



April 14, 2023

Safety, Housing, Education & Homelessness Committee

Robin Kniech, Chair

Paul Kashmann, Vice Chair

Committee Members: Kevin Flynn, Stacie Gilmore, Amanda P. Sandoval, Amanda Sawyer

Re: Ordinance Amendment regarding the Denver College Affordability Fund

Dear Chair Kniech and members of the Safety, Housing, Education & Homelessness Committee,

On behalf of Denver Scholarship Foundation (DSF), I am writing to express my support for the ordinance amendment regarding the Denver College Affordability Fund.

As one of the supported organizations that qualifies for partial reimbursement from the Denver College Affordability Fund (dba Prosperity Denver Fund), Denver Scholarship Foundation has witnessed the impact of housing affordability and associated displacement, coupled with restrictive language in the current ordinance, in preventing hundreds of students from receiving the benefits approved by voters in 2018. Two of the recommended ordinance changes will ensure that the 8000+ Denver area students and Scholars we serve through the work of DSF are eligible for Denver College Affordability Fund support, even if their families cannot afford to live in Denver. The amendment is necessary to honor voter intent to maximize distribution of funds, currently limited by the existing language in the ordinance.

Given the current and future economic outlook in Colorado, it is critical for more Denver students to pursue a postsecondary education and obtain a credential that will help them compete in the marketplace. Our community needs the vibrancy of our college graduates; our economy, their lived experience and professional expertise in key sectors. This ordinance amendment will not only benefit individual students, and their families, but it also will continue to serve the City's economic interests.

These revisions are designed to reach more students, especially those most negatively impacted by the pandemic, more quickly, meet emerging needs and make the program more efficient.

### **Change the residency requirement**

This amendment ensures that the most vulnerable students, including those who have been displaced from Denver and those experiencing housing instability, are served.

- The proposed ordinance change supports families in their continued commitment to the City of Denver by keeping their students enrolled in DPS, and eliminates the barriers currently posed by requiring students to submit addresses, a requirement that creates great challenges for students whose families have had to relocate frequently or have experienced homelessness, further limiting their access to postsecondary education.
  - The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) [reports](#) that in the 2021-2022 school year, 7.6% of the total DPS enrollment (6799 DPS students) reported a residence outside of the district.

- If this trend of displacement continues, the goal of the Prosperity Denver ordinance, to increase access to enrollment and completion of postsecondary education for low-income students will be compromised.
- This ordinance change creates opportunity to support as many DPS graduates as possible, further encouraging students to remain in Colorado, and potentially, by helping to build their family's economic mobility, address the issues created by housing affordability and move back into Denver, furthering the economic impact in our local community.

As an example of the effects of displacement, in the most recent application cycle, 20% of Denver Scholarship Foundation's incoming new Scholars (125 students) did not qualify for Prosperity Denver Fund reimbursement because of the residency requirement as currently defined in the ordinance, which requires that eligible students must have resided in Denver continuously for more than thirty-six (36) months prior to their first scheduled post-secondary class day. Modifying the ordinance language to define residency as graduation from a Denver high school would mean these 125 students, and many more in the future, would qualify.

This ordinance change also creates opportunity to support as many DPS graduates as possible, further encouraging students to remain in Colorado, and potentially, by helping to build their family's economic mobility, address the issues created by housing affordability and move back into Denver, furthering the economic impact in our local community.

**Allow reimbursements for high school support services**, including academic advising, career counseling and financial aid planning, to increase postsecondary enrollment. This language is already in the ordinance for students once they are enrolled in college; the amendment will encompass supports for high school students receiving the same types of services to ensure postsecondary enrollment continues to increase, and students are successful once enrolled.

Equity in education and income are pivotal social determinants, and a postsecondary credential has become increasingly more important in driving social mobility, long-term equity, and successful outcomes. The Colorado 2022 Talent Pipeline Report, released in December 2022, found a "clear indication that postsecondary educational attainment expands career opportunities and bolsters lifetime earnings." The report states that 91.4% of top paying jobs in the state, those offering a family living wage, require some sort of credential beyond high school. Additionally, job postings requiring at least a bachelor's degree increased 22% in the last year.

Unfortunately, postsecondary attainment rates are significantly lower among under-represented communities. Only 37.9% of Black/African American adults and 25.1% of Hispanic/Latinx adults hold a postsecondary credential compared to 59.1% of White adults. Further, while Colorado has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country, the Pipeline Report finds that "those with higher levels of education are associated with arguably more favorable employment outcomes; the lower an individual's education attainment is, the more likely they are to face unemployment."



Denver Scholarship Foundation currently provides high school support services to students at 15 Future Center serving DPS high schools. By authorizing reimbursement for high school support services, the ordinance amendment will enable DSF and other providers to deepen and grow the services provided to students in grades 9-12 to increase access and completion of post-secondary attainment and career success.

Thank you for your consideration of these amendments and the resulting impact. Thank you for investing in Denver's future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lorii Rabinowitz". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lorii Rabinowitz  
Chief Executive Officer  
Denver Scholarship Foundation