

Testimony for HB22-1393, the Displaced Aurarian Scholarship

Good afternoon Mr. Chair and members of the committee. My name is Leora Joseph and I am General Counsel and Chief Administrative Officer for the Auraria Higher Education Center, known as "AHEC." AHEC strongly supports HB 1393. Today I'd like to give some brief history about the campus to help explain why the funding for this scholarship is so important to the state of Colorado.

In 1960, Colorado confronted a crisis in higher education due to the rapidly growing population of Metro Denver, the creation of the GI Bill which meant a 200% increase in students, and impact of the post WWII baby boom and a tidal wave of college students.

Interestingly, in the early '60s, only private colleges were located in the populous Denver metropolitan area. To compound matters, very few graduates of Denver area high schools were enrolling in these private universities because many Denver residents could not afford a private university education; they could not afford to leave home; and, they needed a low-cost education that could be interspersed with work.

After intense debate and discussion, the Governor and the State Legislature created a "Blueprint" for the "Development and Coordination of Higher Education in Colorado."

Out of this "Blueprint," the educational foundation for the Auraria Campus began to take shape:

- CU Denver, originally an outgrowth of the Boulder's extension center, was authorized to begin offering independent degrees in 1962
- The Legislature then created MSU Denver in 1963 – opening in 1965
- The Legislature created CCD in 1967, the first of three community colleges authorized to open, which it did in the fall of 1968.

But not one of the three institutions had a true or permanent home. In the late '60s, classes were being taught out of 30 buildings scattered across the city. Thus began the important work of collaboration between the State of Colorado and the City of Denver. This planning to house three institutions together was

complicated, intertwined, and urgent. The idea of linking three separate institutions was unique and distinctive and remains so even today.

The great flood of 1965 devastated Auraria and this historic community had difficulties recovering; thus, it became one of nine potential sites. It took almost 5 years to firmly land on the Auraria site as the future location of a great American experiment – the housing of 3 higher education institutions.

Part of this history of the campus includes the displacement of Aurarians. More than 300-homes were razed to make way for the construction of the campus. Several of the homes were preserved and still exist on 9th Street on the campus today. The families who lost their homes were compensated for the value and promised free tuition on the campus along with their children and grandchildren.

After more than three decades offering tuition-free education to residents, children and grandchildren of displaced Aurarians, just this year the three institutions expanded eligibility to include all direct descendants of Aurarians who lived in the neighborhood from 1955 to 1973.

The Auraria campus was built to house and serve 15,000 students. Fast forward to the present day. This collaboration now serves 42,000 students, and 5,000 faculty, and staff, making it the largest college campus in the State of Colorado serving students across the state.

The passing of HB 1393 will ensure all lineal descendants of Displaced Aurarians are honored for the hardship and sacrifice their family made during the building of the Auraria Campus. Thank you to Representatives Tipper and Soper for bringing this important bill forward. I respectfully ask for your support today to continue to honor the families of Displaced Aurarians.