

Colorado Justice Report

Founded in 1999, CCJRC is a network of organizations, faith communities, and individuals working to eliminate the overuse of the criminal justice system and advance community health and safety in Colorado.

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Get Real Denver: Redefining Public Safety in Denver

By Kym Ray, Denver Campaign Coordinator & Jenn Dillon, Communications Coordinator

Real safety doesn't come from pouring ever more money into the criminal legal system — it comes from investing in people and communities. Through our advocacy at the Capitol, CCJRC has helped secure over \$100 million for proven community programs across the state that reduce crime, strengthen neighborhoods, and give people the support they need to thrive.

Now, we're bringing that budget advocacy to Denver.

[Get Real Denver – Real Community Safety](#) is our initiative to shift the conversation around public safety in our city, and advocate for meaningful, sustained investment in community-led solutions.

Our first major campaign calls on Mayor Mike Johnston and the Denver City Council to include \$5 million in the 2026 city budget to establish a Community-Led Public Safety Grant Program, a direct investment in community-based programs that prevent crime, stop violence from escalating (particularly among young people), support victims, and reduce recidivism.

What Denver Voters Want

We began this campaign by listening. [Our 2025 poll of Denver voters](#)

revealed overwhelming support for root-cause solutions and funding community-based approaches to safety. The message is clear: Denverites said increasing funding for community-based services would be much more effective in promoting public safety than increasing the number of police, or increasing sentences.

Building Momentum

Over the past several months, we've been working hand-in-hand with community partners to build a strong base of support. Forty-six organizations from across Denver delivered [a powerful community letter to Mayor Johnston](#), and we're actively working alongside City Council members to make this proposal a budget priority.

What's Next

Now, we're entering the critical stage: mobilizing City Council and the Mayor's support so that the Community-Led Public Safety Grant Program is included in Denver's final 2026 budget.

- **October 9th** – City Council will submit its budget recommendations to the mayor.
- **October 20th** – The mayor will release his final budget proposal.
- **October 27 at 5:00pm** – City Council will hold a required public hearing on the budget.

We need to fill the chambers at the City Council Budget Hearing on October 27th to show the depth of community support. You don't need to testify — just being there will send a clear message. We'll provide buttons, signs, and plenty of community spirit.

Take Action Now!

Don't wait! Send an email to City Council and the mayor right now using [our easy toolkit](#)

Together, we can build real community safety in Denver by investing in what truly works – a modern public safety approach that puts communities at the center of the solution, not on the sidelines.

 **Pack the City Council Chamber for the Oct. 27th Budget Hearing!**
Show your support for REAL community safety!

Monday, Oct 27th | 5:00 pm at the Denver Municipal Building | 1437 Bannock St., Denver



Colorado Takes Another Step Toward Prison Expansion

By Kyle Giddings, Deputy Director

For the first time in 22 years, Colorado is on the verge of building a new prison, and on September 22nd, we got one step closer.

That day, the Joint Budget Committee (JBC) met to review the state's financial forecast (which wasn't encouraging) and to hear supplemental budget requests from state agencies that would increase their current years' budget. Among them, the Department of Corrections (DOC) requested \$2.8 million for 153 additional medium-security private prison beds which would bring all remaining private prison beds on line.

CCJRC submitted a coalition letter from 75 organizations to the JBC urging them to reject this request, outlining why expanding prison beds is the wrong path forward. We also packed the hearing room with 74 community members from across the state to send a clear message of opposition.

We also extend our deep appreciation to the chairs of the House and Senate Judiciary Committees, Representative Javier Mabry and Senadora Julie Gonzales, along with seven of their fellow committee members, for standing with us. Together, they submitted a powerful letter to the Joint Budget Committee echoing our findings and urging the committee to reject the DOC supplemental request.

In the end, the JBC narrowly approved DOC's request, but only by a single vote. This is almost unheard of, as DOC supplementals typically pass without opposition. That one-vote margin shows the growing concern about unchecked prison expansion.

Here's the full letter CCJRC sent to JBC:

Dear Members of the Joint Budget Committee:

Please accept this letter on behalf of CCJRC and the undersigned organizations that urge you to deny the Department of Corrections (DOC)'s supplemental budget request of \$2.8 million for 153 additional private prison beds for men in FY 2025–26.

DOC bases its request on recent prison population projections from the Division of Criminal Justice that show an increase in the male prison population, arguing, “[c]aseload needs are driven by external factors, and the request is derived from projections outside DOC.”

This framing ignores DOC's own role in driving prison bed demand. Caseload adjustments are not automatic based solely on population projections. Before funding more beds, there should be scrutiny of whether DOC is doing all it can within its control to reduce demand for more prison beds.

System Efficiency Opportunities in lieu of Prison Expansion - Before approving additional prison beds, we suggest JBC inquire further and get data on what DOC has done or plans to do regarding:

Use of community corrections: Hundreds of community corrections beds are available. While DOC does not control decision-making by the local Boards or programs, it does influence the volume of applications submitted, particularly for those inmates who are initially denied and become eligible for re-referral after six months, who are rarely given that second chance.

Parole plan delays: People often appear before the Parole Board for discretionary release without a parole plan that has been investigated and approved by DOC. Having an approved parole plan is a statutory criteria the Parole Board must consider, and DOC's failure to meet this responsibility causes unnecessary delays and deferrals. If there is no parole plan or the Parole Board finds it unsatisfactory, DOC is legally required to submit an approved plan within 30 days. Too often, DOC fails to meet this deadline, leaving people stuck in prison longer than necessary.

Conditional release bottlenecks: DOC often fails to update the Parole Board when people who have been approved for conditional release complete their required programs, preventing their parole release from being finalized.

Technical parole revocations: Over 1,100 men were returned to prison last year for technical violations, a 19% increase in FY24-25.

Community corrections regressions: More than 500 people were sent back to prison from community corrections programs for technical violations or walking away from programs.

Review COVID-era practices that eased population pressures for reinstatement, like instructing the Parole Board to issue a summons in lieu of arrest for technical parole violations, and expedited parole hearings for those admitted to prison past their parole eligibility date.

Intentionally Avoiding Prison Population Management Measures - In 2018, the General Assembly unanimously passed Prison Population Management Measures (PPMM) to respond when DOC vacancy rates fell below 3%. DOC manipulated the prison bed vacancy rate by inflating its jail backlog. Rather than being held accountable, DOC received an additional \$1.3 million for jail payments. PPMM has only just been triggered for the first time, and it is too soon to know its impact, yet DOC is already asking for more beds.

Medium Bed Shortage - The 2021 Prison Utilization Study found over 1,900 inmates, initially classified as minimum security, were overridden to medium security based solely on the length of time before their parole release date, even though “[m]ost have no history of violent prison behavior (82%) or any escape history (85%). Most have no recent disciplinary conduct and are either participating in or completed a rehabilitative program and/or have a satisfactory prison employment record.” DOC policy (AR600-01) requires anyone with more than 60 months to their parole eligibility date to be classified as medium security. Modifying this AR would reduce demand for medium security beds.

Operational Capacity - DOC counts people in jail backlog in its prison population, but excludes funded jail beds from its operational capacity. This methodology drives the “need” for more prison beds. Even though jail backlog is a short-term placement, so is placement at the Denver Reception and Diagnostic Center, and those beds are included in DOC's operational capacity.

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DOC Opposes Reforms - Over the past two years, DOC has opposed every policy reform proposal offered by CCJRC, despite decades of past collaboration to improve the system.

Independent Audit Needed - Just as the recent audit of DOC's budget revealed many areas for improvement, we recommend an independent audit of DOC's policies and practices regarding transition to community, including both parole and community corrections, to identify improvements that could reduce prison bed need and improve reentry outcomes.

Two weeks ago, Governor Polis ordered \$103 million in cuts across agencies, including nearly \$55 million from Medicaid, more than \$12 million from higher education, and a \$5 million cut from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. More than \$100 million was swept from a voter-approved housing fund. These painful cuts fall on Colorado's most vulnerable residents. Other state departments have been required to tighten their budgets and manage their programs more efficiently. DOC should be held to the same standard.

Approving this supplemental request means choosing prisons over health-care, over housing, and over higher education. We are confident this is not a choice Coloradans support, especially when DOC could instead choose to adopt more effective practices to manage the prison population.

The JBC should deny DOC's request to allow the PPMM to take effect and then reassess if additional beds are needed. Even with a projected increase of about 23 men per month, that growth can be managed through the steps outlined above.

Thank you for your attention and for the difficult and weighty responsibility you all have. Please let us know if you have any questions or need any additional information.

Christie Donner
Executive Director, Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition

On Behalf of:

ACLU of Colorado
Advocates for Change
Alternatives to Violence Program Colorado (AVP)
American Friends Service Committee, Colorado
Appeal to Justice
Arapahoe County Green Party
Astor Investigations
Centennial Mental Health Center
Center for Employment Opportunities
CHIC
Cobalt
College Gateway Program
COLOR: Colorado Organization for Latina Opportunity and Reproductive Rights
Colorado Black Women for Political Action
Colorado Common Cause
Colorado Criminal Defense Bar
Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition
Colorado Freedom Fund
Colorado Legal Defense Group
Colorado Mountain News
Colorado Office of the Alternate Defense Counsel
Colorado Radio for Justice
COPA (Colorado Providers Association)
CrossPurpose
Crowley Foundation Inc
Denver Justice Project
Destination Sober Living, LLC

El Paso County Green Party
End Slavery Colorado
First Congregational United Church of Christ
First Universalist Church of Denver
Harm Reduction Action Center
Haugen Law & Advocacy
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Office of Alternate Defense Counsel
Office of the Colorado State Public Defender
Prison Fellowship
PSL/National Lawyers Guild
Pueblo Indivisible
Purple Mountain Recovery Inc
Recover Simply
Redeemed Ones Jail Prison Ministry, Inc
Remerg
Restorative Justice Practice
Restoring Connections
Servicios De la Raza
Small Town Project
Soul 2 Soul Sisters
Spero Justice Center
Stand for Children
Texas Prisons Community Advocates
The Absolute Word Prison Ministry
The Arc of Larimer County
The Empowerment Program
The Hall Law Office
The Mountain West Co.
The Reentry Initiative
The Sentencing Project
Third Street Counseling, LLC
Together Colorado Transforming Justice Team
Transformative Justice Project of Colorado
Vanguard Justice LLC
Women's Lobby of Colorado
Young and Aspiring Americans for Social and Political Activism (YAASPA)

What's Next

This fight is far from over. JBC staff analysts mentioned that DOC could have asked for up to 450 prison beds this time but didn't. We fully expect DOC to return in January with another supplemental request for more beds, along with a larger ask for the next fiscal year's budget.

CCJRC is so grateful to all the community partners that have joined the No More Prisons Coalition and for mobilizing so quickly to email JBC members and show up for the JBC hearing to oppose the DOC budget request for more prison beds! The JBC, DOC, and Governor's office all took very serious notice of the opposition. We'll be ready.

Stay tuned for more updates and ways to act as we continue to grow the coalition, organize, hold DOC accountable, and fight for a state budget that aligns with our values.



CCJRC 2025 Voices for Justice Sponsors
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**CCJRC's 16th
Annual Voices for
Justice**

On Wednesday,
September 10, 2025,
we were thrilled to host
nearly 300 of our close
friends for our sixteenth
annual night of fun and
fundraising at
Mile High Station.

We cannot thank our in-
credible sponsors enough
for their support! This
event couldn't happen
with out them.

This year, we were hon-
ored to recognize two
extraordinary recipi-
ents of the Rupert-Tate
Gamechanger Awards

YES! Count me in! I want to support CCJRC and help eliminate the overuse of the criminal justice system in Colorado. Enclosed is my tax-deductible contribution!

Your support makes all the difference!

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Please return to:
CCJRC 821 22nd St., Denver, CO 80205

Korey Wise Innocence Project

Through their tireless advocacy and the Legislative Inside program which is facilitated by Jeanne Segil and Jamie Ray, the Korey Wise Innocence Project has advanced critical conversations on wrongful convictions, systemic reform, and the power of legislative change. Their work not only uplifts those directly impacted but also strengthens the foundation of justice for us all.

**Friends and Family of the
"Save Skyline and Beacon" Campaign**

This grassroots coalition of neighbors, families, and advocates has shown what community-led action can achieve. Their campaign to protect Skyline and Beacon is a testament to the power of persistence and the belief that every voice matters in shaping the future of criminal justice. Together, these honorees embody the spirit of the Rupert-Tate Gamechanger Awards. They hold a bold vision, relentless advocacy, and the courage to create lasting change.