

The Agenda for Colorado's Entrepreneurs

Small Business Majority has created a comprehensive state policy agenda to ensure entrepreneurship is at the center of a thriving and inclusive economy in Colorado. The state's more than 691,000 small businesses employ 1.2 million people, accounting for 99.5% of all businesses in Colorado. This is why it's critical that state lawmakers enact policies and programs to support and empower these entrepreneurs, guaranteeing they have access to critical resources and incentives to start and grow their business, affordable and quality healthcare, and benefit programs that will make it easier for them to attract and retain talented employees.

Expand healthcare access and protect consumers

Colorado has made significant strides in expanding access to affordable healthcare, but more must be done to support the state's small business ecosystem. Many Coloradans, including entrepreneurs and small business employees, are facing unforeseen hospital bills and fees, which adds to the burden of accessing healthcare. We are confident that Colorado can address its remaining uninsured rate, increase healthcare affordability for small businesses through common-sense policies and work to pass sensible consumer protections. Specific proposals to strengthen healthcare markets and expand health coverage include the following:

- **Ensure fair and transparent healthcare billing.** The largely consolidated hospital and healthcare systems are driving the costs of hospital bills and fees. Increasing transparency and fairness in healthcare billing will be paramount to supporting the small business ecosystem during this legislative session.
- **Remove medical debt credit reports.** Coloradans, including small business owners and their employees, have felt the effects of the public health crisis for nearly three years. Many of them have sought medical care as a result of the pandemic, which has strapped some individuals with a mountain of debt. These debt records then affect their credit score, hampering their ability to apply for credit and access to capital. Removing medical debt from credit reports will allow business owners in Colorado to work toward accessing the capital they need to survive and run their businesses.
- **Extend pandemic-related benefits beyond the Public Health Emergency.** During the earlier stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, Colorado approved many healthcare benefits to support Coloradans and their children through the public health crisis. But as the Public Health Emergency comes to an end, thousands will lose benefits that have been instrumental in supporting vulnerable populations through Medicaid and Child Health Plan Plus (CHP+). A multi-year continuous funding allocation to these programs will benefit Coloradans and support them beyond the pandemic.
- **Increase access to reproductive healthcare to support entrepreneurs.** In 2022, the U.S. Supreme Court (SCOTUS) ruling in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* stripped away constitutional reproductive rights for Americans, leaving states to decide the future of reproductive healthcare at their discretion. A lack of access to reproductive healthcare jeopardizes essential economic opportunities for women, including the ability to start and grow a business. Although reproductive healthcare is still a protected right in Colorado, it is not accessible to all. A policy proposal during this legislative session will require insurance carriers to provide reproductive health services to ensure all Coloradans can have access to the care they need.

Ensure Colorado entrepreneurs and small business employees have access to retirement and paid leave

Colorado's entrepreneurs and small business employees need a modernized benefits infrastructure that promotes quality jobs for those who do not work for large organizations. They also need a level playing field with larger companies that offer benefits that smaller businesses struggle to provide. Indeed, Small Business Majority's [polling](#) found three in five Colorado small employers do not currently provide a workplace retirement savings plan, citing cost as the primary reason. We are pleased that lawmakers and voters have approved measures to implement a state-backed paid family and medical leave insurance pool and the Colorado Secure Savings Program, and we are now focused on supporting implementation of these programs in a way that prioritizes the needs of small business owners across the state.

- **Continue to support outreach of the Colorado Secure Savings Plan** by ensuring rule-making and implementation acknowledge the unique needs of small businesses and their employees, and work with state officials to educate business owners on the program's requirements. The plan will be funded through modest employee deductions, helping Colorado's small businesses provide access to a critical program without taking on the expense or administrative burden. It is critical that business owners and their employees fully understand the value of retirement savings, and have adequate tools to make informed financial decisions.
- **Ensure implementation and outreach of the paid leave family and medical leave insurance (FAMLI) program meets the needs of Colorado small businesses.** This program will allow small business employees and the self-employed to access parental leave or leave to handle serious health conditions for themselves and family members. Coloradans overwhelmingly supported this initiative on the ballot in November 2020, and the small business voice is essential to creating a benefit program that serves the needs of employees across the state, without additional administrative burdens on business owners who want to provide a healthy work environment.

Support entrepreneurship and reduce barriers to business formation

A healthy entrepreneurial ecosystem provides innovative pathways for women, people of color, youth, veterans, disabled people and immigrants to enter the mainstream American economy and build income and independence. State lawmakers can support Colorado's entrepreneurs and independent workers by implementing the following policy recommendations:

- **Educate undocumented entrepreneurs about the recently removed barriers to public opportunities.** In 2006, the legislature passed restrictive laws that placed severe restrictions on undocumented business owners and their ability to operate a successful business. Last year, the legislature passed a law to remove these barriers. There is still much work that needs to be done to educate our undocumented business community in order to promote an economy that is inclusive to any entrepreneur who has the drive to contribute to our local communities.
- **Protect small business owners from deceptive solicitation and mailing practices.** Cases of deceptive solicitations and mailing by third-party organizations increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, and many Colorado entrepreneurs paid unnecessary, exorbitant costs related to business filings. These solicitations are misleading and draining entrepreneurs' pockets. To curb this harmful act, solicitations should clearly state they are not an official request from the state.
- **Reduce business registration fees for entrepreneurs.** In 2022, the state legislature passed legislation to allow the Colorado Secretary of State to reduce or waive business registration fees for small businesses, which greatly benefited aspiring and current small business owners by removing financial barriers to running a business. The proposal's success is being reviewed during this legislative session to renew it for another year.

Support childcare providers in Colorado through commonsense policies

A robust community of childcare providers can support our economic recovery and get entrepreneurs and workers back to work. But both the industry and the beneficiaries are facing accessibility and affordability issues, which hampers entrepreneurship in Colorado. To address the childcare crisis in Colorado, we must:

- **Work with the Colorado Department of Early Childhood (CDEC) to support the implementation and execution of their programs.** The new Colorado CDEC supports families and the early childhood industry across the state. This year's implementation of Universal Pre-school program will require ongoing support from partners and key stakeholders to ensure the program runs smoothly, with an equity lens in mind in order to support families and providers. In addition, we must find a sustainable policy solution that will fund childcare services in Colorado.