

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

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sincerely,

Bridget Sanchez, LMFT, LAC
Executive Director
Latinx Therapist Project

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

Estimado/a Presidente/a y Miembros del Comité:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Atentamente,

Bridget Sanchez, LMFT, LAC
Directora Ejecutiva
Latinx Therapist Project

House State, Civic, Military, & Veterans Affairs

02/26/2026 Upon Adjournment

HB26-1143 Non-Empl Educ Opportunities Background Check Info

Typed Text of Testimony Submitted

Name, Position, Representing	Typed Text of Testimony
Perla Gurrola For themselves	<p>Mi nombre es Perla soy Mexicana mamá soltera. Como hija y madre, la importancia de una familia fuerte y unida siempre ha sido importante</p> <p>En nuestras culturas siempre han valorado el trabajo de la familia y los padres siempre quieren que los hijos tengan un mejor futuro pero es complicado en un país que no es de nosotros . Cuando fui mamá muy joven mis hijos entraron a la escuela, quería ser mamá involucrada pero da la casualidad que tendré que llenar un formulario para que me checar mi identidad que para mi era imposible ya que pedían seguro social el cual yo no tenía. Como resultado pasaron muchos momentos que mis hijos iban en viajes de la escuela y nunca los pude acompañar, para mi mala suerte mis hijos crecieron con una mamá ausente.</p> <p>Pasé el tiempo y logré cambiar mi estatus legal y recibí un número de seguro social y lo primero que hice fue buscar trabajo en las escuelas para estar cerca de mis hijos. Y durante este tiempo he conocido muchas personas que tienen mucho talento para brindar a nuestra comunidad pero por la barrera de no tener seguro social sus sueños se desaparecen y no logran llegar a donde su corazón lo desea y siento su frustración y los sentimientos que ellos tienen. Como empleada de Mountain Dreamers escucho casos de injusticias barreras que excluye a familias indocumentadas. No tener un número de seguro social para en las verificaciones de antecedentes no es un opción . pero aun así- nosotros venimos a este país a buscar mejores oportunidades y buscamos opciones al nosotros ayudarles en este proceso dejándolos usar ITIN o pasaporte será una muy buena oportunidad para ellos que muchas personas son beneficiarias en ello.</p>

	<p>Con esto en mente, pido tu apoyo para pasar este proyecto de ley para asegurar a las personas puedan lograr su objetivos que sus estatus migratorios no sea un barrera, se pueden involucrarse en estudios, asegurando que las familias en Colorado se mantengan fuertes, unidas y exitosas.</p>
<p>Atlas Ojendiz For Alianza NORCO</p>	<p>Chair Willford and Members of the State, Civic, Military, and Veterans Affairs Committee,</p> <p>My name is Atlas Ojendiz, and I am here today in strong support of House Bill 26-1143 on behalf of Alianza NORCO. I want to thank Representatives Ricks and Joseph, and Senator Weissman, for bringing this important legislation forward.</p> <p>Colorado has long grounded its values in both safety and opportunity “ and in the belief that these two principles can and must go hand in hand. House Bill 1143 reinforces that commitment.</p> <p>Currently, many institutions require a Social Security Number for non-employment background checks tied to educational programs, clinical practicums, internships, apprenticeships, and volunteer roles. However, neither the FBI nor the Colorado Bureau of Investigation requires a Social Security Number to conduct a criminal background check. Requiring an SSN in these cases does not increase safety. It simply excludes qualified Coloradans based on immigration status rather than actual risk. To be clear, this bill does not weaken background checks. As an organization that conducts background checks ourselves, we take this responsibility seriously. If adopted, name-based and fingerprint-based searches will remain intact. Criminal history databases, sex offender registries,</p>

	<p>and child abuse and neglect records will continue to be reviewed. Safety remains the standard.</p> <p>What changes is opportunity. This bill allows individuals to use an ITIN instead of being shut out entirely from programs that strengthen our workforce and our communities.</p> <p>At a time when Colorado faces workforce shortages “ particularly in health care “ we should not be blocking aspiring nurses from clinical placements or students from internships because of paperwork unrelated to public safety.</p> <p>House Bill 1143 ensures that background checks are about safety “ not status.</p> <p>Colorado should be a place where opportunity is determined by conduct and character, not by whether someone has been issued a Social Security Number.</p> <p>I respectfully urge you to vote YES on House Bill 26-1143.</p> <p>Thank you for your time and consideration.</p> <p>Atlas Ojendiz Advocacy Coordinator Alianza NORCO</p>
<p>Perla Gurrola For herself</p>	<p>My name is Perla, I am Mexican and a single mother. As a daughter and mother, the importance of a strong and united family has always been significant. In our cultures, the work of the family has always been valued, and parents always want their children to have a better future, but it is complicated in a country that is not our own. When I became a mother very young, my children started school, and I wanted to be an involved mom, but it so happened that I had to fill out a form to have my identity checked, which was impossible for me since they asked for a social security number that I didn’t have. As a result, many moments passed where my children went on school trips and I was never able to accompany them, and unfortunately, my children grew up with an absent mother.</p>

	<p>Time passed, and I managed to change my legal status and received a social security number, and the first thing I did was look for work in schools to be close to my children. During this time, I have met many people who have a lot of talent for Providing for our community, but because of the barrier of not having a Social Security number, their dreams disappear and they are unable to reach where their hearts desire, and I feel their frustration and the emotions they have. As an employee of Mountain Dreamers, I hear cases of injustices and barriers that exclude undocumented families. Not having a Social Security number for background checks is not an option. But even so, we come to this country seeking better opportunities, and we look for ways to help them in this process by allowing them to use an ITIN or passport, which would be a very good opportunity for them, as many people benefit from this. With this in mind, I ask for your support to pass this bill to ensure that people can achieve their goals, that their immigration status is not a barrier, and that they can get involved in studies, ensuring that families in Colorado remain strong, united, and successful.</p>
<p>Cynthia Gallegos For themselves</p>	<p>Chair Willford and Members of the Committee, My name is Cynthia Gallegos, I am a fifth generation Colorado Native and I am sharing the testimony in support HB-1143, for a friend who would like to remain anonymous due to concerns about her safety.</p> <p>My name is Mirna. I am a mother, a wife, a professional, and a woman with a dream: to have my own art studio.</p> <p>I have lived in Colorado for 14 years, but my story isn't just mine; it's the story of thousands of people like me. Despite being undocumented, I haven't stopped striving to contribute to this country, my community, and to be a role model for my daughters. Throughout these years, I have worked tirelessly. I have sought learning opportunities and trainings, and I have spoken with entrepreneurs who have guided me to make my dream a reality.</p>

	<p>The art studio I want to open would be a space where I would offer workshops to children, teenagers, and adults. It would be a place where creativity becomes a tool for personal growth and for creating change in the community.</p> <p>I've already done the first part of the work. Two years ago, I registered my business to connect with organizations and introduce myself and work to others. But despite my efforts, I faced an unexpected obstacle: the barrier of not having a social security number. Unfortunately, I need a background check to offer art workshops for children. This made me realize that no matter how much I want to move forward, how hard I try to be a role model for my daughters, and how committed I am to the well-being of our community, I encounter legal barriers that prevent me from continuing to grow and contribute.</p> <p>My testimony is not just an ask, but a call to action. We need a law in Colorado that allows people without a Social Security number to undergo a background check. We know that safety is important, but it shouldn't be an impediment in certain areas. Hard work, effort, dedication, and the desire to serve others shouldn't be limited by being an immigrant. The opportunity to advance and improve the lives of others should be available to everyone.</p> <p>Please vote yes on HB26-1143.</p> <p>Thank you for your time and consideration.</p>
<p>Emily Balentine For themselves</p>	<p>Chair Willford and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you</p>

	<p>today. My name is Emily Balentine. I am submitting written testimony in support of HB26-1143 on behalf of Karen, who would like to remain anonymous due to concerns about their safety.</p> <p>My name is Karen. I am an entrepreneur, researcher, and social justice advocate. I have called Denver my home for the last 14 years.</p> <p>Moving to the United States was both a relief and a challenge. At 13 years old, I had no idea</p> <p>what was coming next. And still at 27 years old, as a professional I don't know what is going to happen next.</p> <p>When I was a senior in high school and I started the college application process, I realized that my status meant barriers I wasn't prepared for. It was an incredibly lonely process trying to navigate my educational journey as an immigrant student and seeking guidance from teachers and counselors who did not have the knowledge or resources to help me navigate it. Although I was able to overcome these barriers and pursue a higher education, I was not able to pursue my career after I graduated college in 2021. Like other immigrants, my journey has not been linear. I was not able to accomplish my ultimate dream of becoming a science professor. My plan was to continue my education by earning my</p> <p>post-baccalaureate Medical Laboratory Scientist certification, gaining hands-on laboratory experience, and then applying to a PhD program. Unfortunately, in order to be eligible to participate in clinical courses in the Colorado Center for Medical Laboratory Science program, students are required to undergo a background check.</p> <p>This left me with no choice but to grieve the path I dreamed of.</p> <p>Five years into my professional career, I am in a place where being a business owner brings me joy, but at the same time I wonder If I will ever get the chance to go back to science.</p> <p>It is devastating that we are excluded from opportunities simply because we lack an SSN, when all we want is to do what we love and contribute to this country's economy.</p> <p>Please help make this future look different for today's undocumented students. Vote yes on HB26-1143.</p> <p>Thank you for your time and consideration.</p>
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<p>Jon Schroeder For themselves</p>	<p>Chair Wilford and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Jon and I am reading this testimony on behalf of B, who would like to remain anonymous due to concerns for their safety.</p> <p>We both support HB26-1143. I wanted to share a piece of my story so you can see why this bill is important to open doors for the immigrant community as well as the community at large.</p> <p>Like good parents, my mom and dad kept their problems hidden from my brothers and I. Growing up, we existed in a world where money wasn't a problem, job security was guaranteed, and the world was kind. Dad would come home in the middle of his work day on an tractor and deliver us chocolate bars that he had bought from the local store. Mom left us her phone, which we used to call her at the restaurant she worked at, and we'd ask her when she was coming home and if she could bring us the cinnamon rolls that we loved. While the little truths started to slowly present themselves about the hardships of life, there was never anything to really worry about then.</p> <p>When I learned what it meant that my parents were in the US as undocumented, I had learned for the first time what real fear and uncertainty was. For the very first time, I realized that while my existence here was secure, while theirs was not. I feared every day that my dad might not be coming back home with his chocolate bars or my mom not answering the phone to tell us when she'd be home. Since then that worry is still ever present, and even greater than it has been in previous years.</p> <p>Currently, there are many highly capable and trained individuals in health care who are being held back due to a discriminatory choice by organizations to use background checks that solely require a SSN , when there is a legal and acceptable alternative that uses an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) or even fingerprinting.</p> <p>This bill is part of a bigger conversation about equity and discrimination. Undocumented immigrants are a integral part of our community and like my family. Many have integrated into our society in positive ways, going to school and contributing meaningful and honorable work.</p>
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	<p>In a time when our healthcare is in dire need of trained professionals, it is important to not further the gap but rather increase our personnel by allowing those without SSNs and with US based healthcare experience to contribute their skills with a background check that accepts ITINs.</p> <p>Please support HB-1143.</p>
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To: House State, Civic, Military, & Veterans Affairs Committee
From: Kate Greuel, Policy Advocate, Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning
Date: February 26, 2026
Re: Support for HB26-1143-Non-Employment Educational Opportunities Background Check Information

Dear Madam Chair and Members of the Committee,

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

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

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

Please vote YES on HB26-1143. Thank you.

2/26/26

Good afternoon Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Omar Temprana, and I serve as Programs & Policy Specialist for the Colorado Latino Leadership, Advocacy & Research Organization, otherwise known as CLLARO, and I am here today in strong support of HB26-1143.

I have seen firsthand how talented young people are blocked from educational opportunities—not because they pose any safety risk, but because they do not have a Social Security Number.

Colorado has worked hard to become a state where everyone can live, study, and contribute fully. But at a time when federal protections like DACA, TPS, and Parole are being stripped away or challenged, many immigrant young people, including some who have grown up entirely in this state, are left in limbo. They may not have work authorization or an SSN, but they are still Coloradans. They still want to serve. They still want to build careers in nursing, public health, education, and public service.

Right now, many institutions require a Social Security Number for non-employment background checks tied to clinical placements, internships, and volunteer roles. This creates an unnecessary barrier. It excludes people based on immigration paperwork—not on safety.

CLLARO works closely with Latino communities across Colorado, particularly with college students and emerging leaders. Through CLLARO's Capitol Fellowship Program, we place students in internships with legislators and advocacy organizations here at the State Capitol. These students are bright, committed, and deeply invested in Colorado's future. It would be a shame if we had a barrier that would impede some of these folks in partaking in our programming.

HB26-1143 offers a simple, commonsense solution. It allows individuals to use an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number, or ITIN, instead of a Social Security Number for these non-employment background checks.

Importantly, safety remains intact. Name-based and fingerprint-based background checks still occur. Criminal records, sex offender registries, and child abuse and neglect databases can still be searched. In fact, neither the FBI nor the Colorado Bureau of Investigation requires a Social Security Number to run a criminal background check. This bill does not weaken safety; it strengthens access.

This legislation also matters for workforce development and public health. Colorado is facing shortages in health care and other essential sectors. Immigrant communities bring linguistic skills, cultural competency, and deep community ties that improve patient care and public service delivery. By removing unnecessary barriers, we expand our workforce pipeline and strengthen our communities.

Through my work, I've met students who want to complete clinical hours, volunteer in hospitals, or intern in public service; and who are told "no" simply because they cannot provide an SSN. Today, I am here representing the stories I have seen for years. That is not about safety. That is about status.

HB26-1143 ensures that qualified individuals can participate in educational experiences, contribute to our economy, and build stable futures for themselves and their families. When we expand opportunity, we strengthen all of Colorado.

I respectfully urge you to vote yes on HB26-1143.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Chair Willford and Members of the Committee, My name is Cynthia Gallegos, I am a fifth generation Colorado Native and I am sharing the testimony in support HB-1143, for a friend who would like to remain anonymous due to concerns about her safety...

My name is Mirna. I am a mother, a wife, a professional, and a woman with a dream: to have my own art studio.

I have lived in Colorado for 14 years, but my story isn't just mine; it's the story of thousands of people like me. Despite being undocumented, I haven't stopped striving to contribute to this country, my community, and to be a role model for my daughters.

Throughout these years, I have worked tirelessly. I have sought learning opportunities and trainings, and I have spoken with entrepreneurs who have guided me to make my dream a reality. The art studio I want to open would be a space where I would offer workshops to children, teenagers, and adults. It would be a place where creativity becomes a tool for personal growth and for creating change in the community.

I've already done the first part of the work. Two years ago, I registered my business to connect with organizations and introduce myself and work to others. But despite my efforts, I faced an unexpected obstacle: the barrier of not having a social security number. Unfortunately, I need a background check to offer art workshops for children. This made me realize that no matter how much I want to move forward, how hard I try to be a role model for my daughters, and how committed I am to the well-being of our community, I encounter legal barriers that prevent me from continuing to grow and contribute.

My testimony is not just an ask, but a call to action. We need a law in Colorado that allows people without a Social Security number to undergo a background check. We know that safety is important, but it shouldn't be an impediment in certain areas. Hard work, effort, dedication, and the desire to serve others shouldn't be limited by being an immigrant. The opportunity to advance and improve the lives of others should be available to everyone.

Please vote yes on HB26-1143.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Dear Madam Chair Willford, Vice Chair Clifford, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Rorey King and I am writing on behalf of United Way of Larimer County in strong support of HB26-1143, allowing ITINs to be accepted as an alternative to Social Security Numbers in background checks for non-employment educational opportunities.

At United Way of Larimer County, we believe that each and every young person should have what they need to thrive. From advancing family financial stability and expanding access to quality child care to strengthening the foundations for high school graduation, we work to remove barriers that keep families living paycheck to paycheck and prevent young people from reaching their full potential. Ensuring access to education and opportunities for stable, dignified work is central to that mission. Everyone deserves the chance to study, volunteer, and contribute to our community, regardless of immigration status.

One of the ways we advance this work is by creating community hubs that co-locate partner organizations under one roof, making wraparound support more accessible to families, children, and youth. Several of these partners specifically serve immigrants, refugees, and asylees who are striving to build financial stability while navigating significant barriers to employment, education, and economic opportunity.

According to a recent report by Children Thrive Action Network, children in families with mixed immigration statuses are significantly more likely to experience economic hardship than children in families where all members are US born; more than half of all children in immigrant families live in low-income households. Immigration status shapes family financial stability – not because of how hard people work, their qualifications, skills, or talents, but because of the limited pathways to stable, fairly compensated work and exclusionary practices such as requiring a Social Security Number for a non-employment background check.

When undocumented Coloradans meet all qualifications for an educational opportunity other than having a SSN for their background check, the SSN requirement is no longer about safety; it's about exclusion

With access to credentials and degrees, young professionals who use ITINs can form LLCs, contract with service providers, join cooperatives, and pursue meaningful, interest-aligned careers. By allowing ITINs to be used in place of SSNs for non-employment educational opportunities, we can ensure that skilled, multilingual professionals with the cultural competency our underserved communities urgently need are able to not only join, but strengthen and improve industries with critical shortages—like healthcare, mental health, and the trades. The impact will extend beyond individual students and professionals, creating pathways to stability and opportunity for extended family and the next generation of learners.

Thank you for your consideration,

Rorey King

Director of Community Engagement and Advocacy
United Way of Larimer County

Written Testimony in support of HB26-1143

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

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

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

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

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

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

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Chair Willford and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Jessica Schokman, and I am submitting this testimony on behalf of B, who would like to remain anonymous due to concerns about their safety.

My name is B, and I am a Licensed Social Worker, bilingual therapist, and an immigrant, and I am here to support HB-1143.

I believe in a state where individuals are evaluated by their commitment, their effort, and their skills—not by a nine digit number.

I have done everything that has been required of me to prepare for my profession. I completed years of higher education, internships, and required training. I am licensed, qualified, and actively working toward a career in serving youth and families—especially those who are a part of communities that have been historically overburdened by inequitable systems.

At the same time, Colorado is facing serious shortages in healthcare and mental health services. Programs are attempting to recruit talented students. Agencies are trying to hire skilled providers. Communities are asking for and in need for more services.

And yet, at multiple points in my academic and professional career, I have been prevented from moving forward in certain educational or clinical opportunities—not because I failed a background check, and not because I pose a safety risk—but simply because of a lack of background check processes that do not recognize valid alternative identification.

This is more than an individual barrier. It is an active structural barrier in the workforce pipeline. We are training people, investing public dollars into education, and then limiting qualified candidates at the final gate.

That does not make Colorado safer. It makes our systems smaller, more strained, and less responsive.

Equity means our systems should measure safety and competence—not immigration status.

Passing state legislation to require that alternative forms of identification be accepted during background checks for non-employment educational opportunities like clinical practices is a practical, reasonable solution. It preserves safety while removing a policy barrier that is actively preventing our workforce from growing.

Colorado cannot afford to turn away people who are trained, bilingual, culturally responsive, and ready to serve.

I urge you to vote yes on House Bill 26-1143. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Jessica Schokman

Madam Chair Willford, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to present to you today. My name is Milena Tayah and I am a Policy Advocate at Colorado Center on Law and Policy, and I am reading this testimony on behalf of S, who would like to remain anonymous due to concerns about their safety.

As a higher education staff member that works closely with students, I value equitable, informed access to educational and career based opportunities. Access to opportunities can boost people's chances of improving their quality of life and socioeconomic status.

As a society, we place a lot of emphasis on making good career choices to earn a living wage in order to support our lives, our families, and our futures. As a child of immigrants, I felt this immense academic pressure to pick the right path to a secure future, but securing a well paying job that is enjoyable takes more than academics. I obtained my degrees in STEM, but it was a path I was always a little unsure about pursuing. **While in grad school, I was anxious, miserable, and constantly unsure of myself.** I wish I had explored more in college and tried other things. Out of feelings of desperation, I started researching non-traditional career paths in STEM, and I started to get involved in other groups.

I was able to transition to a career in education because I had experience working as a Teaching Assistant, and I identified that while I didn't like lecturing, I really enjoyed working with students one on one. **I also did summer science workshops with middle and high school students. These experiences allowed me to change my path and find something that I really enjoy doing.**

Now, I work closely with students to ensure they are informed and prepared to tackle all of the challenges that college can throw their way. When you look at a job description, the qualifications aren't just asking for an educational degree or certain classes. Jobs require knowledge *and* experience. **Without opportunities to explore, to complete an internship, or to gain valuable work experience, I would not have been able to get a job or change my career path.**

Students need more than a degree to get a job, they need experience and training. I've worked with many students who pursue healthcare careers because they want to help people. Unfortunately, qualified, hardworking students are being held back from filling much needed healthcare positions because they lack a Social Security Number to complete a background check. Students are unable to finish clinical healthcare programs, pursue volunteer internships, or obtain independent contracting work with clients that require a background check. Students should have the same opportunities as I did **to experiment or get valuable learning opportunities such as becoming a Teaching Assistant.** Access is important to ensure that undocumented students can access career opportunities that grant them a living wage in order to support our lives, our families, and our futures.

We need to pass a state law to allow undocumented students to complete background checks with an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number for non-employment educational opportunities like clinical educational programs. Removing SSN barriers opens pathways for undocumented

Coloradans to study, work, and contribute fully to our economy in much needed industries.

Please vote Yes on the Safety, Not Status Bill HB-1143 to support equitable, informed access to educational and career based opportunities.

Chair Willford and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Amy Hoeven. I am reading testimony in support of HB-1143 on behalf of M, who would like to remain anonymous due to concerns about their safety:

“Earlier this year, I was offered a significant career opportunity. As a recent university graduate supported by years of internships, certifications, and leadership development experiences, I felt prepared and excited to take the next step in my professional journey. However, I lost that opportunity before I could even begin because I was unable to pass a background check due to not having a Social Security Number.

This experience was deeply discouraging. I had demonstrated my commitment through education, and professional training. I followed every step I was told would help me succeed. Yet I was disqualified not because of my character, qualifications, or work ethic, but because of a system that continues to create barriers for undocumented professionals, even in situations where such requirements are not legally necessary. While federal and state agencies can conduct background checks without requiring a Social Security Number, many private screening processes still rely on it, creating unnecessary obstacles that have little to do with safety or competency.

The experience took a significant emotional toll. After years of sacrifice—both personally and alongside my family—it felt as though the door I had spent so much time working toward was closed due to circumstances beyond my control. It forced me to reflect on my future and question whether hard work alone would ever be enough.

At the same time, the experience strengthened my sense of purpose. This challenge is not unique to me. Many talented and driven professionals face similar barriers despite having the skills, education, and determination to contribute meaningfully to their industries and communities. Systems that evaluate individuals should focus on integrity, capability, and merit—not administrative limitations that fail to reflect someone’s true qualifications.

Opportunities should be defined by potential and effort, not restricted by paperwork that prevents capable individuals from contributing to our workforce and economy. Creating fair and inclusive pathways is essential to ensuring that hard work and talent are what truly determine success.”

I am honored to share my friend’s testimony and I am honored to share my support for this bill. On behalf of M. and myself, please vote yes on HB-1143.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Amy Hoeven