



The Bell Policy Center

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Concerning Direction to CollegeInvest to Promote the Use of College Savings Plans for Adults to Save In Pursuit of Their Own Postsecondary Educational Opportunities

House Bill 10-1040

Testimony to the House Education Committee

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My name is Frank Waterous, and I am a senior policy analyst with The Bell Policy Center. The Bell is a nonpartisan, nonprofit research and policy organization dedicated to expanding opportunity for all Coloradans.

The Bell Policy Center supports House Bill 10-1040, “CollegeInvest Lifelong Learning Savings.” By helping more adults save for their own postsecondary educational opportunities, and by allowing employers to match their employees’ contributions in these savings accounts, the bill is good education policy, good workforce development policy and good economic development policy.

About one-third of all students enrolled in Colorado’s public higher education institutions are adults age 25 or older.¹ Yet adult postsecondary students are often overlooked when developing statewide education policies and programs. Adults face a complex blend of financial, personal and family concerns when determining whether or not to pursue postsecondary studies.² Among the financial barriers for many adults is a lack of information about the variety of options available to them in paying for their postsecondary education.

House Bill 10-1040 is good education policy. It would make information about a little-understood postsecondary financing option more readily available to adults considering upgrading their educational attainment or workforce skills. The bill makes explicit in statute that adult “lifelong learners” can open, for themselves, college savings accounts available through CollegeInvest in pursuit of their own postsecondary opportunities. It also directs CollegeInvest to implement a plan to promote the use of these lifelong learner accounts, and to determine the most effective savings options for adults.

House Bill 10-1040 is good workforce development policy. It would allow, but not require, employers to support their adult employees’ efforts to enhance their education and skills. Specifically, the bill directs CollegeInvest to develop and implement

procedures for employers to make matching contributions to their employees' lifelong learning accounts. At a time when many companies are eager to expand the 21st century skills of their current workforce, such an opportunity for matching contributions makes good business sense.

House Bill 10-1040 is good economic development policy. It would ultimately help to strengthen the quality of Colorado's workforce, which is a key factor in our state's economic competitiveness. As a recent report from the Metro Denver Economic Development Corporation noted, "educational attainment is the single-most important element in job and income growth," and is one of the chief underpinnings of a strong economy.³

Let me add one important note before concluding. Lifelong learner accounts will be a viable and attractive option for many working adult students, and we strongly support their development as envisioned in this bill. But they are not a substitute for a strong state-supported need-based financial aid program, available to all eligible students, including adults. Instead, these accounts represent another important tool in the broader tool-kit needed to expand postsecondary educational opportunity in Colorado.

In summary, The Bell Policy Center believes that House Bill 10-1040 will benefit adult postsecondary students, employers and the state. We urge you to support the bill, and thank you for the opportunity to share this information with you today.

If you have any questions, or if I can provide further information, please call me at 303-297-0456 or email me at waterous@thebell.org.

Endnotes

¹ Student enrollment data, statewide public higher education by age, Fall 2008, Colorado Department of Education online searchable database, <http://highered.colorado.gov/Data/Search/query.asp?report=enroll>

² Julie Strawn, "Policies to Promote Adult Education and Postsecondary Alignment," prepared for the National Commission on Adult Literacy, Sept 28, 2007 (rev. 10/18/07), <http://www.nationalcommissiononadultliteracy.org/content/strawnbriefrev101807.pdf.pdf>

³ "Toward a More Competitive Colorado: Executive Summary on Competitiveness," Metro Denver Economic Development Corporation, Nov 2009, http://www.metrodenver.org/files/documents/news-center/research-reports/TMCC_V_ExecSumm.pdf