



The Honorable Jared Polis
Governor of Colorado
200 E Colfax Ave Rm 136
Denver, CO 80203

Joint Budget Committee
200 E 14th Ave #300
Denver, CO 80203

January 23, 2024

Governor Polis and Members of the Joint Budget Committee,

As you are well aware, Coloradans with lower incomes are facing tremendous financial challenges due to rising inflation over the past three years, combined with the loss of health care coverage and additional food assistance support due to the Federal Public Health Emergency (PHE) unwind. [\[1\]](#) The 2023 Colorado Foundation Pulse Poll reported 1/3 of Colorado respondents are worried they might not be able to afford enough food to feed themselves or their families, and this jumps to 60 percent among people living with low incomes. [\[2\]](#)

As providers of human service programs that support families, individuals, and children across the state, counties are working with Coloradans each day who are struggling to meet their families' basic needs. **We are writing to you to respectfully and urgently request your partnership in addressing the crisis in providing access to benefits for people with low incomes in Colorado, and the funding that is necessary to do so.**

As a consequence of the pandemic and striking increases in inflation and cost of living, and despite a workforce crisis among county eligibility staff, Colorado has seen historic demand for public assistance benefits. Since 2019, SNAP has seen a 26.31% increase in the number of individuals with active cases and Medicaid members have grown by 31.19%. The PHE ended in May of 2023 starting the "unwind" for locked-in Medicaid cases, which has begun to reduce the number of Medicaid recipients but has not reduced the workload demands on counties. In fact, between SNAP and Medicaid, the big 11 counties have reported a 137% increase in reported work from November 2021 to November 2023.

Our agencies and our clients appreciate that the State and the JBC have supported some increased funding to process Medicaid and SNAP applications (County Administration funding) from FY20-21 through FY23-24, however, our funding is not keeping pace with the skyrocketing workload. Between 2018 and 2022 counties had seen only an increase of 2-4% in total County Administrative funding. Thankfully, in FY22-23, the Joint Budget Committee responded to the increase in SNAP applications and

provided two years, of an additional \$16.67 million each year, in county SNAP administration dollars. Counties used this funding to sustain their current staff, pay for overtime, offset overspending and hire new staff. However, this two-year funding expires in June 2024. And as we emphasized above, the SNAP caseload and overall workload continues to increase.

Counties urgently ask the Joint Budget Committee to increase the CDHS County Administration funding line. While it is too early in our yearly data collection to accurately predict the true need, we anticipate the need for additional SNAP County Administration funding to be somewhere between the \$16.67 million in funding you provided for two years and around \$30 million in FY24-25. We plan to have more accurate dollar figures at the end of February/early March.

Additionally, to process Medicaid applications and support the PHE unwind, the Federal Government and HCPF have allocated additional short-term funding through FY23-24. Unfortunately, funding is decreasing in FY24-25, while applications, redeterminations, and county staff workload continue to increase beyond pre-pandemic times. Counties are set to lose \$14.6 million in Federal funding at the end of this fiscal year. Counties are grateful that the Governor and HCPF have put forward a request to shift some of those funds to the following year and are very supportive of the HCPF January supplemental and budget amendment. [\[3\]](#)

Counties also recognize that funding, alone, cannot fully address the problem. We are deeply committed to finding ways to streamline processes at the local and state level and have begun meeting regularly with our State partners to prioritize system and policy changes that we believe would reduce confusion for our clients and make eligibility processing faster and more accurate. We also support many of the recommendations that came out of the first SB22-235 study, including increasing communication and collaboration between State agencies and with counties. Lastly, we encourage ongoing investments in the Colorado Benefit Management System (CBMS), which has experienced numerous delays and outages, compounding timeliness, errors, and backlog challenges, all the while leaving Colorado individuals and families in distress

The bottom line is that county workers cannot keep up with the pace of workload as it now stands, and certainly won't be able to if our funding is reduced. There are grave consequences to underfunding Colorado's safety net system. The most vulnerable Coloradans would be delayed in accessing critical food and medical benefits. In addition, as benefits enrollment staff continue to accumulate backlogs of work, Colorado could face Federal corrective actions or fiscal sanctions.

To reiterate, **Colorado's counties are requesting your partnership to address this crisis and are committed to finding solutions that will help us all better serve our communities.**

While we have many ideas about longer term solutions, our immediate ask of you is:

1. Extend (and likely increase) the \$16.67 million the Joint Budget Committee appropriates to SNAP County Administration Funding for FY24-25. While we should have more accurate

projection of the need in February or early March, we know if **Colorado invests \$9M in state General Funds in county administration of SNAP benefits, the state can draw down \$15M in federal funds and Colorado counties invest \$6M for a total of \$30M for county SNAP Administrative funding for FY24-25.**

2. Approve the Governor's Budget Supplemental and Amendment to continue Federal funding to support Medicaid eligibility work in FY24-25.

We are deeply committed to providing the individuals and families in our communities with timely and accurate access to benefits, but cannot do so without a meaningful investment in the funding that makes this possible. We look forward to partnering with you to address this crisis to Colorado's safety net. Please do not hesitate to reach out to us for further information.

Sincerely,



Janet Rowland
Mesa County Commissioner
Chair, Health & Human Services Steering
Committee



Mary C. Berg
Executive Director, Jefferson County Department
of Human Services
President, Colorado Human Services Directors
Association

CC: Executive Director Kim Bimestefer, Department of Health Care Policy and Financing, Clint Woodruff, CFO and Deputy Executive Director, Financial Services, Colorado Department of Human Services, Executive Director Michelle Barnes, Colorado Department of Human Services

[1] Report shows which Coloradans are getting hit hardest by inflation. The Denver Post. [Click here](#)
[2] Pulse. The Colorado Health Foundation Poll. [Click here](#)
[3] HCPF January 2024 Supplemental and Budget Amendment [Click here](#)