet women continue to face barriers to reach our full potential. Education is key to overcoming these barriers especially when standard classroom learning is enhanced by cultural and educational opportunities in the community at large. Unfortunately, too many girls are growing up in opportunity deserts—areas lacking in access to cultural, arts, recreational, or extracurricular facilities.

HB1055 proposes a unique pilot program to provide such activities to girls and AAUW is in strong support. For these reasons, AAUW urges your YES vote in committee and throughout the process of becoming law.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Su Ryden".

**Hon. Su Ryden**  
**AAUW Colorado Advocacy Director**

16699 E. Kentucky Ave.  
Aurora, CO 80017  
303.898.5797  
[suryden25@gmail.com](mailto:suryden25@gmail.com)

*American Association of University Women--AAUW is a top-rated 501(c)3 charitable organization whose mission is to advance gender equity for women and girls through research, education, and advocacy.*

Hello Chair and members of the Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Audrey Goodman. I'm a student at Denver East High School and a member of the SHIFT Fellowship program at Faithbridge. I am here in strong support of HB26- 1055, the My Colorado Card Pilot Program.

I want to begin with a question. What determines a student's opportunity in Colorado? Their talent? Their dreams? Their potential? Or their zip code? Right now, for too many students, it's their zip code.

I am fortunate to be one of few students who has access to parks, recreation centers, and cultural institutions through the MyDenver Card. Because of that access, some of my most meaningful memories weren't locked behind a price tag. They were after school at Carla Madison Rec Center, pushing myself in the gym. They were afternoons wandering every exhibit at the Denver Art Museum, discovering creativity I didn't know I had. They were summer mornings spent at public pools with friends, laying in the sun. Those experiences didn't just fill my time. They shaped who I am. They kept me active, connected, inspired. And they changed my trajectory.

Seeing how powerful access can be led me to apply to serve as a Youth Advisor on the Denver Parks and Recreation Board. Since August, I've had the privilege of seeing firsthand how these spaces are managed, how budgets are allocated, and how decisions about expansions and improvements are made. I have also seen the reality that many communities simply do not have the same access.

HB26- 1055 is about eliminating those opportunity deserts. It is about ensuring that every student in grades six through twelve, regardless of income or geography, has access to the spaces that help them grow. The My Colorado Card would provide free entry to museums, recreation centers, afterschool programs, and more. But this bill is not just about buildings. It is about belonging, growth, and opportunity. It is about possibility.

We know that when students have access to structured and enriching environments, their mental health improves. School engagement increases. Violence and dropout rates decline. Students discover passions that shape their futures.

So I ask you, if we know access improves outcomes, and we know cost is a barrier, and we know that opportunity gaps exist, then why would we not act?

When we remove financial and accessibility barriers, we are investing in public safety, student well-being, and a stronger Colorado. We are choosing to make equity more than just a word.

HB26-1055 Testimony Speech  
Education Committee  
Wednesday, February 25th

I stand here today as a student whose life expanded because access existed. Every Colorado student deserves that same opportunity. We do not need more time, we need action.

Please support HB26- 1055 and help make the My Colorado Card a reality. Thank you.

Thank you Chair and members of the education committee for the opportunity to testify. I write to speak in favor of HB26-1055, the My Colorado Card Pilot Program. My name is Brian Vu and I am a senior at DSST: College View High School. In an effort to change youth circumstances, I work as a fellow in the SHIFT Fellowship program at FaithBridge.

When I moved out of section 8 housing in elementary school, I found that not much had changed. While my parents worked the same grueling hours, the transition was defined by emptiness and solitude at home. Getting books was a scarcity; playing sports felt foreign; and I had never even been to a public pool. This was my reality.

However, when my sister got access to the MyDenverCard for the both of us, our circumstances shifted. I went to Elitches on the little days my mom took off, and my summer was defined with walks to the local library. Although my childhood did not consist of the typical opportunities like going to soccer practice, I got to live through exploration like seeing lions at the Denver Zoo.

Where my parents sacrificed a majority of my early memories to stay afloat, the MyDenverCard brought on opportunities that gave me a running start towards growth and independence. Similar to me, 130,000 kids in Colorado live in a state of poverty, however, not all places in Colorado offer opportunities like our home here in Denver. Regions are overrun by deserts that deprive kids of even the chance to dream of careers. These deserts separate Colorado into opportunity gaps, where Zip Codes tear our kids down.

So it is time that as a state, as a community, we acknowledge extracurricular activities and facilities, like museums and recreational centers, must become commonplace as an investment in Colorado youth's health and security. This bill will combat costs and access barriers associated with education. HB26-1055 will work so that kids take in Colorado as its entirety.

I urge this committee to look for what the My Colorado Card pilot does by our youth. While parents work, our youth will grow outside of the class room. Students deserve to be students – they deserve to have their full efforts be put into learning what they love. With this bill, Colorado is taking strides to lift our kids out of inequity and allow them to find themselves in catered opportunities. I get to go to college because of the tensions the MyDenverCard helped to relieve.

HB26-1055 is what our youth deserve. This bill is a commitment from the state to the entirety of Colorado's youth. In a time of division, where common interest is lost, I urge that we zero in on the vulnerable children of our state. Allow our youth the opportunity to learn and explore passions — allow them to be kids. I thank you for your leadership and your commitment to Colorado's students.

February 25, 2026

Chair and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of HB26-1055, the My Colorado Card Pilot Program.

At its core, this bill is about access.

Colorado is home to extraordinary museums, recreation centers, arts organizations, after-school programs, libraries, and cultural institutions. Yet for many middle and high school students, particularly those in rural communities, on reservations, and in lower-income neighborhoods, these opportunities remain out of reach. The barriers are rarely about interest or motivation. More often, they are about cost, transportation, and family capacity.

HB26-1055 proposes a thoughtful, time-limited pilot program to address these barriers by providing students in grades six through twelve with a My Colorado Card. The goal is simple: reduce cost obstacles and connect young people to structured cultural, artistic, recreational, and extracurricular experiences within their communities. The bill intentionally selects diverse pilot communities and includes built-in data collection and reporting to ensure the legislature can evaluate outcomes before considering broader expansion.

There is strong evidence that structured extracurricular participation supports youth success. A longitudinal study published in *Child Development* found that students involved in structured activities demonstrate higher GPAs, stronger school engagement, and lower dropout rates. The Afterschool Alliance reports that students who participate in afterschool programs attend school more regularly, and nearly three-quarters of parents say these programs reduce risky behaviors. The National Endowment for the Arts has found that low-income students who are highly engaged in the arts are five times less likely to drop out of high school and twice as likely to graduate from college. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention links participation in organized sports to improved mental health, stronger social development, and lower rates of obesity. These outcomes are especially important as youth mental health concerns have increased in recent years.

Participation gaps are well-documented. The Brookings Institution has found that children from higher-income families are significantly more likely to participate in arts, sports, and enrichment activities than their lower-income peers, and those gaps widen over time. The Urban Institute has demonstrated that transportation access alone can significantly affect youth participation rates, particularly in rural communities.

HB26-1055 does not attempt to solve every barrier. Instead, it takes a responsible and measured approach by establishing a pilot with required reporting and non-identifying data collection. This design aligns with best practices identified by the Pew Charitable Trusts and the National Conference of State Legislatures, both of which recommend pilot programs and sunset

provisions when states test innovative initiatives. Built-in evaluation reduces fiscal risk, strengthens oversight, and ensures that future policy decisions are based on Colorado-specific evidence.

This program also has community-level benefits. The National Assembly of State Arts Agencies reports that arts investments generate significant local economic activity. Youth participation increases facility usage, supports instructors and program staff, and strengthens long-term civic engagement. The My Colorado Card can function both as a developmental tool for youth and as a modest stimulus for local cultural and recreational organizations.

Ultimately, HB26-1055 sends a powerful message: access to opportunity should not depend on zip code or family income. When young people are connected to positive, structured activities, they are more engaged in school, more connected to their communities, and better positioned for long-term success.

HB26-1055 is targeted, fiscally cautious, and built for accountability. It reflects both research and real-world experience across Colorado communities.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to support HB26-1055.

Thank you for your consideration.

Kimberlee Sia

**House Education**

**02/25/2026 Upon Adjournment**

**HB26-1055 My Colorado Card Pilot Program**

**Typed Text of Testimony Submitted**

<b>Name, Position, Representing</b>	<b>Typed Text of Testimony</b>
Fathi Hirsi For themselves	<p>Good morning my name is Fathi Hirsi I'm junior in Hinkley high in Aurora. I am writing to support HB26-1055.</p> <p>The positive impacts of structured extra curricular activities and organized sports and youth development is that it highlights how these activities contribute to academic success higher. GPAs better school engagement and also behavior improvements it reduces bad behavior. It also increases confidence and a better mental health and social development. These programs offer valuable opportunity for young people. But there's a problem the prices of after school programs is a huge barrier, making things unfair for kids in different communities when families can't afford these programs children miss out on important learning and fun activities the outcome is that children from wealthier families get more chances to develop new skills and export their interest compared to the children with lesser wealthier families.</p> <p>The primary way youth participation support local organization has highlighted in the evidence is in increasing long-term audience participation and volunteerism this means like when young people engage with art or different programs they're more likely to become regular attendees and willing helpers for these organizations in the future.</p> <p>I urge you to support HB26-1055 to help all students in Colorado get access. Let's begin by piloting this program with communities in higher need. Thank you for your time.</p>
Journey Tootle For themselves	<p>Hello, my name is Journey Tootle, and I am a student at Montbello High School and a part of the SHIFT Fellowship program at FaithBridge. Thank you Chair and members of the education committee for the opportunity to testify. I am writing today to speak in favor of HB26-1055 the My Colorado Card Pilot Program. This bill means not only a great deal to me but to the many others that made this bill come this far. We have worked non stop for months to create this bill to bring to you and show you this amazing potential opportunity for the community. As a current user of the My Denver Card, I can confirm that it is an amazing thing to have in hand as someone who lives in Denver. The my Denver card has brought countless opportunities and activities to participate in such as access to rec centers, libraries, museums, etc. However, not everybody gets to experience these amazing opportunities. I personally have had many friends and family members unable to do</p>

	<p>certain things and unable to gain a my Denver card because of where they live making them “ineligible” and it’s so unfair. And that’s where our bill comes in. We have created a bill where everyone in Colorado has access to all sorts of opportunities, no matter their zip code, and we call it The My Colorado Card. Now I know what your thinking. What the point of this card, who benefits from it, why should you even consider this bill? The answer is simple. This bill will eliminates opportunity deserts, meaning this card will bring opportunities, pathways, exposures, and experiences to youth all over Colorado. This bill is the my denver card but way better and expanded with way more opportunities. Additionally, The my Colorado card pilot addresses opportunity deserts by removing cost and access barriers that prevent many students from exploring interests and discovering new possibilities. Meaning, cost is not a problem for the experiences and possibilities of this amazing bill.</p>
<p>Sarah Cole For themselves</p>	<p>Hello, my name is Sarah and I am a student at south high school and a part of the SHIFT Fellowship program at FaithBridge. Thank you Chair and members of the education committee for the opportunity to testify. I am writing today to speak in favor of HB26-1055 the My Colorado Card Pilot Program.</p> <p>This bill is important to me because even though I have access to the my Denver program I feel there is a grey area of what you can or can’t do as well as accessing opportunities outside Denver and the my Denver program. I also feel that having this resource will help get more recognition and use around the state as well as creating opportunities outside of Denver for the people who live who don’t really have those opportunities.</p> <p>The HB26-1055 bill advocates for the my Colorado card pilot program which would provide an opportunity to those in other areas of the state who struggle with having access to opportunities and experience because of things like where they live or how much money they have. With the my Colorado card the out of pocket cost to use a "CULTURAL, ARTS, RECREATIONAL, OR EXTRACURRICULAR FACILITY" OR "FACILITY" MEANS A MUSEUM, CULTURAL INSTITUTION, LIBRARY, ARTS ORGANIZATION, RECREATION CENTER, PARK, SPORTS FACILITY, AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM SITE, OR OTHER COMMUNITY-BASED FACILITY THAT PROVIDES YOUTH ENRICHMENT OPPORTUNITIES. Would be cared for with no physical dollar amount due to grants. We as students really care for something like this. This is important for our continued development and learning. Vote Yes on HB26-1055!</p>
<p>Isaac Limon For themselves</p>	<p>My name is Isaac Limon, I am a student at Mullen High School, and a SHIFT Fellow with Faithbridge. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am writing in strong support of HB26-1055, the My Colorado Card Pilot Program. I wish I could be there in person, but since the hearing is during the school day, it is not possible for me to be there in person.</p> <p>I have a “My Denver Card”, but I have not used it much. The reason is that my friends live in neighborhoods within 10 minutes of my house but just outside of Denver. I have the ability to go to rec centers or museums, but since my</p>

	<p>friends don't have the My Denver Card, it feels like there is no point in going without them. So we usually go to each other's houses or have to rely on parents to lend them money so that we can get into places together.</p> <p>When I have used the card, I have gone to the rec centers to play basketball or swim. Once, I attended a birthday party at the Athmar Rec center, and I remember that for me, it was easy to get in, but one of my friends who doesn't live in Denver was embarrassed since he had to pay an entry fee, but his mom had just dropped him off unaware of the fee.</p> <p>If we had a card for all students in Colorado, then zip codes and city boundaries wouldn't be a barrier to my friends and I exploring more of the cultural facilities, rec centers, and other places that participate in the program.</p> <p>Please vote YES on HB26-1055 so that students like me can explore Denver and the surrounding area without so many barriers.</p>
<p>John Youngquist For himself</p>	<p>My name is John Youngquist and I am a Director on the DPS school board, a career educator, and a devoted advocate for Denver and Colorado youth. As a principal and school district leader in urban, suburban, and mountain districts in Colorado, it is clear to me that our young people have interests that are beyond the confines of their neighborhoods. The My Colorado Card Pilot program provides the opportunity for young people in every Colorado community to begin engage with artistic, academic, and athletic experiences, not defined by a county line, but defined by the common interests that Coloradans share and find of value. As a principal in Summit County, I know my elementary students would have gained from added cultural experiences near their homes and from the opportunity to explore museums and libraries that are so well funded in the big city of Denver. As a non-profit leader, principal, and chief of academics in Aurora and Denver, I know my students and the families that I continue to serve would gain great value by having immediate access into the doors of recreation facilities and other community-based based experiences not inhibited by the county line they cross, but welcomed because they are members of our greater community in Colorado. One of the reasons that I am so enthusiastic about the My Colorado Card Pilot Program is that the concept and proposal has been developed by our youth through their voices and based on the interests that they hold. The authors of HB 26-1055, themselves, live with the limits an opportunities that they are working to improve upon and I hope that you see that this is an opportunity that must be explored as a low or no cost investment in the youth of Colorado.</p>

Hello, my name is Bryton Washington. I am a student at Regis University and a college intern at FaithBridge. Thank you Chair and members of the Education Committee for the opportunity to speak today. I am here in support of House Bill 26-1055, the My Colorado Card Pilot Program. Sports were a constant in my life growing up. They gave me discipline and a way to stay focused. Basketball was my favorite, but I stayed active year round, playing football, baseball, tennis and even soccer when I could. Being involved in sports kept me busy in the best way and connected me to positive friendships and mentors. I attended high school at Vista PEAK Preparatory in APS from 2020-2024, and some of my favorite memories are the everyday moments. Going to the rec center with my friends, playing basketball, or just hanging out between activities gave us a place to grow together. Those ordinary afternoons left a lasting impact on me. My friends and I would walk about twenty minutes up the street to the Green Valley Ranch Recreation Center. To get into all Denver rec centers, we used the My Denver Card. That card gave us access to gyms and programs after school. It meant we always had somewhere productive to go.

Unfortunately I had friends who lived just outside of Denver city limits who did not have that same access. For them, getting into a rec center often meant paying a fee or not going at all which was absolutely heartbreaking. When you are young, those barriers matter. Access shapes how you spend your time and who you are surrounded by. My sister still uses the My Denver Card today. She goes to hang out with her friends and spend time somewhere positive as she navigates middle school. It gives her a sense of independence. It gives her something to look forward to after school. It also gives my family peace of mind knowing she has a safe place to go if she does not want to be home all the time. That is the power of access. It creates stability during those critical years. Not every student across Colorado has that opportunity. In many communities, it depends on cost, transportation, whether the program even exists nearby, or all of the above. This predicament creates opportunity deserts, places where young people have fewer chances to explore their interests or connect with safe spaces outside of school. House Bill 26-1055 helps close that gap. The My Colorado Card Pilot Program expands access statewide so opportunity is not limited by city boundaries. It removes barriers and opens doors for students to participate in extracurricular experiences that support their growth.

This bill is also smart policy. By creating a pilot program, Colorado can collect data on usage, measure impact on student engagement and well-being. It ensures resources are used efficiently and targeted toward students who need them most. Supporting this bill is not just about giving students a card. It is about making a measurable systemic change that ensures every student has the chance to thrive. At FaithBridge, our mission is to co-create a just world. Our vision is that all children thrive, learn in great schools and achieve their hopes. House Bill 26-1055 aligns directly with that vision. It ensures that access to opportunity and safe spaces is not a privilege for some, but a right for every student in Colorado. I am standing here because I had a card that opened doors for me. My sister is benefiting from that same access today. Every student in Colorado deserves that same chance, no matter where they lay their head at night. I respectfully urge you to support House Bill 26-1055. Thank you for your time and your commitment to students across our state.



HB26-1055 Testimony Speech  
Education Committee  
Wednesday, February 25th

Good afternoon Chair and Committee Members,

My name is Katie Cole. I am a SHIFT Fellow with Faithbridge and senior at Denver South High School where I participate in many activities such as being a part of the swim team and Symphonic band. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of HB26-1055.

I have been very fortunate to grow up in Denver and have access to Recreation Centers with the My Denver card. I learned to swim at the Rec Center by my house and was a member of their swim team for many years. If you know me, you know I am awful at any sport that involves any kind of ball or physical contact. If it weren't for the rec center, I would have gone my entire childhood without participating in a team sport. Swimming gave me the physical activity my body needed and the ability to be a part of a team. I have learned so many things by being part of a team such as sportsmanship, the importance of practice, and the benefit of hard work. I had a hard time fitting in and creating a community and swimming opened me up and allowed me to build bonds with my teammates, which ultimately helped me make friends at school.

If I were to live somewhere that did not give me access to opportunities like swimming, I would not have been able to develop my social skills and make friends. I would not have had much physical activity. The most important thing that being a part of sports taught me is how to always give my best effort, and if I work hard, I can succeed. This mindset has translated into my schoolwork, where I always do my best and push myself to be better.

The investment that Denver put in me has helped me succeed in my social and academic life. But, many students in Colorado don't have access to opportunities like the ones I did because of their zip code. If Colorado provides opportunities to every student no matter where they live or what their parents make, they can have these opportunities to learn life lessons and develop into resilient and passionate students and people. HB26-1055 allows Colorado to expand access to activities and experiences statewide. I urge you to support HB26-1055 and help ensure that every child in Colorado has the opportunity to discover what they love, connect with others, and thrive socially, emotionally, and academically.

Thank you for your time.

HB26-1055 Testimony Speech  
Education Committee  
Wednesday, February 25th

Hello, my name is Lawrence Phillips-Thomas and I am a student at Colorado Early Colleges of Aurora and part of the SHIFT Fellowship program at FaithBridge. Thank you Chair and members of the education committee for taking the time to read my written testimony. I am writing today in favor of HB26-1055, the My Colorado Card Pilot Program.

If I had access to the My Denver Card, I would have the chance to utilize the Denver recreational centers, art and history museums, and other cultural institutions. Having such a card would be an invaluable and transformative tool for the youth anywhere. Imagine the opportunities and possibilities that students would have without limits of financial and other access barriers.

Growing up, I had the opportunity to play sports, participate in school clubs, as I got older these opportunities got further and fewer. Having to look outside my school and district for more opportunities. I can remember as a kid going to the local recreational pool, and having to pay to enter and how fun it would have been to go more often, even daily if I could, whether that be to swim, play basketball, or just hang out with my friends or family.

HB26-1055 is pivotal for students not just in the Denver metro area, but throughout the state. Access to a quality education is a necessity, but what we do for students and children outside the classroom is just as crucial for childhood development.

When we have access to said resources, we are introduced to the broader world. The various career pathways, cultural institutions, and transformative experiences that lie outside of our communities. The My Colorado Card pilot will address these opportunity deserts by removing not just the cost, but the various access barriers that prevent many students from exploring their interests and discovering new possibilities.

HB26-1055 is pivotal for students not just in the Denver metro area, but throughout the state. Access to a quality education is a necessity, but what we do for students outside the classroom is just as crucial for our development.

When we have access to these resources, we are introduced to a broader world — to career pathways, cultural institutions, mentors, and experiences that help us imagine a future bigger than our current surroundings. The My Colorado Card Pilot Program would address opportunity deserts by removing not just cost barriers, but also the access barriers that prevent many students from exploring their interests and discovering new possibilities.

HB26-1055 Testimony Speech  
Education Committee  
Wednesday, February 25th

This bill is not about giving students something extra. It is about giving students something essential. It is about prevention. It is about engagement. It is about equity.

When students have safe places to go after school, when we can access museums, recreation centers, arts programs, and extracurricular activities without worrying about affordability, we are more likely to stay involved, stay motivated, and stay hopeful about our futures.

As a student, I can say this clearly: we want to be engaged. We want to explore. We want to grow. What often stands in our way is not motivation — it is access.

The My Colorado Card would send a message that Colorado believes in its youth enough to invest in our full development — not just during school hours, but beyond them.

I urge you to support HB26-1055 and help ensure that students across Colorado, regardless of income or zip code, have the opportunity to thrive.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Hi my name is Lily Becker. Thank you chair and education committee members. I am writing today in full support of HB26-1055.

As a member of a low-income household myself I remember my early childhood summers being long, grueling, boring days where I would spend the majority of my time in front of a screen. As one would expect, being in front of a screen consistently for 3 months would mean one would not make any significant childhood memories; well that was at least the case for me. That was true until I discovered the “My Denver Card” . I can remember it like it was yesterday, sitting down with my mom at our dining room table and signing up for one. As one would expect an 8 year old wouldn’t be very helpful but, I was still there because I was so immensely excited—getting this what seemed to be a magical card—meant to my 8 year old brain I could go to the pool “whenever I wanted” in the summer for free! Though, I realize as I've grown over the years and have looked back on the childhood that I still long for, that it wasn't just about getting into the pool for free, everytime I went I made new friends by sharing something as simple as cheap pool toys; those experiences have become a core memory in my childhood. Everyday I had the *opportunity* to do something outside, to do something else other than wasting away on a TV due to this resource. It wasn't like I was actually outside everyday but, I had the choice and ability to go out if I wanted to.

I had—and still have—an abundance of opportunities because of the My Denver Card, but there are countless kids in Colorado who don't. Countless kids, because they don't live in the Denver metro area, don't have access to the My Denver Card and are wasting their childhoods in front of a screen which is slowly deteriorating their social, cognitive, and emotional development. Research summarized by the Children & Nature Network and recent peer-reviewed studies shows that higher screen time in children is linked to poorer attention, lower academic performance, increased anxiety and depression, and weaker emotional regulation. However in contrast, more time spent outdoors is consistently associated with better mental health, stronger cognitive functioning, and improved social development. Without access to programs like the My Denver Card that promote outdoor and community engagement, many Colorado children may rely more heavily on screens, potentially limiting their social, cognitive, and emotional growth.

Access to opportunities like the My Denver Card is more than just free admission to activities—it is an investment in healthy childhood development. Expanding access to similar programs, as proposed with the My Colorado Card, would help ensure that all Colorado children, regardless of where they live, have the chance to grow, explore, and thrive—not just sit behind a screen.

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony, my story.

Evidence pulled from:

[Research Digest: Screen time and green time Effects of Excessive Screen Time on Child Development](#)



HB26-1055 Testimony Speech  
Education Committee  
Wednesday, February 25th

Chair and committee members,

My name is Sese Schlater and I am a current student at Thomas Jefferson High School. As a shift fellow with Faithbridge, I am here to advocate for the bill HB26-1055 and the My Colorado Card Pilot Program. I come from a low-income household and being able to participate in different activities can be difficult when fees are attached. When I was in elementary school, I lived in Southeast Denver and was very grateful to be able to utilize the My Denver Card. It was a crucial tool for me to be able to attend different activities and events with friends at the museum, zoo, and even at rec-centers for free.

I currently live in Aurora while attending DPS. Having seen the other side, it's hard not to notice the lack of access I have to various opportunities and events within my own community. I see the absence of advocacy and the fight for students to be able to grow doing the things they love. Driving from Aurora to Denver, I see how the signs and advertisements grow for students to be a part of different programs. This absence makes me, as a 16 year old, feel isolated and unheard. Imagine how a curious and explorative 10 year old feels.

This is why I have a deep connection and appreciation for this bill. According to America After 3PM (Afterschool Alliance), "24 million children nationwide would enroll in afterschool programs if one were available." I am fortunate enough to be able to access select programs through my school, but that is also because I have the means to be able to travel everyday and go to a Denver school. It should not be assumed that every student can do this. Research from the Urban Institute shows that "transportation access strongly affects youth participation rates, particularly in rural communities." With access to the My Colorado Card, myself and others across Colorado will be able to utilize Denver programs to strengthen our talents and passions and apply them to the real world, ultimately helping you and your needs when we graduate. Enrichment access is linked to stronger long-term workforce readiness and civic engagement.

I strongly agree with the push for the My Colorado Card and believe that it would eliminate opportunity deserts not just in neighboring cities, but across our state. The access that students have to be able to grow both mentally and physically shouldn't be restricted to those who live within certain parameters or the amount of money they have. All students should be advocated for no matter where they live and should have equal opportunities to be able to develop the emotional and social aspect of their lives. This is also crucial for all students to be able to pursue their passions without the burden of financial requirements on their minds.

This bill would do so much for incoming generations in ensuring that they have the resources they need to grow and thrive in what they chose to do. We need this change and the issue will only continue to resurface if it's pushed down today, especially when students in Durango realize that they are underrepresented and are vastly overlooked compared to their friends who live in Denver. Passing this bill for the My Colorado Card would eliminate this issue

HB26-1055 Testimony Speech

Education Committee

Wednesday, February 25th

and ultimately ensure the success of all students, no matter where they live or what their family income looks like.

Thank you for your time and consideration for Colorado students.

HB26-1055 Testimony Speech

Education Committee

Wednesday, February 25th

Good afternoon Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Zoe Cooperman. I am a shift fellow at faith bridge and a junior at Thomas Jefferson High School, I am a Denver resident, a volunteer at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science and a varsity swimmer for the girls swim team at TJ!

While I was not born in Denver, I have lived in the Denver area since I was 7 and I have benefited dearly from the MyDenver card whether it was going to the pool in the summer or going to libraries or museums and meeting new friends, the opportunities that the MyDenver card has grown my community immensely. Through the mydenver card, I got access to so many opportunities that greatly shaped my community and what I am interested in now as a high schooler!

I grew up in an upper middle class household with my parents working at home. It gave my brother and I ample time to explore and have fun growing our interests with the support around us. I found a love for swimming when I was young going to the pool with my family and that love has continued even now. The access to this pool through the MyDenver card nurtured and created a love for the sport that I still compete in today!

As I got older and especially now as a high schooler at a diverse high school, I can see first hand how some people don't or didn't get access to similar things to the my denver card some of my friends who live in Aurora or Castle Rock don't get the same access to activities that I did because of cost or where they lived and transportation.

That is why HB26-1055 and the MyColorado card are incredibly important.

Kids don't understand why they don't get the same opportunities as other kids. They just want opportunities to learn, connect, and discover their passions. Location and wealth shouldn't determine what the youth has access to the incredible opportunities that the youth of Denver has.

When looking at the impact the MyColorado card would have on students, 75% of parents report programs help children gain confidence and on top of that, 73% say programs reduce risky behaviors. Not only that, 24 million children nationwide would enroll in afterschool programs if one were available allowing them to grow and develop their interests and learn what they enjoy and don't enjoy allowing them to have fun and build community which is such an important part of growing up.

When thinking about all of Colorado, rural students aren't near the same amount of cultural institutions and recreational opportunities in comparison to students in more urban areas. Not only is area a big barrier for the youth, cost is also a huge barrier for kids all across the state. Cost barriers make it harder for kids to go to things like pools and museums or the zoo, things that shape children's future interests! Things like going to the mountains or going to the pool or joining a swim team can be incredibly helpful and important developmental opportunities.

HB26-1055 Testimony Speech

Education Committee

Wednesday, February 25th

Students, no matter their zip code or socioeconomic situation, should be able to have the same opportunities as the students living in the Denver area benefiting from the MyDenver card.

The MyColorado card and HB26-1055 gives students a measurable pilot program aimed to expand the opportunities of students around the state, rural and urban, low income and high income. It shrinks the opportunity deserts that the youth in some areas of Colorado experience and give amazing opportunities to the whole youth of Colorado.

I urge you to support the MyColorado card and help give all students in Colorado the opportunity to grow community, have fun, learn, and thrive.

Thank you for your time and consideration.