



Lorena Zimmer

SB19-216 High School Innovative Learning Pilot Program

Senate Education

April 10, Upon Adjournment

Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the committee. My name is **Lorena Zimmer**. I'm the director of talent pipeline at the Denver Opportunity Youth Initiative, an affiliate of the Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce.

I'm here today to voice the Chamber's support for Senate Bill 216.

This bill will allow more students to gain workplace experience and skills by participating in programs like apprenticeships with local businesses, competency-based learning projects and capstone projects, among others. This real world experience allows more students to be prepared to meet the future needs of businesses and the jobs on which our economy depends.

We recognize that there are a number of great career opportunities where on the job training can help students build the skills to become long-term employees. Not every opportunity requires a traditional post-secondary education and we're supportive of building a strong pipeline that includes both traditional higher ed along with certificate, apprenticeship and work study programs.

Programs like these work. For decades apprenticeships have been a successful strategy to fill the talent pipeline for a limited number of industries, servicing a narrow demographic of Colorado. Recently, however, the BEL Commission identified apprenticeships as a proven strategy to close the skills gap throughout the state and work has been underway for several years by many different organizations to offer more opportunities like this for Colorado kids. Colorado has been a national leader in creating a policy infrastructure and promoting work-based learning, including apprenticeships, internships, and other training pathways.

And registered apprenticeships help businesses thrive. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, employers get an average of \$1.47 back in increased productivity for every dollar spent on apprenticeships.

It is imperative we continue to work together to ensure all students have access to a quality education that will prepare them to enter the workforce successfully.

Please vote yes on Senate Bill 216. Thank you.