



Dear Members of Legislative Council,

Colorado Counties, Inc. (CCI) and the Colorado Human Services Directors Association (CHSDA) encourage you to support the creation of 2024-006 Public Benefits Eligibility Systems Interim Study Committee. The Colorado Benefits Management System (CBMS) has impeded our ability to serve our communities effectively and efficiently and warrants increased scrutiny from our elected officials. Delays in processing results in basic needs for individuals and families not being met, including the inability to access medical services, medication, and food. It is imperative that Colorado improve the technology system that so many critical services rely on. This topic is worthy of the General Assembly dedicating its time and resources. We also respectfully request that counties be included in the list of entities that may be called upon to provide information to the Interim Study Committee. As the users of the system, county staff know firsthand the benefits and challenges that exist.

Colorado has seen an unprecedented increase in food assistance (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program—SNAP) enrollment and in overall workload in Medicaid over the last several years. The largest 11 counties report a 137% increase in work on hand from November 2021 to November 2023. Counties and the State have worked tirelessly to serve our communities throughout the pandemic, despite a workforce crisis, but have struggled to keep pace with the demand. All of this has been exacerbated by a technology system—CBMS—that has severe functionality shortcomings.

First, system errors and downtime prevent county eligibility workers from performing their work and serving their clients. CBMS had a total of 63 system issues in 2023 totaling 126 hours with diminished productivity. Between April and December 2023, 73 of these hours were considered heavy impact. While these numbers are rough, for the large 11 counties, for every 30 minutes CBMS is not functional, we miss out on helping about 850 families. From April to December, CBMS had a heavy impact for 73 hours which means we missed out on serving approximately 124,000 families timely.

Just last week, CBMS was fully down for the majority of Friday (10 a.m. - midnight), all day Saturday, and all day Sunday. Counties saw their lobbies filled with clients who could not be issued EBT cards and had to quickly set up emergency food banks and issue gift cards so clients could feed their families over the weekend. This pivot caused counties to rely on county-only funding rather than the federal dollars associated with SNAP. The inability to issue SNAP, Medicaid, and financial benefits has a detrimental impact on the individuals we serve and results in unnecessary visits to our lobbies and increased phone calls. The downtime also exacerbated the backlogs and workload for counties, and some now have to mandate overtime due to the CBMS downtime. The lack of consistent performance takes its toll on our staff, who already suffer from morale challenges given the intense workload, high expectations, and constant change management.

We understand that vendors contribute to the ecosystem that supports CBMS, and we question how contracts and deliverables can be improved so that errors and downtime do not regularly

impede our work. Those companies that we contract with must be held accountable or new contracts should be pursued. Many promises have been made, but so far counties have not seen any significant progress.

Second, the ability for the State to make important functionality improvements is hampered by capacity and resource challenges. Counties have made several recommendations for system enhancements that would improve the processes and productivity of staff and the experience of customers, but those are often delayed or deprioritized because of a lack of capacity. CDHS and HCPF often share that they must prioritize federal change requirements or statutorily required changes to comply with legislation, which regularly delay the changes that we believe would have the most significant impact on our work. We would encourage the interim committee to review the larger funding and capacity needs that would allow these important fixes to occur.

Third, the CBMS governance structure lacks transparency and is outdated. Counties have been urging the state to revamp the governance structure to improve organization and communication and increase transparency, but progress has been slow. Counties are left wondering how decisions are being made on CBMS builds and systems improvements. This process needs to be transparent and modernized, so counties can be confident that the overall decisions being made are working towards the common goal of improving the system.

We know that many State staff and the leadership at HCPF and CDHS are committed to addressing the problems with CBMS. Counties are doing our best to work alongside our partners, but strongly believe that it is time for the General Assembly to scrutinize the impact of the system's challenges and the costs to clients, communities, and the State. This should all be done with the goal to create stability and improved functionality to better serve all parties involved.

Thank you for your consideration of this incredibly important topic as the subject of an interim committee.

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