

Reforming Policymaking in Colorado: Short Summary of Recommendations for the State Legislature

The Colorado Health Foundation (CHF) is the state's largest private philanthropy and works statewide to bring good health and well-being in reach for everyone who calls Colorado "home." So much of our health is influenced by our individual choices, our neighborhoods as well as the public policies that govern our lives. We believe all Coloradans should have the tools and opportunities to be healthy where they live and should have a voice in the decisions that impact them.

What we've heard so far about legislative processes and procedures:

In 2021, CHF policy staff began exploring what specific policies become law in Colorado and the underlying *how*. How do the daily ins and outs of introducing, crafting and implementing policy decisions have an impact on which voices tend to have the greatest influence on policy outcomes in our state? Interviews were completed with 25 organizations that engage in advocacy work and 19 current and former legislators, legislative staff and lobbyists. Full summary reports and description of methodology are available at: <https://coloradohealth.org/studies-reports>.

These conversations highlighted positive aspects of how Colorado's legislature operates and lifted meaningful opportunities to improve efficiency, engagement and access in the legislative process. Suggestions ranged from structural and/or Constitutional changes – such as changes to the legislative calendar, term limits, and legislator and staff pay scales – to more immediately implementable process changes.

Process and procedural changes that could be considered in the near term include the following:

- **Enforce 5 bill limit:** It was recognized that the time constraints of the 120 legislative calendar cause challenges throughout the session. Enforcing the five-bill limit was suggested as a possible way to promote efficiency, utilize time more effectively and allow for more meaningful stakeholder engagement.
- **Make remote testimony permanent:** While a few respondents mentioned some downsides to remote testimony (e.g., less formality), this flexibility introduced during the pandemic is seen as a positive change that should be made permanent. It allows greater geographic representation in the legislative process and more accessible participation, especially given the unpredictability of scheduling for committee hearings. One advocate stated, "Absolutely keep the virtual testimony option. This allowed real people, not just lobbyists, to participate in the legislative process. It is really empowering."
- **Modify how demographic and fiscal notes are used:** Fiscal notes and demographic notes are viewed as critical points of analysis that could be used more extensively. Suggestions included increasing training on fiscal notes for legislators and expanding the usage of demographic notes for all bills to better understand the impact of legislation on Colorado residents.
- **Promote bipartisanship:** Respondents from all political affiliations emphasized that better policy is made when there is the opportunity to compromise and work to find policy solutions that are not partisan in nature. There was a strong desire to create more opportunities for bipartisan connections between legislators to deepen understanding and collaboration.



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- **Provide additional training and resources for new legislators and staff:** The majority of respondents indicated a desire for better training, resourcing, and onboarding for new legislators, with a particular focus on supporting incoming legislators of color or from low-income communities. Others recommended creating internships aimed explicitly at diversifying the pool of lobbyists, aides and legislators.
- **Provide translation services:** Laws impact everyone in our state, so participation in the legislative process should not be limited to those who speak English. There is a strong desire, especially among advocates, to ensure that translation services are readily available.
- **Require in-person attendance for legislators:** While remote testimony is viewed as a positive to allow statewide engagement in the bill process, there was a strong desire to ensure legislators attend all hearings and vote in person as they are able.
- **Restructure SMART Act hearings:** SMART Act hearings are viewed as an essential source of information for legislators; however, there is an appetite for restructuring these hearings to promote greater accountability and transparency. Suggestions include using this time to update the legislature on the implementation of bills passed in previous sessions, and/or utilizing the hearings for meaningful engagement with community members concerning budgetary decisions.
- **Strengthen and enforce existing bill processes:** Colorado is viewed as being ahead of many states in opportunities for citizen engagement in the bill development process. Better enforcing the Gavel Amendment, improving stakeholder engagement in the bill development process, and setting an end date for when bills can be introduced were all proposed to improve existing processes.
- **Use interim committees more effectively:** Respondents acknowledged that a legislator's job is not confined to the 120 days of the legislative session. Regular engagement between legislators and Coloradans in the interim was identified as a critical community engagement strategy that would more meaningfully elevate perspectives across the state. More standardization of expectations around interim committees was encouraged.

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