



HB 19-1223: Support Coloradans with Disabilities

Sponsored by Rep. Dafna Michaelson-Jenet and Colin Larson and Sen. Faith Winter

Fund SSI and SSDI Application Assistance for Aid to the Needy Disabled Clients

The bill would create a statewide program that helps individuals with severe disabilities navigate the process of applying for federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Income (SSDI). The program will be administered by the Colorado Department of Human Services and implemented by participating counties. The bill would target Coloradans with the greatest need by making SSI/SSDI application assistance available to Aid to the Needy Disabled (AND) applicants and recipients.

The Need for a Bill

SSI and SSDI help individuals with disabilities achieve stability by providing income for necessities and enabling access to health care. AND is a state program that provides \$217 per month to individuals with severe disabilities while they are applying for SSI/SSDI. With just \$217 per month in income, AND clients struggle to meet their most basic needs and are often homeless.

Completing the application process for SSI/SSDI is extremely difficult. The application is complex and applicants must navigate the process while contending with debilitating mental and/or physical health conditions. As a result, individuals that are ultimately eligible are often denied multiple times. In 2016, more than 10,000 people died while waiting to get approved for SSI. Application assistance greatly improves the rate of approval on initial applications and reduces the time it takes for individuals to access federal support.

The timely access to SSI/SSDI supported by application assistance is critical because –

- **SSI and SSDI help people with disabilities avoid homelessness.** Disability causes and prolongs homelessness. Nearly 10 % percent of the non-institutionalized population in Colorado is disabled, yet Coloradans with disabilities constitute over half of those who are chronically homeless. SSI and SSDI recipients often use the federal assistance to cover housing costs. Housing alleviates the extraordinary health risks associated with homelessness, expedites recovery, and improves peoples' quality of life.
- **SSI and SSDI help people with disabilities access basic needs.** SSI and SSDI ensure a source of income for people with disabilities. Beneficiaries use the financial assistance to pay for food, transportation and other basic needs. In addition, recipients of SSI or SSDI gain access to health care through Medicaid or Medicare.
- **SSI and SSDI improve stability for veterans and their families.** Many veterans suffer from physical and/or mental disabilities as a result of serving in the military. As a result, veterans are more likely to have trouble maintaining employment and stable housing. SSI helps veterans remain housed and meet their most basic needs.
- **SSI and SSDI save the State money and help local economies.** SSI and SSDI reduce the need for people with disabilities to use costly services, such as emergency rooms and homeless services. The support also reduces state spending on programs like Old Age Pension and Aid to the Needy Disabled. In addition, recipients spend the federal support in their communities, boosting local economies.

For more information:

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Support for Expanding Social Security Disability Application Assistance

Accent on Independence

AdvocacyDenver

All Families Deserve a Change (AFDC) Coalition

Bayaud

Easter Seals Colorado

Center for Independence, Grand Junction

Colorado Coalition for the Homeless

Colorado Center on Law and Policy

Colorado Cross-Disability Coalition

Colorado Mental Wellness Network

CREEC

Disabled Resource Services

Disability Law Colorado

Interfaith Alliance

Oral Health Colorado

PASCO

Southwest Center for Independence

The Arc of Adams County

The Arc of Aurora

The Arc of Colorado

The Arc of Larimer County

The Colorado Catholic Conference

Senior Support Services