

April 17th, 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 Safety, Housing, Education & Homelessness Committee,

On behalf of Ednium: The Alumni Collective I am excited to write this letter in support of the ordinance changes proposed by Prosperity Denver Fund as they extend more opportunity for our homegrown talent to be full participants in our city's democracy and economy.

Ednium: The Alumni Collective is an action focused community development organization that partners with Denver Public School Alumni (30 years of age and younger) to change the way our city both educates and reinvests in its homegrown talent. Our vision is that every public school alumni has the tools, knowledge, and agency to define and achieve success for themselves.

Since our inception in 2020, we have built deep relationships with hundreds of Denver Public School Alumni, conducted multiple qualitative research projects, and developed extensive partnerships with organizations that serve students throughout the city. The voice and perspective of Alumni lends valuable insight into how our public school system is preparing students, and how the products of said educational system are able to contribute to the greater prosperity of Denver.

Our work has captured hundreds of recent alumni voices, experiences, and stories. Through these conversations a few trends have become incredibly clear and has driven our support for the proposed expansion of the city ordinance:

- **DPS Alumni (especially those coming from low income households) are being priced out of the city.** Alumni want and need to be full participants in the city's democracy and economy. Unfortunately, Denver lacks the infrastructure to ensure the sustainable development of homegrown talent. The expansion of the residency requirement allows for more of the intended students (Denver students from historically underrepresented backgrounds) to have a chance at completing a post-secondary credential that will provide a more sustainable pathway to thriving lives.
- **DPS graduates need more effective postsecondary pathways at multiple life stages.** A large number of DPS Alumni seek opportunities to develop their careers, yet did not have the opportunity to attend traditional postsecondary institutions immediately after high school. Alumni have expressed that not pursuing college or credentials upon high school graduation was due to a lack of a clear 'why' and interest; as alumni explore

they find this passion but are often stifled in their pursuit because they do not have access to the financial support necessary to attain a post secondary credential as they age out of most scholarship program criteria. As a result, Alumni in this situation often feel abandoned by the existing system. Even though they did not immediately start postsecondary education following high school graduation, they still want to serve the Denver community, and want to pursue opportunities that allow them, and the city, to thrive. Given the fact that over 50% of Denver Public School students do not attend college immediately after high school, the expansion of the age range will ensure we keep pathways open for the ordinance's intended population.

- **Alumni who have graduated over the past 5-10 years, as well as current students have expressed frustration with the limited number of pathways presented as viable options.** Further, alumni who do not thrive in traditional academic settings still seek training and credentials to obtain jobs and career pathways that provide a self-sufficient wage. Given the set of circumstances that have led many students to seek opportunities and programs that prioritize outcomes and are also in need of a shorter timeline of study, the inclusion of high quality credentialing programs provides our city a better opportunity for more students and alumni to pursue pathways that will allow them to take care of their families and ultimately better contribute to the city as a whole.

Ednium: The Alumni Collective is strongly supporting the expansion of the ordinance based on a deep understanding of the barriers, dreams, and potential of Denver's homegrown talent. Thank you for your work and leadership to ensure our public school students and alumni have the opportunity to thrive in our city.

Sincerely,



TeRay Esquibel
Executive Director
Ednium: The Alumni Collective