



LEGISLATIVE **POLICY** AGENDA



BUILDING A STRONGER,
SAFER, THRIVING
COLORADO



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INTRODUCTION

Advance Colorado is the leading conservative policy and advocacy organization in Colorado. We are committed to restoring common-sense governance and putting our state on a path that prioritizes taxpayers, workers, and families. Through the daily efforts of our experienced team and broad network of allies, Advance Colorado actively challenges progressive policies that have moved the state away from fiscal responsibility and economic freedom, working instead to hold our government accountable while proposing proactive solutions.

Our mission is carried forward through a strong emphasis on leadership development, ensuring that the principles Advance Colorado champions are translated into effective action by training well-prepared leaders across our state. The Advance Colorado Academy develops conservative leaders by pairing passion with practical skills needed to create real policy change in Colorado. Through our 5-week New Leader course, participants are prepared for leadership roles in public service, business, non-profits, and in their communities. We offer three free programs – New Leader, Ambassador, and “You Won! Now What?” – created under the guidance of subject-matter experts. Graduates will gain ongoing access to resources and a supportive network to help them lead with impact.

Our organization includes the Advance Colorado Institute, the think tank and research arm dedicated to educating citizens. We spread information on policies that expand economic opportunity, individual freedom, public safety, and government transparency. The Institute evaluates how proposed and enacted policies affect Colorado’s families and business community. The Institute is also active in the legal arena, pursuing lawsuits against unconstitutional overreach such as the tax on overtime pay and the oil and gas fees, reinforcing our commitment to defending the Taxpayer’s Bill of Rights (TABOR).

Advance Colorado engages citizens through multiple platforms, including the Advance Colorado Rundown, a podcast that explores the state’s most critical policy debates. Featuring a wide range of leading voices from across the political landscape, our podcast offers thoughtful analysis and insider perspectives on the decisions shaping Colorado’s future.

Founded on a belief in practical, common-sense solutions, Advance Colorado strives to inform, engage, and drive meaningful change – including through ballot measures – in order to build a more prosperous Colorado for all.

INCREASE PENALTIES FOR FENTANYL DEALERS



Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid up to 50 times stronger than heroin, and has a potency that is unmatched, as an amount equal to just a few grains of salt can be deadly. Fentanyl is now commonly hidden in other drugs and pills, so many victims never even know they are ingesting it.

The leading cause of death for Americans aged 18-45 is fentanyl. Federal law enforcement officials now seize enough of this drug each year to kill every American several times over.

In Colorado, fentanyl has devastated our communities for far too long. Fentanyl deaths in our state rose by 40.9% in a 5-year period, while total overdoses from all drugs rose by 8.5%. In 2024 alone, there were 761 fentanyl deaths in Colorado, which accounted for nearly half of all overdose deaths that year. **The DEA has recently declared Colorado among the top 3 states in the nation for fentanyl seizures.**

Colorado's current laws are far too lenient on fentanyl dealers. Under current law, **a dealer can sell up to 50 grams of fentanyl- which contains nearly 25,000 lethal doses -and still not be sentenced to mandatory jail time.** As a result, dealers carrying enough fentanyl to end thousands of lives are receiving punishments that are disproportionately light compared to the severity of their crime. Additionally, low-level users often have few treatment options, leaving them trapped in a cycle of relapse and repeat.

Mandatory jail time for dealers is essential to deter trafficking and stop repeat offenders from keeping this poison on our streets. Court-mandated treatment for users gives them a real chance to recover instead of returning to drug use and reoffending. Colorado needs a solution that holds fentanyl dealers accountable with tougher penalties while ensuring people struggling with addiction receive compassionate treatment. Doing nothing ensures the fentanyl crisis continues to get worse.

Report link: <https://www.advancecolorado.org/institute/communities-in-ruin/>

NO SANCTUARY FOR VIOLENT AND REPEAT CRIMINALS

"Nobody disputes that if you have violent criminals on the streets, we should detain those folks -- and if they're unlawful, to deport them."

Congressman
Jason Crow



Colorado is currently further to the left of New York, California, New Jersey, and Connecticut on immigration enforcement.

As Colorado is burdened with the distinction of being named **the second most dangerous state in the nation**, we must focus on removing violent and repeat offenders off our streets. A series of laws signed by Governor Polis have restricted local law enforcement from communicating with the Department of Homeland Security when someone who is here illegally is charged with a violent crime or a repeat offense. SB25-276 also imposed a fine of up to \$50,000 on law enforcement officers who choose to pro-actively share information with DHS, even about a convicted violent offender.

Across the U.S., there are only ten sanctuary states that do not have an immigration cooperation exception for violent or serious crimes or felonies: Colorado, Washington, Vermont, Rhode Island, Oregon, Maryland, Minnesota, Massachusetts, Illinois, and Delaware.

Colorado should not be a sanctuary for violent offenders. The tragic deaths of many Coloradans at the hands of individuals who should have been in federal custody underscore the real-world consequences of these "no-contact" policies, continuing the pattern of turning more Colorado residents into victims.

Report link:

<https://www.advancecolorado.org/institute/shielded-from-justice/>



CRACKING DOWN ON RETAIL & AUTO THEFT



Colorado currently sits far above the national averages for retail and auto theft. These crimes are often repeat offenses and frequently committed by dangerous gangs, creating a cycle that not only drives up costs for consumers, but also strains our law enforcement resources and shuts down local businesses. Our most vulnerable Coloradans are paying the price for the lack of accountability these criminals face. Despite some improvements, there is still no mandatory jail time for organized retail or auto theft.

Retail theft has caused billions of dollars of economic losses in recent years, and the price our communities pay for these organized crimes has been consistently ignored by lawmakers.



Unchecked theft has resulted in countless lost jobs, suppressed wages, and closed businesses, and our laws do not adequately address the seriousness of these crimes.

Auto theft has been a major issue in Colorado for years. While the legislature took a step in addressing the highest rates of auto theft in the nation, **the crime is still eligible for probation**, leaving a major gap in the law that repeat offenders continue to take advantage of.

Everyday Coloradans are constantly at risk due to the legislature's choice to prioritize the criminal over the victim. Our state must crack down on organized retail and auto theft by implementing minimum sentencing.

Report link:

<https://www.advancecolorado.org/institute/inside-colorados-auto-theft-crisis/>

<https://www.advancecolorado.org/institute/retail-theft-in-colorado/>



MANDATORY JAIL FOR CHILD PREDATORS

Colorado law currently allows child predators, including both child rapists and those who solicit sex with children, to be eligible for a probation-only sentence. Because of this probation loophole, Colorado laws allow judges to hand out probation-only sentences for these child predators.

Some lawmakers have attempted to close the probation loophole for these sexual predators. In 2024, HB24-1092 would have required a minimum sentence for some crimes against children. Unfortunately, this bill was killed in committee on a party-line vote. A similar bill came back next year, HB25-1073, and would have required minimum sentences for those convicted of child rape and closed the probation-eligibility loophole for those offenses. Again, this proposal was killed in committee despite it being a bipartisan bill.

Colorado is doing a major disservice to victims and their families. By allowing child predators to be let out on probation, we are putting more children continually at risk. We should implement minimum sentences for child predators to protect children from exploitation and close dangerous loopholes in our laws.

Our state currently ranks 11th in the nation for sex offenses, with a prevalence of these offenses being against children aged 0-10.



PROTECTING SCHOOL CHOICE & PARENTAL RIGHTS

A successful education system is one that puts parents and students first by strengthening choice and accountability. School choice has been a pillar in Colorado's education system for many decades, retaining a record of strong bipartisan support. School choice is key to addressing the different circumstances of families across our state.

Colorado stands out because we have many school choice options: public, charter, magnet, private, homeschool, online, and open enrollment schools – and they all serve a vital purpose in giving students an effective education tailored to their needs.

Strong school choice protections must be paired with equally strong parental rights. It's parents, not the government, who know their children best – and they must retain the authority to make informed decisions.

Ensuring parents preserve their role in our education system empowers families to tailor learning to their child's individual needs, ultimately enhancing academic and social success.

Our education system has been under attack in recent years – through attempts to defund charter schools, strip away school choice and remove parental rights. Every attempt to weaken parental rights or limit educational options is an affront to Colorado families and should be firmly rejected.

Report link:
<https://www.advancecolorado.org/institute/promoting-school-choice/>





PRIORITIZING STUDENTS AND TEACHERS IN COLORADO'S EDUCATION BUDGET

A recent survey revealed that the majority of Coloradans are dissatisfied with our state's education system and believe it needs improvement.

Since 2021, the number of administrators has continued to grow even as overall student enrollment has declined. Colorado spends about 10% less on class instruction than the national average, spending this extra 10% on increased administration. This shift has coincided with declining student outcomes.

Although the state's education budget has increased significantly in recent years, a shrinking share of that money is reaching teachers and classrooms. Record-high levels of funding are being absorbed by administrative and bureaucratic overhead, leaving fewer resources where they matter most: in the hands of educators and the students they serve. As a result, **teacher salaries have stagnated, classrooms remain under-resourced, and students face larger class sizes with fewer learning supports.**

By ensuring that more funding reaches teachers and students, we can improve academic outcomes, support educators, and build a more effective public-education system for students in the future.

REJECTING THE PROGRESSIVE INCOME TAX



A proposed shift from Colorado's flat income tax to a progressive structure would result in the largest tax hike in state history, **allowing lawmakers to retain an estimated \$4.1 billion in new revenue. The measure would also exempt these additional funds from TABOR limits, removing taxpayer protections and effectively giving legislators a blank check to spend the money with limited accountability.** As businesses and employers would also face higher tax burdens under this measure, the added costs would ultimately flow down to consumers, making Colorado more unaffordable.

This measure is specifically designed to increase government revenue by restructuring Colorado's tax system so the state can collect substantially more from top earners, large estates and trusts, and businesses. Under TABOR, Colorado's revenue growth is capped, and when collections exceed the constitutional "C-Cap," the state must refund the excess revenue back to taxpayers. Under this plan, the state would gain the authority to collect and retain an estimated \$4.1 billion in new annual revenue rather than refunding excess collections back to taxpayers. This is after Colorado's budget increased from \$28.8 billion to \$44 billion over the last 8 years. Current proposals would also allow the legislature to put extra fees on incomes earned by working families. Ultimately, **the initiative's core design is not simply to "tax the rich," but to dramatically expand the amount of money the government collects and spends.** A progressive income tax system is not right for Colorado, and should be rejected.

The proposed progressive income tax, also known as a graduated income tax, would replace Colorado's current flat income tax rate of 4.4% with a tiered system that would tax as high as 9.5% for income above \$1 million.





The Taxpayer's Bill of Rights (TABOR) has had long-standing bipartisan support dating back to 1992. TABOR sets a limit on how much the government can spend and requires voter approval before the government can keep any revenue increase above the limit. Without that approval, if revenue collection exceeds a certain amount, the excess gets refunded back to taxpayers.

DEFENDING TABOR

Despite claims that Colorado is suffering from a lack of revenue, the state budget has grown by 74% over the last decade.



Our state government is receiving a healthy revenue increase even with the pro-taxpayer TABOR restrictions on revenue growth in place.

Although **70% of Coloradans support TABOR**, our state legislature has continually attempted to weaken, and even abolish, these taxpayer protections. In 2025, we saw repeated attempts to undermine TABOR: efforts to challenge its legality in the courts, shrinking the refunds Coloradans are owed, and even violating TABOR outright by imposing an unconstitutional tax on overtime pay. Maintaining TABOR's limits on state revenue and its promise to let voters decide on taxes is essential to keeping our state affordable.



FEE REFORM

When TABOR was passed in 1992, it required that all new taxes and increases must be approved by the voters. In 2020, the voters passed Prop 117 and required the legislature to go to the people before charging fees that added \$100 million or more in revenue in the first five years. Fees are not intended to be a revenue replacement for taxes, however, despite voters' will, the legislature now heavily relies on fees to fund various projects.

The legislature has increasingly sidestepped TABOR and Prop 117 by raising revenue through "fees" on everyday services such as food delivery, online orders, and even filling up your gas tank.

Fee revenue has skyrocketed by 3,400% over the past two decades.



One of these fees, the oil and gas fee, has raised energy costs across the state, increasing prices for heating, transportation, and other goods. This significant charge should have gone to the voters to decide, but instead the legislature circumvented TABOR and implemented it anyway.

Affordability in Colorado continues to be a top issue, and the increasing number of fees and enterprises is exasperating this problem. The legislature should prioritize repealing unnecessary taxes disguised as fees, clearly define fees, and strengthen TABOR by putting the requirement that proposed fees go to a statewide vote in the constitution.

Report link:

<https://www.advancecolorado.org/institute/state-taxes-fees/>

ADDRESSING COLORADO'S MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS



Colorado's mental incompetency laws were originally designed to protect defendants with severe mental or cognitive impairments who are unable to fully understand or participate in their criminal proceedings. However, in recent years, they have been misused as a loophole to avoid justice, allowing some defendants to claim incompetency to delay trials, avoid prosecution and heavy sentences, or evade jail time altogether.

Right now, if a defendant is found to be permanently incompetent, courts are required to dismiss all charges, even if the defendant committed a violent crime.

These laws have allowed dangerous defendants to cycle in and out of the system with little to no oversight. There have been too many victims of the incompetency loophole, and the criminal and civil commitment laws must be changed so justice is achieved and violent offenders are not on the streets, regardless of their mental status.



With Colorado already facing a shortage of beds in mental health treatment centers, we must **prioritize those beds for violent individuals who are a danger to the community.** To truly improve Colorado's mental health crisis, the state should also invest in collaboration efforts between law enforcement and mental health professionals to ensure people in crisis receive timely support.

JOIN OUR WORK MOVING COLORADO FORWARD!

Advance Colorado is a citizen-led organization, driving education, engagement, and advocacy throughout Colorado's diverse communities. Your involvement is essential to our success. Below are several ways you can join the effort!

APPLY FOR THE ADVANCE ACADEMY

If you'd like to increase your leadership skills or expand your ability to serve on the local school board, you can apply for our New Leader or You Won! Now What? programs by visiting: www.advancecolorado.org/academy Classes are run several times a year, and admission is free to accepted applicants.

SUBSCRIBE TO THE ADVANCE COLORADO RUNDOWN

Our podcast is available on Apple Podcasts and provides an inside view of Colorado's top issues. From interviews with elected officials and other experts to breakdowns of our policy agenda, the legislative session, and the Taxpayer's Bill of Rights (TABOR), you'll gain insight and action points whenever you tune in!



READ THE ADVANCE COLORADO INSTITUTE REPORTS

Since 2024, our policy analysts and fellows have been reporting on the biggest policy issues facing Colorado -- compiling data, news stories, personal accounts, and details on the implementation of legislation and, most importantly, how it all affects your life and your community. You can read our policy reports here: www.advancecolorado.org/institute/research-reports



QUESTIONS?

Email us at info@advancecolorado.org.

To support our work educating citizens and keeping government accountable, you can make a tax-deductible donation of any amount [on our website](#).




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