



# The Bell Policy Center

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## Protecting Opportunities & Workers' Rights Act (SB21-176)

### Testimony to Senate Judiciary Committee

Andrea Kuwik, Policy Analyst • April 1, 2021

Good afternoon, and thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of [SB21-176](#). My name is Andrea Kuwik, and I'm a policy analyst with the Bell Policy Center. The Bell Policy Center provides policymakers, advocates, and the public with reliable resources to create a practical policy agenda that promotes economic mobility for every Coloradan.

We're excited to be here this afternoon in support of a bill that updates and modernizes Colorado's anti-discrimination laws. As we've pointed out in our work, freedom to participate fully in the workplace without fear of discrimination and harassment is essential to financial security. However, of the various elements in this bill, the two we're most excited to see included are the provisions related to age discrimination and the designation of caregivers as a protected class. We believe extending and strengthening protections for both of these groups is essential to creating a more inclusive economy that works for everyone.

Though relatively young, Colorado is also one of the [fastest aging states in the country](#) – a trend that impacts our workforce, where older adults comprise the [fastest growing](#) segment of our labor force. Importantly, [78 percent of Coloradans 50 and older](#) say the primary reason they're either working, or looking for work, is to sustain daily living. Unfortunately, surveys also show [nearly one-third](#) of older Coloradans have experienced workplace age discrimination, which, of course, impacts the ability to either enter or remain in the workforce.

Over the past several months, we've [spoken](#) with older workers across Colorado about their experiences with age discrimination. In conversation after conversation, we've heard about the devastating health and financial consequences, which include everything from enhanced economic insecurity to depression and anxiety. A [plethora of research](#) shows these impacts are common and widespread.

In addition to helping victims of age discrimination, we're also excited to see the enhanced supports this bill affords working caregivers. Our research shows [18 percent of Coloradans 15 and older](#) provide unpaid support to an older adult in their lives. A majority of these

caregivers – 60 percent – are women and most – 73 percent – of these Coloradans work, the majority doing so full time. For many of these caregivers, continued workforce participation is an economic imperative. Research from AARP shows the average caregiver of an adult spends approximately [\\$7,000 per year out-of-pocket](#) supporting their loved one, with [nearly one-quarter](#) taking on debt due to their care responsibilities.

We believe for both groups, working older adults and working caregivers, the provisions in this bill will support their long-term financial security and well-being. We also believe these protections will be important as our state continues to recover from COVID-19, as both of these groups have been disproportionately impacted by our most recent economic downturn.

SB21-176 provides needed modernizations to Colorado's anti-discrimination laws and does so in a way that reflects the needs of our changing demographics. Thank you for the opportunity to testify this afternoon, and thank you to Senators Pettersen and Winter for bringing forward this important bills. I'm happy to answer any questions.