

**Colorado Youth Advisory Council (COYAC)**  
**2016-2017 Policy Recommendations**



## 2016/2017 COYAC Members

Last Name	First Name	Senate District	City
Nijkamp	Frederik	2	Woodland Park
Bryant	Saxon	3	Pueblo
Scott	Abby	6	Durango
Barnett	Sofia	10	Colorado Springs
Rickert	McCade	11	Colorado Springs
Geoffrey	William	12	Colorado Springs
Lin	Nicholas	14	Fort Collins
Janssen	Emme	15	Loveland
Strasser	Pierce	16	Evergreen
Pennington	Trae	18	Lafayette
Schiller	Ryan	19	Westminster
Lee	Bert	20	Golden
Akrami	Kasha	21	Englewood
Miller	Sasha	23	Erie
Martin	Mikayla	24	Arvada
Hancock	Cole	26	Littleton
Ramesh	Rahul	27	Centennial
Kopuri	Himanvi	29	Aurora
Fisher	Jason	30	Lone Tree
Geldzahler	David	31	Denver
Saragosa	Alana	33	Denver
Mathews	Ana	35	La Junta
Park	Hannah	14AL	Fort Collins
Hearty	Caitlin	26AL	Littleton
Mohamed	Yasmine	29 AL	Aurora
Zinno	Tony	30 AL	Lone Tree
Pulido	Andres	30 AL	Lone Tree

To nominate someone to serve as a youth representative for an open district for COYAC,  
please contact Maureen Wolsborn at [info@coyac.org](mailto:info@coyac.org).

## COYAC Introduction and Process

The Colorado Youth Advisory Council (COYAC) is a vehicle created by the Colorado State Legislature, to bring the voice of youth to the Capitol. Since the 2008 legislation that launched COYAC, (Youth Advisory Act in House Bill 08-1157) the mission of the Council has been to examine, evaluate and discuss the issues, interests and needs affecting Colorado youth now and in the future and to formally advise and make recommendations to elected officials regarding those issues. The Council is made up of 40 young people, representing Colorado's 35 state senate districts, and five at-large seats. These students have an interest in learning more about public policy, state government and are passionate about making a difference in their community and their state.

Throughout their two-year commitment, Council members explore topics that are interesting and relevant to youth including education, employment and economic opportunity, access to state and local government services, the environment, behavioral and physical health, substance abuse, driver's license requirements, poverty, and increased youth participation in state and local government.

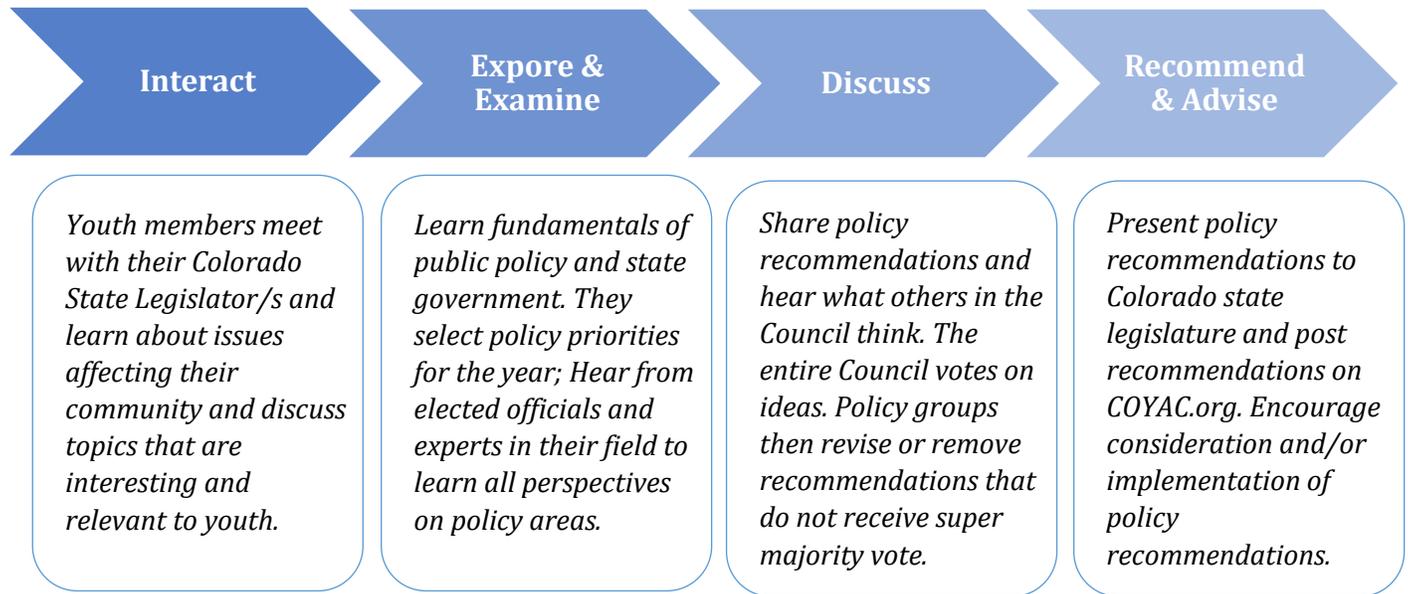
In addition to the 40 youth Council members, there are four members of the Colorado General Assembly that serve as members of COYAC. The speaker and minority leader of the House of Representatives, and the president and minority leader of the Senate each appoint one member to COYAC.

The Colorado Youth Advisory Council is open to all Colorado youth between the ages 14 and 19 who are attending a Colorado junior high, middle or high school, including online schools; nonpublic, home-based educational programs; or general equivalency degree programs. All eligible applications are reviewed by the COYAC recruitment and membership committee and then sent out to the entire Council for approval or denial.

COYAC is intended to be a youth-led Council. The Council elects a Youth Co-Chair, Youth Vice-Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer who serve with a Legislative Co-Chair and Legislative Vice-Chair to lead the Council. Engaged Public (EP) supports the youth within the framework outlined by the enabling legislation, which provides guidance for leadership and structure. EP also develops a work plan, and provides the content for annual reports and the COYAC website.

Engaged Public began facilitating COYAC in late 2013 and created the following process:





The Council is tasked with coming up with policy areas to focus on each year. After a large group discussion with the entire Council, key themes and trends emerged in what the legislative focus is this year. From those themes, youth members discussed which were most important and relevant to youth in Colorado. This year, Council members selected the following four policy areas

- 1. Youth Mental Health Awareness and Suicide Prevention**
- 2. Education and Technology**
- 3. Secondary Education/ICAP Review**
- 4. Teen Homelessness**

Each policy group met with a subject matter expert (SME) who provided contextual information about each policy area. The group meets for a final time prior to their presentation at the Capitol to draft and refine their recommendations.

# Youth Mental Health Awareness and Suicide Prevention

## Policy Group Members

Sofia Barnett, Colorado Springs

Frederik Nijkamp, Woodland Park

Cole Hancock, Littleton

Nicholas Lin, Fort Collins

Trae Pennington, Lafayette

## Why we chose Youth Mental Health Awareness and Suicide Prevention as a policy Priority

Today, the issue of teenage mental health and suicide is growing at an alarming rate. Academy School District 20 in Colorado Springs recently saw three suicides over the course of just two weeks, but unfortunately this is hardly an anomaly, as the district is routinely reported to have one of the highest suicide rates in the nation. With around twenty suicides in the district and surrounding areas over the past year, some of which even occurred on school grounds, suicide is a widely visible and troubling problem. It impacts the community and State in forms including, but not limited to, loss of life, suicide contagion, etc. In Colorado, it is the leading cause of violence or injury related death for 0-24 year olds (Exhibit B). According to the Child Fatality Prevention System Annual Report, suicide was the leading cause of death among teens ages 10-17 from 2010 to 2014 (Exhibit A). In 2015, Colorado recorded its highest number of total suicides in its history.

Throughout our research and discussions with students across the State, we found a significant gap between the numerous mental health resources available to youth and the knowledge of teens about these resources and how to access them. Very few teens know about the pre-existing resources within their schools, school districts, and wider communities that can help them or a loved one with mental health and suicide prevention. Our recommendations focus on connecting all teens with the existing resources within their communities in an effort for not only suicide intervention but also prevention and improvement of general mental health.

## Recommendations

### **1. Funding to Office of Suicide Prevention to create a teen-based website for mental health and suicide prevention.**

Once again, we strongly recommend the delegation of additional funding to the Office of Suicide Prevention to target youth suicide and mental health issues with the goal of reducing the rate of suicide among youth.

We firmly believe that the creation of a teen-based website geared towards youth mental health resources will help reduce or aid in the reduction of the youth suicide rate. This website will help bridge the gap between youth in need of mental health services, and the resources available to them. We recommend that this website be created with the Office of Suicide Prevention, and serve as a teen-focused, interactive, resource for those struggling with their mental health.

### **2. Support the Governor's proposal of \$9.7 million from the Marijuana Tax fund to increase funding for the School Health Professional Grant Program.**

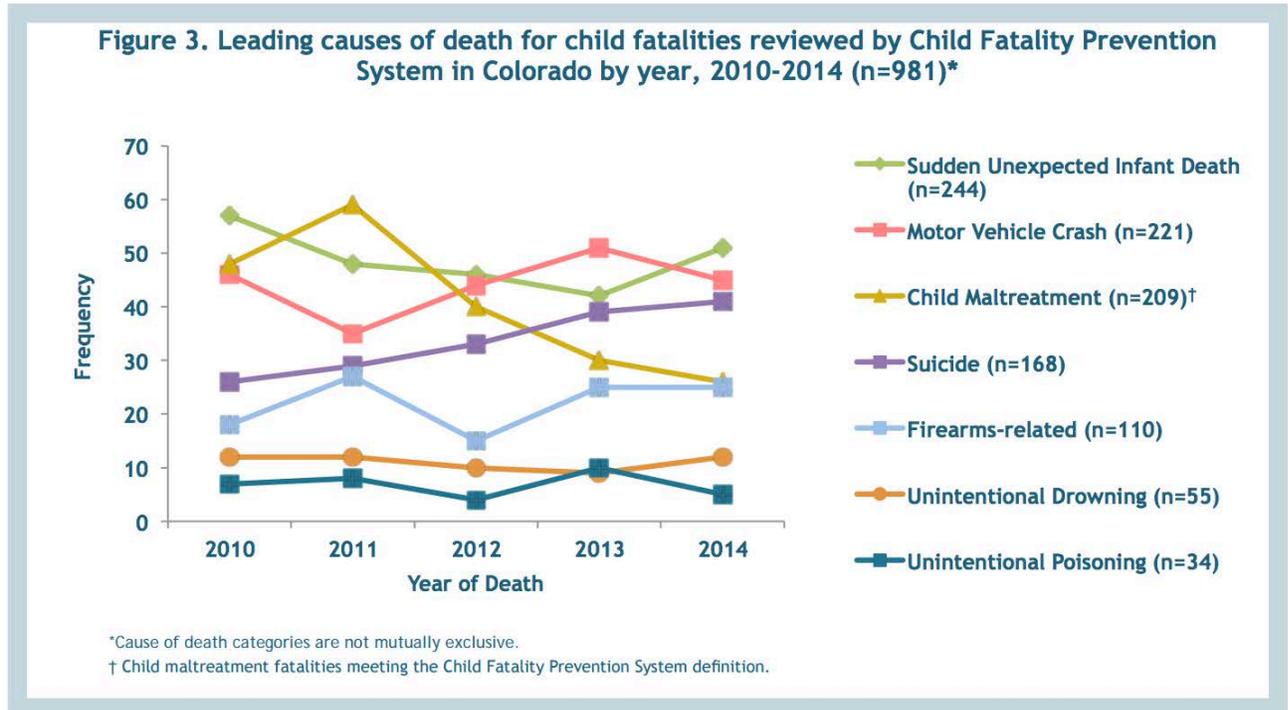
We strongly support, and ask for, the Legislature’s support of the Governor’s Request that \$9.7 million dollars be allocated to the School Health Professional Grant Program. This funding is estimated to create 150 new health professionals (psychologists, social workers, nurses, and counselors) for schools.

The School Health Professional Grant Program was created by SB14-215 to provide matching grants to schools to increase the number of school mental health professionals.

We strongly believe that the presence of these additional School Mental Health Professionals would help increase accessibility for students to get the help that they need in relation to mental/behavioral health and substance abuse. This additional access will undoubtedly be a necessary and positive step toward preventing teen suicide in the State of Colorado.

## Appendix

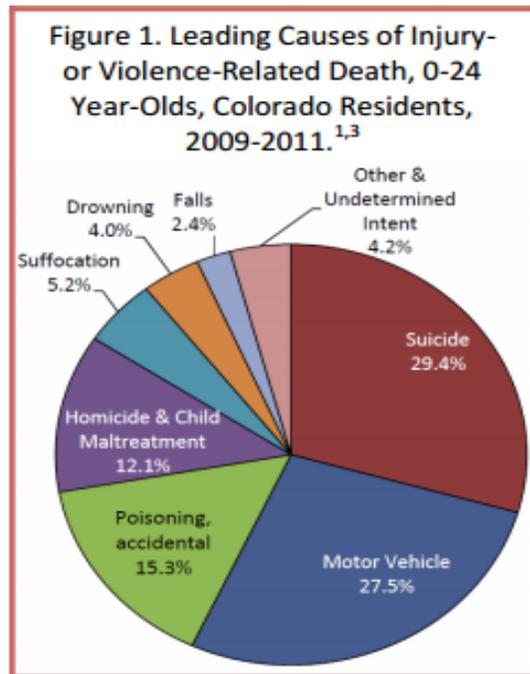
Exhibit A:



From 2010 to 2014, the frequency of suicide in youth deaths steadily increased from 26 to 41. In comparison, the frequency of death for the other six listed causes of death either fluctuated or decreased.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Taken from Child Fatality Prevention System 2016 Annual Legislative Report.  
[https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/sites/default/files/PW\\_ISVP\\_CFPS-2016-Legislative-Report.pdf](https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/sites/default/files/PW_ISVP_CFPS-2016-Legislative-Report.pdf)

Exhibit B:



Suicide accounted for the largest percentage of injury- or violence-related deaths for Colorado residents ages 0 to 24 from 2009 to 2011. It was higher than both motor vehicle accidents and homicide.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Taken from Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment Child and Youth Injury Report [https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/sites/default/files/PW\\_ISVP\\_Child-and-Youth-Injury-in-Colorado.pdf](https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/sites/default/files/PW_ISVP_Child-and-Youth-Injury-in-Colorado.pdf)

## Education and Technology

### Policy Groups Members

Abby Scott, Durango

Ana Mathews, La Junta

David Geldzahler, Denver

Kasha Akrami, Englewood

### Why we chose Technology and Education as a policy priority

A nationally representative poll conducted by the Guard Child showed that 20% of teenagers (13-16 years) have sent or posted nude photos or videos of themselves, 39% of all teens sent suggestively sexual messages via text, email, or instant messaging, and 48% of all teens have received such messages. Irrevocably, sexting has become a prevalent issue for youth throughout Colorado, as demonstrated in the sexting ring that was revealed in Canon City in 2015. Current Colorado Legislation classifies under-age sexting as either a Class 3, 4, or 6 felony offense, depending on the circumstances of the crime. The party responsible for and privy to these pictures is legally susceptible to child pornography charges, including becoming a registered sex offender.

Despite these stringent punishments Colorado teens continue to sext one another, showing that current legislation is not sufficient. When asked about under-age sexting the majority of youth had the attitude that “it’s not a big deal” and was socially acceptable because “everyone does it”. To remedy this attitude, we recommend the creation of a rapid response technology committee [Recommendation 1] and to adjust to scenarios where youth received or distributed inappropriate photos without malintent we suggest more lenient legal reparations [Recommendation 2].

### Recommendations

- 1. The COYAC Technology Committee suggests that Colorado Legislature mandate the formation of an interim committee at the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) that will keep up with technological trends, respond to issues, and act preemptively by creating curriculum that can be downloaded and used to instruct students on technological issues.**

In the case of sexting, this curriculum can be incorporated into multiple classes, such as health, history, and technology, and will educate students on the legal and social repercussions of sharing inappropriate photos. Currently, technology misuse issues such as sexting may be dealt with by the Bullying Committee or Emergency School Committee. Neither of these committees are fully equipped to address the issue of sexting in Colorado.

Moreover, the creation of this committee would allow for a rapid and constructive response to issues such as the Canon City sexting ring. This proposition is a preemptive measure that will allow students to understand the risks of their choices before they make major mistakes.

As we understand that technology will be abused by students no matter what education is available, our group also recommends the Colorado Legislature offers its support to HB17-1064, or something similar. The idea presented in this bill acts to create a progressive punishment system for students who have sent, received, and/or forwarded compromising photographs of juveniles. As

it currently stands, all students who fall within any of these categories are guilty of a class three felony, regardless of whether or not they are victims in the situation. Other class three felonies include vehicular homicide, second degree kidnapping, first degree arson, and the possession or use of chemical, biological, or radiological weapons. Charging a juvenile with a felony seriously limits them from pursuing a successful future and significantly hinders them financially. The concept of HB17-1064 works to offer more protection to the victims of these unfortunate situations while also lessening the punishment for students who have become involved in these situations consensually. We believe that a progressive punishment system will allow students to be properly prosecuted for their mistakes without preventing them from having a successful life. Misdemeanors would be offered as punishment instead of felonies, allowing victims to have lower punishment than those who have distributed photographs with malicious intent.

## Secondary Education/ICAP Review

### Policy Group Members

Jason Fisher, Lone Tree  
William Geoffrey, Colorado Springs  
Emme Janssen, Loveland  
Bertrand Li, Golden

Andres Pulido, Lone Tree  
Pierce Strasser, Evergreen  
Anthony Zinno, Lone Tree

### Why We Chose the ICAP as a policy priority

The Individual Career and Academic Plan, or ICAP, is a program that is meant to guide students from 6th grade to high school in their academic and career choices. Most high schools in Colorado meet state requirements for ICAP through the website Naviance. From our point of view, only a handful of Colorado schools have implemented this program effectively. This notion is supported by the D'Evelyn High School (in Denver) Counseling Department, which states that "ICAP is good in theory, but is not being successfully implemented. The legislation is rather general and up for interpretation, leaving much leeway to run ICAP at different schools."

The ICAP system is an incredibly helpful resource for students, but due to a variety of factors, it is not widely utilized. This can be concluded as the number of students who use all opportunities provided by the resource is low, although the few students that use it to a fuller extent reap valuable planning tools and benefits. It is this discrepancy that we are attempting to address.

### Recommendations

**1. Due to these ailments with the current ICAP/Naviance system, we propose a Colorado ICAP Interim Committee composed of Colorado high school students, parents, teachers, and Colorado Legislative members to reform and reprocess the ICAP system.**

The first major issue is the tone and lack of significance with which ICAP and Naviance are discussed and considered. The committee should assist in the reform of the ICAP program to attend to an appropriate level of intellectual capability of high school students. The current system approaches outreach to high school students as if they are immature, outlining basic concepts to a completely unnecessary extent. Due to such methods of communication regarding Naviance and ICAP, the apparent usefulness of the service is diminished, and as a result, students see Naviance as a service that is not particularly useful. This lack of effective communication leaves Colorado students at a disadvantage. Other schools implement communication regarding Naviance into their school system incredibly well. One such school, according to Neysa Lee, parent and PTSA volunteer for Walton High School in Marietta, Georgia, states: "Parents and students that take advantage of the program's capabilities for college and career planning love it. And I know it makes the college application process more efficient and reliable." Modifying the rhetoric with which ICAP and Naviance are discussed in schools will help to make its capabilities more widely used. This may be accomplished by instructing students in a more mature tone.

Additionally, while the current ICAP system shows students what is necessary to be academically successful along with the best ways to meet the grade requirements needed to begin post-

secondary education, it is lacking in its focus on students' individuality. Meaning, it fails to inform students about specific details of college choices, such as college culture and level of difficulty regarding study, which are critical in choosing an appropriate college.

Using the answers given after taking a personality test, Naviance sorts students into one of six of the Holland Party types, which is a system for classifying personality types, much like the Myers-Briggs test. The categories used by the Holland Party types are: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional. Suggested career pathways are refined through these personality tests. This in itself is not a negative trait of Naviance, but the test may limit the career pathways suggested to students. This means that potential career pathways that students may have had an interest in but do not match their Holland Party type may go by the wayside. For example, if a student inputs into the computer that they have an interest in STEM curriculum, alternative career paths are largely cast aside, such as artistry. Thus, there is a limitation to the career suggestions produced by the website.

The Colorado ICAP Interim Committee shall focus on reforming three main flaws in the ICAP system: the tone used when discussing ICAP and Naviance, the lack of career and educational focus areas and guidance, and the classification of students into specific schools of thought that limit their focus on potential careers and goals. Other goals of the Committee shall be to make recommendations for schools' use of Naviance, making suggestions to Hobsons (the company which hosts Naviance) for improvement of their services, as well as brainstorming ways to improve ICAP. Other focuses may include improving ways in which ICAP is involved in the curriculum. This may follow Jefferson County's Green Mountain High School's implementation of the service, where, according to their 10th grade counselor, they "teach the competencies through multiple opportunities throughout the year such as: the 10th grade Career Fair with accompanying lessons, Mock Interviews, Meet the Pros presentations, registration presentations where we explain pathway information and test results, Executive Internship and Job Shadows," and conduct other activities to embed ICAP into the school's curriculum. These particular focuses should not limit what the committee should work on, but are simply examples of ways in which one such committee could improve the current systems.

**Suggested structure of the proposed committee:**

1. 3 Students
  - a. COYAC member/s
  - b. Representatives of high school student bodies
2. 3 Parents
  - a. PTA members
3. 3 School counselors
  - a. College specialists
  - b. General counselors
4. 3 High school administration members
  - a. Principals
  - b. School board members

5. 3 Legislative members
  - a. Members on the Board of Education

## Teen Homelessness

### Policy Group Members

Caitlin Hearty, Littleton  
Yasmine Mohamed, Aurora

Saxon Bryant, Pueblo  
Himanvi Kopuri, Aurora

### Our Current Point in policy process

We are very passionate about this issue and feel that to fully develop our proposal and plans, one more year is necessary to reach the full potential of this recommendation. Therefore we have decided to postpone our official policy recommendation to next year. Despite this, we do have initial plans and an overview of what we are going to include in our recommendation. We appreciate your understanding on our position and look forward to crafting final recommendations.

### Why we chose Teen Homelessness as a policy priority

Despite the fact that more and more unaccompanied youth between 12 and 17 years of age experience homelessness each year in Colorado, the state has no clear and coordinated policy to reduce youth homelessness. The issues that face runaway, homeless, and exploited youth are so diverse, there is a great need for cooperation among private nonprofit entities and public entities serving these youth to break down barriers and provide more seamless, collaborative, and effective services. On January 25th, 2016, local agencies and volunteers across the Metropolitan Denver region conducted the annual national Point-in-Time survey. This survey generates a “snapshot” of the individuals and families who are experiencing homelessness in our communities. The purpose of the national Point-in-Time is to count the number of homeless individuals on one day of the year and to educate citizens about the presence of homelessness within their own communities. The Metro Denver Homeless Initiative recently published the 2016 Time-In-Point Survey results, and they are absolutely astonishing.

### Information about the 2016 Point-In-Time Survey\*

- 3,697 people are currently defined homeless by HUD
- 2,472 families with children were surveyed
- 14,969 children in the Denver Metro area receive services through the McKinney-Vento Act
- 29.4% of people surveyed were under the age of 25, alas MDHI stated, “Given known barriers to reaching the youth population, we can say with certainty that those under 25 years of age counted in the 2016 PIT represent only a portion of the unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness in the region.”

### Potential Recommendation 1: imintoapp

The imintoapp is an app for people to put in their interests and get connected to possible resources in their area. We believe this would be a perfect resource for homelessness. If we could register the homeless resources (shelters, drop-in centers, etc) on this app, then people could find resources near them that fit their criteria. We have started working on this process, and are excited of the possibilities. Our policy recommendation would most likely involve government funding to keep the app running as a resource for homeless civilians.

## **Potential Recommendation 2: Homelessness Bill of Rights**

Years of research and advocacy around criminalization of homelessness has shown that added protections are needed to preserve the civil rights of people experiencing homelessness. A report from [Yale Law School](#) found that criminalization of homelessness in Connecticut leads to a vicious cycle of homeless individuals being forced to break the law. The [National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty](#) found that such policies “...are ineffective in addressing the underlying causes of homelessness...are expensive to taxpayers, and they often violate homeless persons’ constitutional and human rights.” A homelessness bill of rights, or a right to rest act, would provide protections for homeless individuals against segregation, laws targeting homeless people for their lack of housing and not their behavior, and restrictions on the use of public space. Examples of these oppressive regulations exist across Colorado, such as Denver where it is illegal for a homeless individual to sleep or sit on the sidewalk, or Durango, where a street guitar player was ticketed simply for having his guitar case open to accept donations. Laws such as these not only exacerbate the homeless situation by stigmatizing, isolating, and pushing homeless individuals away from their communities, but also have significant costs in terms of expended police resources. Several states across the U.S. have implemented similar legislation such as California, Oregon, Delaware, Illinois, Vermont, Tennessee, and more. There is already a strong legal basis for such moves. The 2015 case of [Browne v. Grand Junction](#) saw regulations that prohibited panhandling struck down by the Federal District court as unconstitutional. This legislation is a necessary first step, to ensuring that current homeless individuals and families are given a fair chance at prosperity and recovery.