



Restore Supports for Coloradans with Disabilities: Vote Yes on Budget Amendment

Sponsors: Senators Winter and Gardner and Reps. Michaelson Jenet and Larson

Restore Funding to HB19-1223

- ✓ **Proven model of application navigation assistance:** A 2019 bipartisan bill funded navigators to assist participants of Colorado's Aid to the Needy Disabled (AND) program in developing and submitting applications for federal disability income. This bill passed 50-14 in the House and 24-11 in the Senate.
- ✓ **Investment:** For FY2020-21, the program was to receive \$3.8 million in General Funds, including \$3.4 million to hire county-based navigators to provide application assistance.
- ✓ **A solution cut short:** The funding was cut in 2020 since it had not yet been fully implemented. Funding for disability benefit application assistance should be restored before spending money on new programs.

The amendment restores \$2 million in GF to hire approximately 33 navigators.

IMPORTANCE OF RESTORING FUNDING

- Many Coloradans living on just \$217/month provided by the state AND program will gain access to critical federal disability income, more than tripling the monthly amount available to support their basic needs.
- Coloradans spending their federal disability income on housing, food, transportation, and other necessities will stimulate their local economies.
- Restoring funding for this program will yield a significant return on investment for taxpayers. Colorado will get reimbursed by the federal government for AND payments made to program participants who are later determined eligible for SSI. This will save General Funds appropriated to Aid to Needy Disabled (AND).

BACKGROUND

Applying for federal disability income (SSI/SSDI) involves mountains of paperwork and specialized knowledge. People must collect years of medical and vocational documents, keep multiple appointments, and respond regularly to the Social Security Administration (SSA) through the months-long process. The requirements can be insurmountable for many with the greatest need – people with severe mental or physical disabilities who are living in poverty or homelessness.

- About 67% of people who meet the disability standard for SSI are **denied** on their initial application. Many are later **approved**.
- On average it takes nearly **two years** for applicants who appeal initial denials to get approved for benefits.
- Many give up after the first denial because the application process and the experience of being denied are traumatizing.
- A pilot project demonstrated that providing application assistance by a trained navigator reduced denials, reduced the time to get approved for benefits, and made the process much less stressful for applicants.

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Supporters: Colorado Center on Law and Policy (CCLP), Colorado Coalition for the Homeless, Colorado Counties, Inc.