



April 13, 2026

Dear Denver City Council Members,

We appreciate the opportunity to engage in ongoing discussions regarding these proposed ordinance changes and have worked closely with bill sponsors and proponents throughout the process, including reviewing the current draft.

Violence Free Colorado supports aligning Denver's municipal code with state statute and promoting consistency in charging and prosecution. However, we do not support the proposed amendment to the municipal harassment ordinance preserving the ability to prosecute "painless assault."

As the state coalition against domestic violence, we support and collaborate with member programs across Colorado, including direct service providers in Denver, and engage with a wide range of perspectives. In navigating these conversations, our most important consideration is how policy changes may impact survivors in negative or unintended ways. While expanding criminal penalties is often intended to reflect an understanding of the seriousness of domestic violence, these decisions do not occur in a vacuum. Factors such as police training, mandatory arrest laws, available resources, and judicial understanding of domestic violence dynamics all shape how these policies are applied in practice.

In that context, low-level assault charges can and do result in the criminalization of survivors, particularly in cases involving dual arrests, misidentification of the primary aggressor, or coercive control that is not readily visible through physical injury. We are also concerned about proportionality, as this approach would allow prosecution of conduct without injury while maintaining penalties comparable to offenses involving bodily injury.

We also note that, from a survivor-centered perspective, our longstanding position has been that domestic violence cases are more appropriately handled in state court, where there are typically more robust protections and resources available. Expanding pathways for these cases to be charged and prosecuted in municipal court raises additional concerns about survivor impact.

We appreciate the complexity of this issue and welcome continued dialogue about approaches that promote accountability while minimizing unintended harm.

Sincerely,

David Karnes

Public Policy Director

Violence Free Colorado