

The Arc of Colorado

Support for SB 228
April 23, 2009

Chairperson McFadyen and Members of the CO House Committee on Transportation and Energy

My name is Marijo Rymer. I am Executive Director of The Arc of Colorado. I was Chairperson of the 2008 campaign for Amendment 51 which, if passed, would have gradually raised the state sales tax to end the waiting list for more than 13,000 Coloradoans with developmental disabilities.

While A 51 did not pass, support for the cause it promoted was widespread across the state—over and over we heard from newspaper editors, community leaders and advocates that providing support for people with developmental disabilities is a basic responsibility of government. Over and over we heard that the state legislature and the Governor should use the existing budget process to solve the problem.” The Denver Post issued a “clarion call to lawmakers to take on this responsibility.” We heard echoes of those thoughts across the state.

Supporters of Amendment 51 knew then and know now that 1) it would be difficult to heed that call when there’s not enough money to respond and 2) that even if there was a pile of money, Colorado law limits the tools that you need to set budget priorities and allocate dollars for programs that citizens value—including higher education and transportation. The Arc of Colorado participated in the discussions that led to the changes you are seeing today—we acknowledge that roads and bridges and universities and parks are vital to ensuring the quality of life in Colorado. But, the 6% formula forces lawmakers to dedicate general fund dollars to specific purposes—regardless of changing needs and conditions elsewhere. It doesn’t make sense today and it doesn’t add anything to building a stable funding process for education, human services, or transportation.

Equally egregious is the dreaded “ratchet effect” of the current law. The needs of people with Down syndrome or Autism or Cerebral Palsy don’t ratchet down when the economy goes sour—if anything, economic downturns increase the need for long term services and supports. We acknowledge and deeply appreciate the extraordinary measures that you have taken this year—in both chambers—to preserve funding for services for people with developmental disabilities. But, other reductions—especially those affecting Medicaid rates for acute care providers and reductions in school programs—will be felt. The ratchet effect in the existing law will make it difficult to recover those funds when the economy improves. For those who need help the most, the ratchet always moves downward.

We encourage the Committee to support SB 228—removing the outdated and no longer useful barrier presented by the Arveschoug-Bird 6% formula. We know that it will not produce more money; it will not increase spending; it will not end the waiting list this year or even in the next few years. But, it will give you and future legislators a tool to help you do your jobs and be accountable for your decisions. Please put an end to the “6% excuse.”

Respectfully submitted,

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The Arc of Colorado builds better lives for persons with developmental disabilities and their families by improving connections to schools, work and the community through influencing public opinion, increasing public awareness, supporting local chapters, and collaborating with other organizations sharing the same values.