



20th Anniversary
COLORADO CENTER
on LAW & POLICY

Forging Pathways from Poverty

Our Path: A CCLP Retrospect

A Letter from CCLP Executive Director Claire Levy

On behalf of all of us at Colorado Center on Law and Policy, I want to say how proud I am of what we have done during our first 20 years.

CCLP was created to effect systemic change. We were created to reduce, if not eliminate, the barriers to well-being that are imbedded in the rules by which our economy and health care system operate. This retrospect gives a glimpse of what systemic change looks like. Among our more notable accomplishments:

*** We used litigation to protect access to basic human needs for some of Colorado’s most vulnerable residents.** We continue to be a watchdog to ensure state agencies are delivering the services they are required by state and federal law to deliver.

*** Our advocacy helped extend Medicaid to several hundred thousand more Coloradans who would not otherwise have access to regular health care because their jobs did not provide benefits and paid too little to allow them to cover the costs of health insurance premiums.** We continue to advocate on Medicaid to assure that health care is genuinely accessible, affordable and serves all the health needs of eligible Coloradans.

*** We played a key role in securing voter approval for an increase in Colorado’s minimum wage so that people who work full-time are not living in poverty.** The voters demonstrated that they understand the strains Colorado’s high cost of living are putting on hard-working people. (See Page 11)

*** By regularly publishing the Self-Sufficiency Standard for Colorado, we bring data to every discussion about what individuals and families in every corner of our state require to meet their basic needs.** After all, we cannot change systems if we do not know the goal. (See Page 10)

A major anniversary is an opportunity to look forward and ask “where do we go from here?” Do we just keep doing more of the same? My answer is, “Yes and no.” Protecting basic access to health care, housing, food and an income floor was our founding mission and will not change. But we need to do more to redress the legacy of racism and injustice. Racial equity and economic justice must be front and center for CCLP’s work to effect deep and enduring change.

The more I read and listen and learn, the more convinced I am

that CCLP must squarely address the racial disparity that exists in housing and wealth.

Owning a home is the way most Americans acquire an asset that provides financial well-being: the ability to plan and prepare for the future; invest in oneself and one’s children; and have a sense of agency and self-

determination that provides a foundation for emotional and physical health. From the very inception of this country, racism has infected the tools by which Americans can achieve that financial well-being.

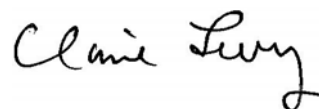
We must address the chasm between the wealth of White Coloradans and that of Coloradans of color. This requires confronting the fact that current levels of poverty and inequality are not just the unfortunate result of economic dynamics; they are an injustice that results from institutions that were built over many decades and that were designed to preserve the status quo.

Poverty and inequality do not just harm those who are immediately affected by it. They leave a multi-generational legacy – robbing future generations of the opportunity to dream and prosper. Poverty and inequality leave another legacy: They undermine our representative democracy by silencing the voices and the power of millions.

While CCLP must stay focused on the systems we have the ability to change so that we do not dilute our effectiveness, we will also be working to change the “cultural common sense” that has allowed this injustice to endure. We will remind our audiences, whether they are elected officials, opinion-leaders or the general public, that poverty is rarely the result of individual failure; people who are living on very low incomes have dignity and joy in their lives; and the conditions we seek to change are the result of deliberate policy decisions that can be changed.

And so, as CCLP looks towards our next 20 years, I hope you, our funders, collaborators and friends will join me in this battle.

Claire Levy, Executive Director



In the Beginning:

Reflections from Jon Asher, CCLP Co-Founder

Note: Jon Asher, Esq., made these comments while addressing participants at CCLP's 20th anniversary celebration in June. Asher is the Director Colorado Legal Services, one of CCLP's co-founders and a longtime member of CCLP's Board of Directors.

The conception and creation of CCLP began two years into the Clinton Administration with the ascension of Newt Gingrich to the Speaker of the House. His election was based on his commitment to implement the Heritage Foundation's Contract with America which -- as with the current Trump Administration -- called for the elimination of the Legal Services Corp. (LSC) and all federal funding for civil legal aid that helped people with few financial resources access justice.

By early 1995, it was clear that LSC funding would be severely cut and there would be draconian restrictions on the use of LSC funds. Directors of federally funded legal service programs recognized that even if we could not engage in class action lawsuits, administrative advocacy or represent undocumented immigrants and workers, we could access other remedies to protect and assert the legal rights of our clients.

So, as I have done so many times in my legal career and professional life, I turned to Ed Kahn, David Butler, Jean Dubofsky, Jim Mauck and Meredith McBurney. I myself don't have all the answers, but I think I do have good taste in whom to ask for help.

Over the next six to nine months, the legal aid programs decided to forsake their portion of funding from the Colorado Lawyer Trust Account Foundation so that a COLTAF grant could be made to Catholic Charities so that they could engage staff in activities that would be restricted by LSC grantees. The grant began in early February 1996 and the restrictions became effective that April.

Dick Gast was Chair of the COLTAF Board at that time and he responded thoughtfully and aggressively, as he has as the President of the Colorado Bar Association. He was and continues to be a great asset to us in legal services and public-interest law.

CLS, then the Legal Aid Society of Metro Denver, convinced

two of its best attorneys, Maureen Farrell-Stevenson and Mary Catherine Rabbitt to leave the safety of the mothership for the dingy headed off to Catholic Charities. Two years later, that led to the actual creation and formation of Colorado Center on Law and Policy. We couldn't have chosen who to throw overboard more wisely.



The vision of CCLP was to create the capacity to deal with two very urgent issues pivotal to the lives of our clients: access to quality health care and confronting the meanness and worst effects of what was then characterized as "welfare reform."

Over time, welfare reform morphed into the broader issues of economic security, but despite our best efforts and the incredible work and success of its staff over the years, those issues remain front and center to CCLP's work.

It was our hope that we could create and sustain the capacity to engage in high-quality research, advocacy and litigation on behalf of marginalized Coloradans, protect and advance the health, economic security and wellbeing of low-income Coloradans to make access to justice more full and more real for those in need.

Our vision and hopes have been far surpassed through the leadership and efforts of the staff of CCLP over the years. Their work has simply been outstanding.

I am humbled and most proud to celebrate CCLP's 20 years of quality work and its success as a respected and effective voice for those in need.

Our Mission

Colorado Center on Law and Policy Advances the health, security and well-being of low-income Coloradans through research, education, advocacy and litigation.

Our History/CCLP Timeline

For 20 years, CCLP has improved the health and financial security of hundreds of thousands of Coloradans. We are widely recognized by policymakers, opinion leaders and advocates for our knowledge, skill and effectiveness in shaping enduring and systemic change in Colorado.

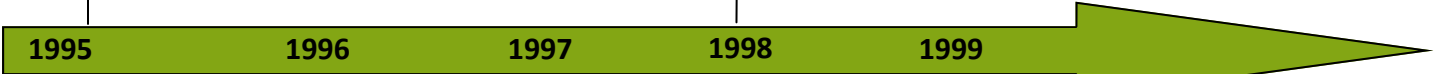
This timeline highlights some of our milestones over the past two decades:



Congress imposes restrictions on Legal Services Corp., which provides funding for civil legal aid for those who would otherwise be unable to afford it. (See Page 3)



Colorado Coalition of Legal Service Programs is renamed Colorado Center on Law and Policy and incorporates as an independent organization. Maureen Farrell-Stevenson is appointed as CCLP's first Executive Director.



As a result of the LSC limitations, Colorado Coalition of Legal Service Programs forms at Catholic Charities. The coalition represented the public interest in the conversion and sale of the nonprofit Blue Cross, Blue Shield of Colorado to the for-profit Anthem Inc., by ensuring that the assets of the nonprofit were valued fairly and allocated appropriately to serve the community's needs. (See Page 6)

CCLP establishes the Colorado Fiscal Project (later the Colorado Fiscal Policy Institute). The project conducted independent research and analysis of tax, budget and other fiscal policies that effect lower-income Coloradans.



After helping to establish a statewide Earned Income Tax Credit in 1999, CCLP led the successful campaign to raise the EITC to 10% of the federal EITC for workers who are trying to support their families. Fourteen years later, the EITC would become a permanent. (See Page 7)



CCLP brought a lawsuit against the state when a new benefits management system left tens of thousands of people without access to health care, medications, cash assistance and food. (See Page 8) Also in 2004, CCLP challenged the Colorado Health Foundation's distribution of assets, resulting in a substantial increase in annual giving by the Foundation — a funding threshold that continues to benefit health-oriented nonprofits in Colorado and the people they serve. (See Page 6)

CCLP Timeline



CCLP's Elisabeth Arenales is appointed to the 27-member Blue Ribbon Commission for Health Care Reform, created by Colorado legislators to study and establish health care reform models for expanding coverage, especially for underinsured and uninsured Coloradans.



CCLP Board Chair T.A. Taylor-Hunt is appointed interim CCLP's Executive Director.



Christy Murphy is appointed CCLP's Executive Director.



Colorado Fiscal Policy Institute becomes Colorado Fiscal Institute.



CCLP led efforts to reform unemployment insurance during the depths of the Great Recession by making it easier for the lowest-paid intermittent workers to claim unemployment subsidies.



We developed and advocated for pioneering legislation that would enable parents on TANF to receive the child-support payments made by the non-custodial parent — allowing the children of TANF recipients to benefit directly from their parents' hard work.



Rep. Claire Levy is appointed CCLP's Executive Director.

Also in 2013, CCLP played a leading role in Colorado's decision to expand Medicaid under the ACA. As a result, more than 250,000 additional Coloradans now have access to health care.



We played a major role in a campaign for a successful ballot initiative that will raise Colorado's minimum wage to \$12 an hour by 2020. As a result, Colorado's lowest-wage workers are getting a much-needed boost while job growth and the economy remain strong in the state. (See Page 11)



With our partners, we built support for the State Human Service Board to approve a 10 percent increase in basic cash assistance for participants in Colorado's TANF program -- the first such increase in 10 years.

20th Anniversary Milestones: How CCLP's Conversion Advocacy Changed Philanthropy in Colorado

Over the last 20 years, CCLP has been a vital watchdog when health care nonprofits are acquired by for-profit entities by ensuring that these transactions are valued fairly, the proceeds are dedicated to the public good, and the resulting foundations use the proceeds to support the health of the public. Ultimately, this work has benefitted Coloradans most in need of assistance.

"We're responsible for hundreds of millions of dollars more being spent in the provision of health care to low-income people and to poorer parts of Colorado," said Ed Kahn, an attorney who helped found CCLP and acted as lead counsel in some of Colorado's largest conversion cases.

Kahn represented the public interest when the nonprofit insurer Blue Cross Blue Shield of Colorado was sold to the for-profit Anthem Inc. in the late 1990s. Earlier, Kahn helped draft legislation that established the legal parameters for such deals. The Blue Cross conversion led to the creation of the Caring for Colorado Foundation in 1999 from the proceeds of that sale.

Due in part to CCLP's involvement, Kahn noted, the Caring for Colorado Foundation's valuation was set about \$55 million higher than Anthem's initial offer of \$100 million.

The Caring for Colorado Foundation reported \$201 million in assets and awarded 106 grants totaling more than more than \$6.63 million to organizations throughout Colorado in 2017. Last year, the foundation funded nonprofits that specialize in children's mental health and dental work for the medically underserved along with many other nonprofit organizations, including CCLP.

In the early 2000s, as a result of Kahn's advocacy, the Colorado Health Foundation (then a partner of for-profit HCA in the HealthONE joint venture) dramatically increased its annual funding to community organizations. This came after Kahn filed complaints with the Internal Revenue Service and Colorado's Attorney General because the foundation's failure to grant a more substantial share of its funds violated federal and state law.

Today, the Colorado Health Foundation has \$2.4 billion in assets, partly as a result of the sale of its interest in the HCA-HealthONE partnership. In 2016, the foundation awarded more than \$94 million in grants and contributions to nonprofit organizations, government agencies and other groups to improve the health and health care of Coloradans.



CCLP's Initial Director Ed Kahn and CCLP Health Care Program Director Elisabeth Arenales played a watchdog role in a number of conversion cases which have distributed hundreds of millions of dollars to Colorado nonprofits.

In 2016, Kahn and CCLP staff, including Health Care Program Director Elisabeth Arenales and Health Care Attorneys Bethany Pray and Allison Neswood, successfully made the case to Colorado's Attorney General for preserving the full fair-market value of InnovAge for public purposes in Colorado. InnovAge, a nonprofit that converted to for-profit status, provides community-based comprehensive care for people in need of long-term services and support.

In addition to arguing that the value of InnovAge was \$16 million higher than the proposed acquisition amount, Kahn and CCLP maintained that assets from the conversion should primarily benefit Colorado's frail elderly and disabled people rather than being dispersed in other states.

In her decision approving the conversion, Attorney General Cynthia Coffman increased InnovAge's valuation and ordered that 80 percent of InnovAge's value remain in Colorado for the benefit of frail elderly and disabled Coloradans. Coffman also ordered InnovAge to fund an ombudsman to oversee the interests of InnovAge clients.

As a result of the sale, \$202 million (including \$15 million held in escrow) created the Next 50 Initiative foundation. Next 50 Initiative is committed to awarding \$8 million in its first year for programs and products that improve the lives and capacities of people over age 50.

In addition to these matters, CCLP helped establish the right to attorneys' fees when a common fund is established from an insurance company conversion. CCLP also worked on several smaller conversions, including the 2017 acquisition of the nonprofit health insurer Rocky Mountain Health Plans by UnitedHealthcare.

20th Anniversary Milestones: The Long and Winding Road for Colorado's Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)

Workers supporting their families now benefit from a state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) thanks in large part to Colorado Center on Law and Policy's decades-long efforts to put extra dollars into the pockets of Coloradans in low-income jobs. The tax credit benefits workers with children as well as individuals with extremely low wages.

Widely considered one of the most effective tools for fighting poverty, the federal EITC was established in 1975 and expanded on a number of occasions since then. Because the EITC grows with each additional dollar of earnings until reaching the maximum value, studies show that the EITC encourages large numbers of single parents to return to work while giving workers in poorly paying jobs an incentive to increase their work hours. Specifically, a 2015 study showed that a \$1,000 increase in the EITC leads to a 7.3 percentage point increase in employment — demonstrating that the tax credit is even better at fighting poverty than what earlier Census data suggested.

The Colorado EITC was first enacted in 1999 when legislators faced a budget surplus of \$900 million amid a booming economy. Because the Taxpayer's Bill of Rights (or TABOR), approved by Colorado voters in 1992, limited the amount of revenue the state could collect, legislators lowered the income tax rate from 5 percent to 4.75 percent and considered tax breaks for everything from investing in new farm equipment to adding new phone lines.

"Basically, it seemed like every lobbyist was working on a tax break for their own client. It was as if every corporation had an idea for a tax credit for themselves," said Chaer Robert, who was involved with efforts to approve, increase and implement the state EITC over 16 years through her role as president of the Women's Lobby of Colorado. Robert also served as chair of the EITC Coalition and more recently as Manager of the Family Economic Security program at CCLP.

A pioneering advocate of a state EITC, Maureen Farrell-Stevenson, then Executive Director of CCLP, believed that as long as employers were benefitting from new tax breaks, ordinary workers ought to benefit too. Gov. Bill Owens himself called for broad-based tax cuts to include an EITC in addition to cuts in the sales tax and income tax rates.

In 1999, Farrell-Stevenson and CCLP Policy Analyst Adela Flores partnered with the Women's Lobby of Colorado. They worked with the late Rep. Gary McPherson to establish a state EITC. The successful bill was among four introduced that created the State EITC as a "top-priority" TABOR refund mechanism to be paid to qualifying Coloradans at 8.5 percent of the federal EITC during years when there was a surplus of taxpayer revenue. McPherson sponsored another proposal



Rep. John Kefalas, D-Fort Collins, uses a "big check" to demonstrate the benefits of the statewide EITC. Kefalas was involved in many legislative efforts to make the tax credit permanent. Kathy White, then of CCLP, is seated on the left.

which raised the state EITC from 8.5 percent of the federal level to 10 percent the following year. At the same time, legislators voted to permanently reduce state income taxes from 4.75 percent to 4.63 percent. Qualifying Coloradans also received the tax credit in 2001 before the state's economy took a turn for the worse.

A lengthy wait for the EITC

Since the tax credit was predicated on a TABOR surplus, the EITC wasn't paid from 2002 through 2005 because of insufficient tax revenue. The credit wasn't paid in the 2006 or 2007 tax years because the voter-approved Referendum C suspended the TABOR limit for five years to support K-12 education, higher education, health care and transportation. In the years following the Great Recession of 2008, there were no TABOR surpluses and therefore no EITC, though workers needed financial relief more than ever.

But despite bipartisan support, efforts to make the EITC permanent — whether or not there was a TABOR surplus — failed year after year amid concerns about the state's economy and lack of tax revenues.

In 2008, after several years without an EITC, Farrell-Stevenson and Kathy White of the Colorado Fiscal Policy Institute (then a project of CCLP) crafted a bill to fund the tax credit at 10 percent of the federal level using Unemployment Insurance (UI) surcharge dollars and unused federal dollars — or reserves — from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program (or TANF) which provides cash assistance for the lowest-income Coloradans. The measure was sponsored by Rep. John Kefalas and Sen. Betty Boyd. A very active EITC Coalition, which included Colorado Progressive Coalition (now COPA), 9to5 Colorado, All Families Deserve a Chance Coalition, Women's Lobby of Colorado and dozens of other organizations brought hundreds of community members to the capitol in support.

White, who later continued her work on the EITC through the

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20th Anniversary Milestones:

How CCLP Mitigated a Statewide Computer ‘Disaster’

Colorado has suffered its share of deadly natural disasters over the last 20 years from the Hayman Fire of 2002 to the 2013 floods that claimed at least eight lives and damaged more than \$1 billion worth of property.

Yet, one of the most significant disasters to hit the state was the result of a computer system “upgrade” that was ill-conceived, mismanaged, poorly planned, inadequately funded and badly implemented.

All told, the massive failure of the Colorado Benefits Management System (CBMS) — a statewide computer network used to determine eligibility and process payments for public assistance programs such as Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and others — put hundreds of thousands of Coloradans in jeopardy without access to health care, medications, cash assistance and food. In 2010, a nine-year-old boy with severe asthma died after his mother was unable to obtain prescription drugs because of the failure.

To mitigate the destructive effects of the CBMS failure for Colorado’s residents most in need, Colorado Center on Law and Policy (CCLP) worked with the Colorado Lawyers Committee and the National Center for Law and Economic Justice to bring a lawsuit against the state when the system consistently failed to make accurate determinations of eligibility for benefits. Ultimately, CCLP secured a settlement requiring the state to meet benchmarks for processing applications on a timely and accurate basis, and held the state accountable until it consistently met the benchmarks. The state complied over time and was released from oversight in 2017.

A tragedy of errors

Intended to streamline Colorado’s human service programs with a faster, more efficient computer system, the project went horribly wrong due to miscalculations from contractor Electronic Data Systems over how much time and effort the project would take and unrealistic expectations from the state, which changed the design mid-stream and failed to adhere to its own benchmarks before going live. To further complicate matters, Colorado’s economy took a turn for the worse, further tightening the state’s budgetary constraints. State legislators perennially expressed frustration over missed deadlines and budget overruns related to the project. In 2004, representatives from county governments approached CCLP with grave concerns about the much-needed update of the state’s legacy systems serving more than 538,000 Coloradans enrolled in benefits programs such as Medicaid, Child Health Plan Plus, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

“The counties came to us and said ‘this is not going to work,’ recalled Elisabeth Arenales, Director of CCLP’s Health Program. “They saw the writing on the wall.”



Part of the problem from the beginning was that state and county agencies historically had not worked well together on IT projects. “Cohesion is incredibly important in a project like this,” Arenales said. “Any IT project needs a clear chain of command and an absolute decision-maker and we didn’t have it with this one.” Though the state had agreed not to “go live” until they reached a target of 95 percent processing accuracy they

proceeded with the launch despite a dismal 67 percent accuracy rates.

CCLP and the Colorado Lawyers Committee went to Denver District Court seeking to stop CBMS from going live through a Temporary Restraining Order. The judge declined to issue the order.

“The judge essentially said, ‘Well, this is worrisome, but it hasn’t gone live yet, so there is no actual harm,’” Arenales said.

Unfortunately, despite dire warnings from county administrators and a tech consulting firm, the state proceeded with the launch of the new system, and the Colorado Lawyers Committee, CCLP and NCLEJ returned to court.

“We came in a few months later and said: ‘look at the actual harm! Tens of thousands of people are going hungry and without medical care,’” Arenales recalled.

Among the problems: the data didn’t transfer from the legacy systems to the new system properly and the new system was built so that it couldn’t sort out its data in a meaningful way. Case workers who didn’t understand the system had to construct time-consuming work-arounds. On top of that, there wasn’t adequate capacity in the computer system itself. If enough workers used the system at the same time, it would crash. CCLP received so many complaints from people who could not access their benefits that it hired a full-time employee, Muriel Arvey, to field the calls.

Arvey started with CCLP as a volunteer but was put on the payroll when it became evident that more help was needed. “We were very, very busy,” Arvey recalled. “Once people knew there was an organization working on this, we had lots of calls.”

The court issued an injunction ordering the state to establish a

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back-up customer-service unit so that people could get their benefits, address noticing issues and ensure that the state did not go after people who had been overpaid SNAP benefits because of system error. A settlement agreement was reached in 2006, which among other things, required the state to improve the timeliness and accuracy of benefits processing.

According to a 2011 report by two researchers from the University of Denver detailing the troubled system's history: "The new system was not capable of processing transactions as efficiently as the systems it replaced... Huge backlogs of unprocessed transactions developed, which resulted in employees working overtime, the hiring of temporary employees, and the installation of additional computer servers to add capacity."

The project ran \$75 million over-budget and the state spent \$481,000 defending CBMS in court in 2005. As many Coloradans were being denied benefits, a 2006 legislative audit revealed that the state had accidentally administered about \$90 million in improper over-payments. According to a 2005 article in *The Denver Post*: "The state realized early on it could not afford all it wanted out of the system, but forged ahead anyway.... Counties administer the programs CBMS is designed to handle. But some of them failed to participate in the computer system's development or get their employees trained."

Fixes required time and money

The disaster spanned more than 10 years through three governors; costing hundreds of millions of dollars and leaving a trail of disgruntled caseworkers and tech firms in its wake. Over the years, the state has gradually improved its performance so the system processes applications more accurately and with shorter lag times. Among the state's biggest changes was the establishment of the Office of Information Technology (OIT), within the Governor's office, designed to oversee major IT projects.

While CCLP earned much credibility in advocacy circles for taking on the state and winning, the effort tapped out many of the organization's resources.

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Colorado Fiscal Institute, said the proposal was supposed to be a "temporary fix" but the business community was "up in arms" about the legislation because they feared it could trigger an increase in required employer UI contribution. Meanwhile, county administrators disliked the notion of tapping into the TANF reserves, despite having reserves that exceeded their annual operating budgets. As a result of the opposition, the bill died swiftly in the House Finance Committee.

In 2010, House Bill 1002 restored the state EITC as the primary TABOR refund mechanism. In 2013, with Colorado Fiscal Institute leading the EITC Coalition, Sen. John Kefalas, Sen. John Morse and Rep. Daniel Kagan sponsored a successful bill that made the state EITC permanent once it is triggered by a TABOR surplus. The

"I'd say it was an absolute 24-7 job for six to nine months," Arenales said, noting that she continued to work on CBMS on and off for a full 13 years. "I probably spent the better part of two years on that case. In fact, we spent so much time on that case that we barely did a bit of fundraising during that time." Fortunately, local grant-makers stepped up their support of CCLP so that the organization could continue its important work and grow.

"It was a complex but important case," said Ed Kahn, an attorney who helped found CCLP and worked on the CBMS case. "The more you see due process not being given by the federal government the more you realize how important that case was. I'm thinking of the immigrants in detention and the way that's been screwed up. That's a worse example than CBMS but it is similar in that there was a lot of willful conduct in implementing something without fully testing it first."

In the end, the CBMS case not only improved what was a severely flawed computer system — sparing Coloradans aggravation or unnecessary crises — it also established CCLP as an advocacy force to be reckoned with.

"The case has defined my relationship with state government departments — particularly HCPF [Colorado Department of Health Care Policy and Financing]," Arenales said. "They know that we mean it when we say somethings not right and they need to do something so that people don't get hurt."

legislation also created a state Child Tax Credit for children under 6, which was made contingent upon Congress passing a tax on internet sales.

With the economy gaining steam, a surplus finally triggered payment of the EITC in 2015, and Colorado residents who qualify have used the now permanent tax credit to defray state income taxes ever since. Though proponents would like to increase the state tax credit to a higher level or expand it so that more Coloradans would qualify, the current EITC still gives working Coloradans a nice boost in income.

"If people have kids, even adding \$300-\$400 a year can make a big difference," Robert said.

The case not only improved what was a severely flawed computer system — sparing Coloradans aggravation or unnecessary crises — it also established CCLP as an advocacy force to be reckoned with.

20th Anniversary Milestones: Report Sharpens Focus on ‘Self-Sufficiency’

For 20 years and counting, Colorado Center on Law and Policy has been an organization that cares about economic security. In addition to advocacy work, litigation and occasional representation, CCLP has published heavily researched, data-driven reports to inform legislators, direct-service providers and the general public about financial realities in Colorado.

One of our most successful and influential reports is the Self Sufficiency Standard (SSS), an analysis commissioned by CCLP and prepared by Diana M. Pearce of the Center for Women’s Welfare at the University of Washington. The findings create a picture of what kind of income individuals and families in Colorado must make to be “self-sufficient,” or not have to rely on public-assistance programs like Medicaid or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). These data also show how many people fall below this standard, providing a more nuanced picture of financial well-being and who needs public assistance than federal poverty statistics.

First published in 2000 under the leadership of then CCLP Executive Director Maureen Farrell-Stevenson, CCLP has commissioned a SSS or related report roughly every three years, with the latest being published in 2015. An updated SSS, along with two supplemental reports, is scheduled for release in late 2018. The SSS specifically breaks down the costs of housing, child care, food, transportation, health care and other necessities in each of Colorado’s 64 counties. As one of the most comprehensive measures of economic security available, the SSS is often referenced by managers of workforce training programs, direct-service providers, policymakers, legislators and the media as a barometer for wage adequacy and policy effectiveness.

But the SSS isn’t just a book of statistics. It’s an invaluable tool that can be used in a number of ways. “The reports are packed with data, but that wasn’t enough to motivate foundations to support the project,” said Claire Levy, Executive Director of CCLP. “To raise the money we would need, I knew I had to demonstrate that these reports were important instruments for policymakers, service providers, philanthropists and the public.”

Levy knew there were plenty of concrete examples to

demonstrate the value of the SSS when seeking funding for the 2018 reports. “The Human Relations Commission for the City of Boulder asked for my help in basing a living wage proposal on the 2015 Standard. The campaign to raise the Colorado

minimum wage relied on the standard to demonstrate the challenge of living on the existing minimum wage in most Colorado counties. Directors of county departments of human services told me about the ways they use the standard to establish child care reimbursement rates and eligibility thresholds,” Levy recounts. These examples helped raise the funds needed to publish the reports and fund outreach plans to distribute the reports statewide. Nan Sundeen, Director of Human Services for Pitkin County, reported to Levy that she used the SSS in many presentations to the Board of County Commissioners and Aspen City Council to illustrate the difficulties of living in Pitkin and the need for subsidies for child care, housing, transportation and medical care.

Following the release of the SSS, CCLP staff will engage in extensive outreach efforts across the state to promote and publicize the findings of the report to Colorado legislators and relevant parties, such as the Colorado Department of Human Services, community colleges and nonprofit organizations. In 2015 and the year following,

“The Self-Sufficiency Standard provides an objective tool for policy development,” said Chaer Robert, manager of CCLP’s Family Economic Security program. “It provides a quick reality check for assumptions such as how much people can afford to pay for college or save for retirement.”

Apart from being an invaluable advocacy tool, the SSS can also guide the budgeting strategy of Coloradans of all ages who are working to manage their own finances. Location-specific and updated each release year by concrete data from our state, its uses are far-reaching, timely and relevant.



20th Anniversary Milestones: Grassroots and Policy Came Together in the Push to Raise the Minimum Wage

It's no secret that Colorado has been one of the fastest-growing states over the past decade. However, with rapid growth comes a rapid rise in both housing costs and the cost of living. Unfortunately, wages have not kept up with these trends, pushing many families to the financial brink. The 2015-2016 State of Working Colorado report showed that nearly 1 in 3 Coloradans lived either at or near the poverty level, and 46 percent of Coloradans living in poverty lived in deep poverty (that is, an income that is half or lower than the poverty line).

In 2016, the minimum wage in Colorado was \$8.31. However, the 2015 Self-Sufficiency Standard indicated that in 57 out of Colorado's 64 counties, a single adult working an hourly job full-time could not live on this wage without using government-funded public assistance programs like SNAP and Medicaid. For an adult with one preschool-aged child, this wage was under the self-sufficiency standard in every single Colorado county. By contrast, the federal minimum wage is stalled at a woefully inadequate \$7.25 an hour.

In early 2015, CCLP and partner organizations viewed this disparity with growing alarm. With a big election year around the corner and state legislators unable to make changes in the minimum wage, it was time to take action in support of Colorado workers. The last minimum wage increase prior to the 2016 initiative was in 2006, when the voters first authorized a state minimum wage that was higher than the federal minimum wage. That initiative resulted in a 33 percent one-time increase that preceded an influx of more than 73,000 new jobs statewide two years after the successful vote.

For the 2016 effort, CCLP teamed up with SEIU Local 105, Together Colorado, the Colorado People's Alliance, and United for New Economy (UNE), among others, to brainstorm on what a minimum wage increase campaign would look like. CCLP's Executive Director, Claire Levy, committed early in the campaign to dedicate time and resources to the fight.

"We all came together around the shared value of running a transformational campaign vs. transactional campaign," said Michelle Webster, CCLP's Manager of Research and Policy Analysis. The group of advocates wanted not only to help put more money in the pockets of workers in the short-term, but create a foundational narrative around economic security, and a long-lasting commitment to wage security. "We weren't just coming together for one policy win, we wanted to build power to advance even more policies in the future to help low-income Coloradans," Webster explained.

In 2015, the partners formed Coloradans for a Fair Minimum Wage, to build support for legislation that would increase the minimum wage throughout the state and eliminate restrictions on local governments to raise the minimum wage so that workers can better support their families. Although none of the coalition's bills passed, they set the stage and generated publicity around the issue.



CCLP's Manager of Family Economic Security Chaer Robert (left), Board Chair Nan Morehead, Policy Analyst Jesus Loayza and Manager of Research and Policy Analysis Michelle Webster (right).

With an election year around the corner, the team developed an amendment to the Colorado constitution to gradually increase the minimum wage statewide to \$12 an hour by 2020.

However, the coalition knew that persuading voters to pass the ballot initiative wasn't going to be easy. With support from the Colorado Restaurant Association, the opposition campaign had poured money into an extensive economic study that purported to show that raising the minimum wage would trigger a loss of 90,000 jobs in Colorado, and would result in small businesses shuttering.

The opposition's report got extensive news coverage as well, including references in *The Denver Post*, *Westword*, and the *Denver Channel*. But the campaign debunked the opposition's assumptions by showing that the one-time raise in 2006 was followed by positive gains in the job market.

The campaign strategy emphasized getting out and knocking on doors, and a large rally at the capitol which generated coverage on traditional and social media. "It was really important to get out and counter the arguments in person about how the sky was going to fall based on the opposition's report," Webster said.

There was one just one final hurdle left to conquer: the ballot itself. "It was a crowded ballot," said Webster, "and our amendment was down ballot." "Nevertheless, on election night, the campaign's efforts were rewarded with the amendment's passing with 54 percent of Coloradans voting in favor of the initiative.

Collaboration, commitment, and the willingness to stand up against skewed data all contributed to the amendment's success. But even more important was the willingness to take a stand on behalf of workers who do not have bargaining power and say that they too deserve a decent life and fair pay for their hard work.

Celebrating 20 Years of Making a Difference!



Twenty years ago, Colorado Center on Law and Policy became an independent nonprofit organization. CCLP has been advancing the health, well-being and economic security of low-income Coloradans ever since. On June 7, we celebrated the occasion at the Governor’s Mansion Carriage House with friends, funders, partners, volunteers, Board members, current staff and alumni.

