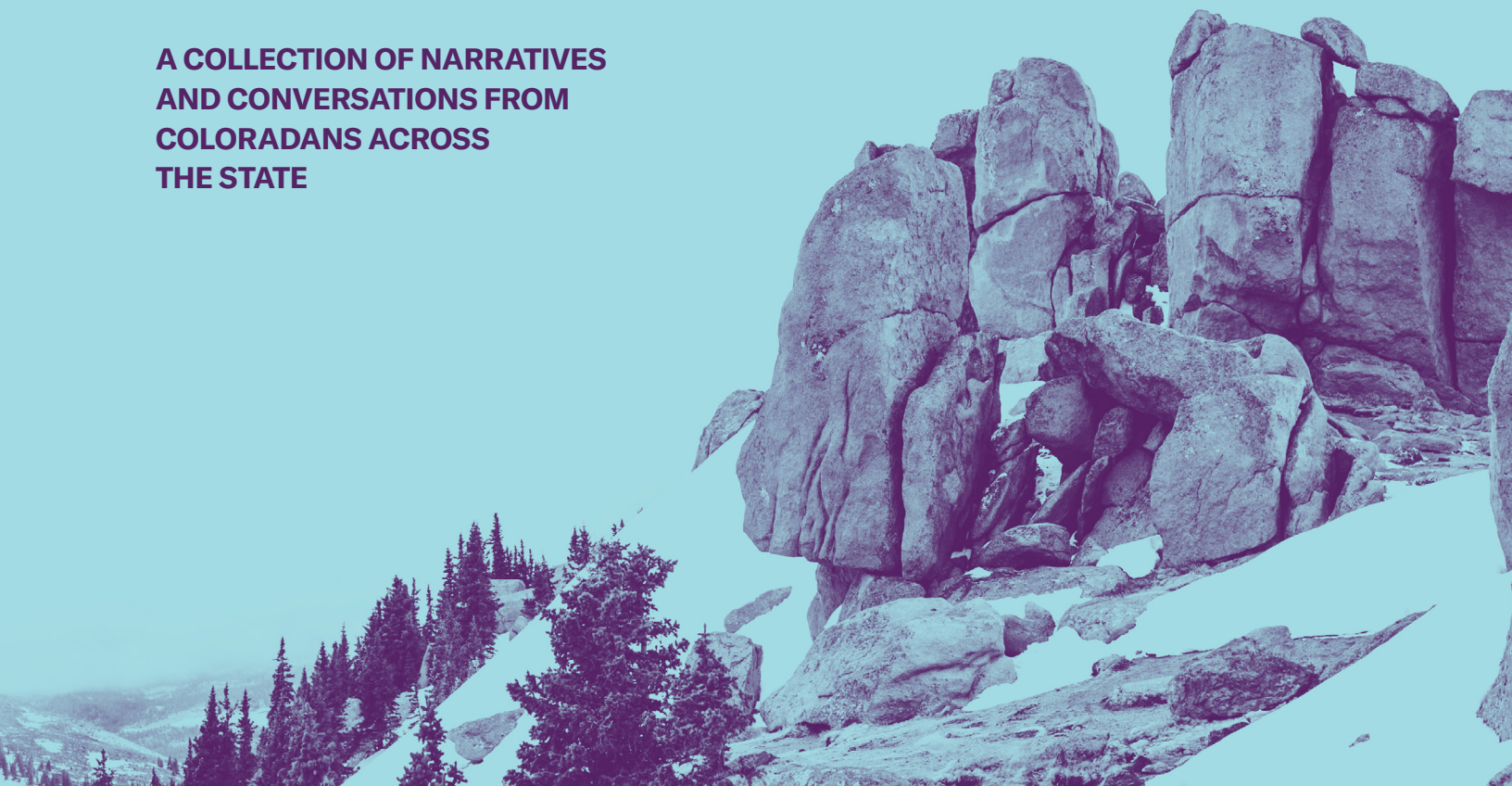


ACLU OF COLORADO REPORT

EXPANDING THE TABLE FOR JUSTICE

A COLLECTION OF NARRATIVES
AND CONVERSATIONS FROM
COLORADANS ACROSS
THE STATE



ACLU Colorado

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FROM COLORADANS ACROSS THE STATE**

ACLU
Colorado

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Executive Summary & Methodology

Executive Summary

Sustainable and systemic social justice depends on all Colorado communities having equitable representation. Only when every person has a seat at the table will we have the input necessary for effective action to secure civil liberties for all. This qualitative data can only be provided by those with the lived experience of having their civil liberties routinely violated. Thus, it is essential that we create a vehicle for Coloradans to determine the issues that need to be addressed in their communities. To this end, the American Civil Liberties Union of Colorado (ACLU of Colorado) launched Expanding the Table for Justice (ETFJ) in order to build partnerships and find resolutions.

This listening session report is presented as a narrative of our listening tour with Colorado communities that ACLU of Colorado recognizes as stakeholders in our work. This marks a new practice in our multipronged approach to inform our commitment to social justice in Colorado.

From June 2021 to June 2022, ACLU of Colorado staff facilitated 38 listening sessions with 383 attendees from the Denver metro, Greeley, Colorado Springs, Pueblo, Aurora, Durango, Paonia and Northglenn regions. Each session sought to answer two questions: what issues are happening in your community, and what changes do you want to see?

Throughout the nearly year-long listening tour, common themes emerged: racial justice, reproductive rights, immigrants' rights, housing security, criminal legal reform, voting rights, disability rights, gender justice, privacy, economic justice, and LGBTQ+ rights.

Each community throughout the state additionally

expressed unique concerns. In Pueblo, primary concerns included racism and transphobia in school settings and barriers to affordable housing and employment that prevented justice-impacted people's reintegration into their communities. In Aurora, people expressed the need for proportional ethnic representation in Aurora schools – Black and Brown communities there want more school board members, administration, and school staff who share similar life experiences as them. Spanish-speaking parents need Spanish-speaking staff to better communicate with them. Durango and Paonia residents echoed concerns of white supremacy and racism in the community, along with a lack of respect for LGBTQ+ individuals. In Greeley, an agricultural community, participants told us police functioned as extensions of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), contrary to their legal mandate. In every community, we heard that institutions were failing to protect the rights of Colorado residents. These failures were especially experienced by Black, Indigenous, and Latinx communities. Due to their vulnerability, attendees who feared retaliation for reporting abusive landlords, conflicts with local authorities, or being reported to ICE maintained their anonymity or were represented by advocacy groups.

Despite the injustices they have experienced, participants in our conversations were not without hope. Community participants envision a near-term future that includes decent and affordable housing, employment that provides a living wage, laws that protect LGBTQ+ rights and equal justice for all. Equal justice for our participants included fair treatment of immigrant communities and protection for people experiencing mental illness when

they encounter law enforcement. Notably, equal and fair access to resources and opportunities for Black, Latinx, and Indigenous people was a vision that emerged in every community. The Visions for Change section of this report summarizes these hopes and the desired support from the ACLU.

In response to these conversations, ACLU of Colorado will spend the next two months determining effective actions to address the concerns of our community stakeholders. These action items will inform our three-year strategic plan as we continue a multipronged approach to advocate for all Coloradans.

Methodology

To develop ETFJ, we first tested our conversation model by inviting individuals to attend discussions about specific topics. We then adopted a co-host model, enabling us to expand into communities across the state. As part of our conversations, all participants were informed that these findings would contribute to a listening session report to inform the future work of ACLU of Colorado. To ensure the safety and confidentiality of our participants, this report has intentionally maintained the anonymity and confidentiality of all stories shared.

Phase One: June – August 2021

We conducted 15 virtual conversations with 51 individuals, mostly from the Denver metro area. Outreach included email marketing, social media posts, and general word-of-mouth. Fifty-six percent of participants had a prior relationship with the ACLU of Colorado as supporters, former staff, board members, or partners on previous campaigns.

Attendees by region

Region	Attendees
Denver Metro	143
Colorado Springs and Pueblo	100
Durango and Paonia	67
Aurora	56
Greeley	12

Phase One attendees by topic

Topic	Attendees
Racial justice	9
Reproductive justice	6
Immigration	6
Housing/homelessness	5
Criminal legal reform	4
Voting rights	4
Disability rights	2
Gender justice	2
Multifaith	2
Privacy and technology	2
Economic justice	1
LGBTQ+	1

Attendees signed up for conversations based on pre-selected issue areas.

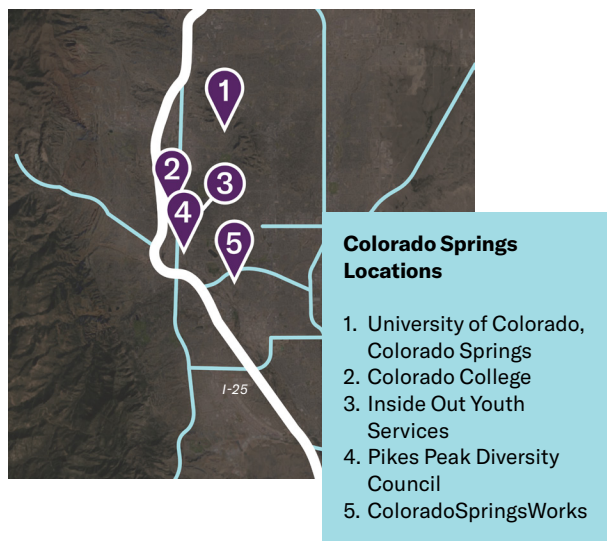
Phase Two: October 2021 – June 2022

We held 23 conversations with 332 attendees across Colorado. These discussions were co-hosted with external organizations, including direct-service nonprofits, youth groups, and public education groups. Most discussions at K-12 schools and universities were co-hosted with school employees, except for the University of Denver which was sanctioned by a student group. Outreach consisted of email marketing, social media posts, partner outreach, and general word-of-mouth. ETFJ facilitators invited each attendee to talk about one issue they have experienced in their community. Facilitators then structured the conversation around two to three themes most mentioned by attendees.

Findings by Region

Colorado Springs and Pueblo

With the help of local partners, we hosted eight conversations with approximately 100 attendees in Southern Colorado. The primary concern raised in these conversations emphasized racial justice and LGBTQ+ rights within the education system and criminal legal reform.



Racism and Transphobia in School Settings

Student wellbeing is threatened when schools fail to address racism. A mother in Colorado Springs said that one day after class, her non-binary, biracial child, who has suffered from racism and gender discrimination at school, said to her, “Mom, I don’t know if I can make it till tomorrow.”

A parent of a middle school student aired her frustration in a room of 20 people, saying, “I don’t know how we can take back public education.” Many nodded their heads in agreement. Parents noted that school boards remained silent in the face

of racism and transphobia in their school districts.

“The system is continuing to break the spirit of trans folks,” said a staff member at Inside Out Youth Services, a direct service nonprofit in Colorado Springs that provides a safe space for LGBTQ+ youth and allies. Attendees shared stories of queer students becoming the victims of bullying on school grounds while school officials did not take preventive measures to stop bullying. “It makes people hate themselves, wish they were better off somewhere else, or not here,” they said.

Students also reported a lack of support for the establishment of Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA) – a recurring theme throughout conversations in Southwest Colorado communities.

Another common theme raised by parents and students was the disproportionate disciplinary action taken against Black and Brown students. A grandmother recounted how she had been called to school by the principal during work hours for a student conflict. Upon arriving, she realized she was the only guardian called, and her granddaughter was the only student of color involved in the conflict. “It didn’t matter that she was a straight-A student. It mattered that she was Black,” she said.

In 2020, at Pueblo Central High School, a school with a 68% Latinx student population,¹ Spanish

“THE SYSTEM IS CONTINUING TO BREAK THE SPIRIT OF TRANS FOLKS.”

– Inside Out Youth Services Staff Member



ETFJ team members at the conversation with Inside Out Youth Services on May 16, 2022.

classes were discontinued, only to be replaced by an online program without a live teacher. Meanwhile, French and Italian classes were able to retain a live teacher in the predominately Latinx school.² Parents and community members described this as denying Latinx students the ability to participate in their own language and culture and, more importantly, identified this as part of the long history of targeted exclusion of their unique Spanish dialect in southern Colorado.³

Barriers to Reintegration for Justice-Impacted People

CommunityWorks, an organization whose mission is to empower individuals through employment



Attendees from ColoradoSpringsWorks sharing their experience on April 5, 2022.

opportunities, welcomed us to their Colorado Springs and Pueblo locations to hear from justice-impacted people.

Many justice-impacted attendees listed barriers to obtaining housing, including not having a credit history, having applications denied automatically, and being charged more than other applicants for a security deposit. A mother recounted her experience of only being able to rent in less-desired neighborhoods due to her criminal record. “Where does that put my children?,” she asked.

Employment inequity was another recurring issue. Richelle Gittens, State Director at CommunityWorks, said that her clients earned a lot less than people without a criminal record who worked in similar capacities.⁴ Many attendees shared that they lost access to their birth certificate or social security card during incarceration and that without these documents, securing housing and employment was nearly impossible.

“I WANT TO BE SEEN AS AN INDIVIDUAL, **NOT A CATEGORY.**”

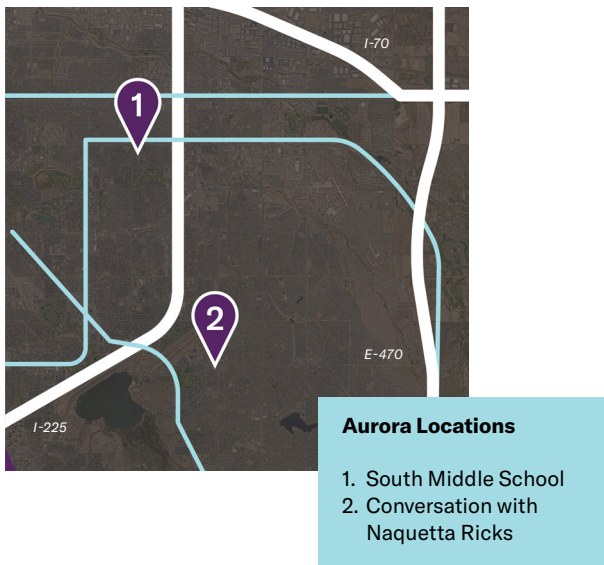
— Justice-impacted participant

Aurora

Our next stop as we continued our journey through Colorado was Aurora, where we spoke to 56 people.

Safety and Student Concerns

South Middle School serves the Del Mar Park and Hoffman Heights communities in Aurora. In January 2021, members of the Aurora School Board voted 5 to 2⁵ in favor of closing two elementary schools and phasing out two other schools, including South Middle School which will close at the end of the 2023 school year. With the impending closure of their schools, many students reported feeling disenfranchised. Additionally, students voiced a lack of support from school staff.



Students hope to create a healthy school environment with trust between students and teachers. As one student noted, “Teachers are not just teaching, they’re shaping society.”

Housing and Interactions with Law Enforcement

Another concern for many Aurora residents was interactions with law enforcement. One resident mentioned the need for mental health services when police respond to a person experiencing a mental health emergency. Under Colorado law, a person may be taken to a facility for involuntary care for up to 72 hours if deemed an “imminent danger” to themselves or others.⁶ The resident added that this was ineffective, and more training and resources are needed for community services and public safety.

Durango and Paonia

In November 2021, we traveled to the Southwest slope of Colorado to meet with community members in Delta County and the city of Durango.

White Supremacy and Racism

We met with 67 people, with a range of identities and backgrounds, from across southwest Colorado. Despite their differences, one recurring theme emerged from our conversations: A sense of increasing organized white supremacy, resulting in



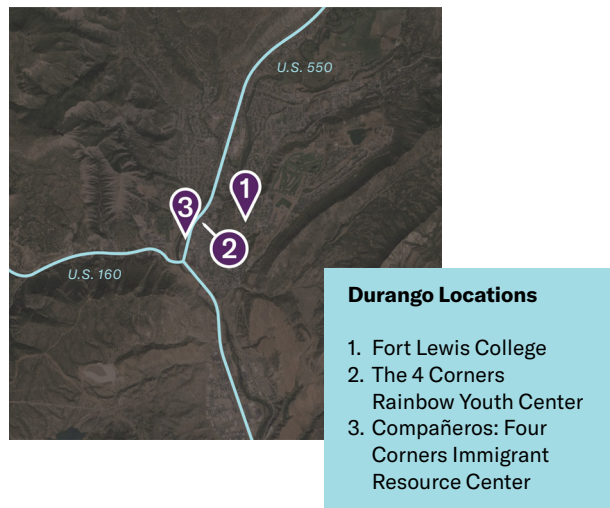
ACLU of Colorado Executive Director Deborah Richardson hosting a community conversation with Colorado State Representative Naquetta Ricks on April 9, 2022.

feeling unsafe at school, work, and in other community environments.

Students reported racism perpetuated by teachers, fellow students, public businesses, and law enforcement.

LGBTQ+ Discrimination

Students in Southwest Colorado reported that LGBTQ+ students experienced hostility at school in their attempts to unite as a community and express themselves freely. Gay Straight Alliances (GSA) are often powerful ways of creating inclusive environments and safe spaces for LGBTQ+ students, yet



students said they often face pushback from hostile school officials or even outright bans.

Laws have been set up to protect students' rights to form a GSA. According to the Federal Equal Access Act (1984), if a public school permits non-curricular clubs, then it must allow students to form a GSA.⁷ The school must treat a GSA the same as it does other non-curricular clubs.

To add to the hostility, multiple students in Southwest Colorado reported that some teachers do not use students' preferred pronouns and have deadnamed them, meaning they were called by a name they no longer use, in class. "It is embarrassing," said one LGBTQ+ student in Durango.

In addition to the Colorado Anti-Discrimination Act of 2008, which prohibits gender-based discrimination in places of public accommodations,⁸ the State of Colorado Civil Rights Commission's Rules and Regulations states, "All [public] covered entities shall allow individuals the proper use of gender-segregated facilities that are consistent with their gender identity. Gender-segregated facilities include but are not limited to restrooms, locker rooms, dressing rooms and dormitories." In addition, the Commission holds that prohibited harassment on the basis of sexual orientation includes "deliberately misusing an individual's preferred name, form of address, or gender-related pronouns."⁹



ACLU of Colorado Field Organizer, Julian Camera, talks to LGBTQ+ youth about their civil right protections at school on November 15, 2021.

"I WAS CALLED THE N WORD
AND WHEN I REPORTED IT
TO THE PRINCIPAL, HE
GASLIT ME AND TOLD
ME IT WASN'T THAT
BIG OF A DEAL."

— Student

Community Engagement

Residents who joined the conversations in Durango felt that the City Council is disengaged from the community. "Marginalized communities are losing confidence in democracy," said one community member.

In Delta County, there were multiple reports of an "old boy's network" among elected officials. Residents who participated in the tour felt their civic participation was discouraged if they were not associated with the current cabinet of elected officials. Community members reported that the school board did not give adequate notice to the public about a vote on the teaching of comprehensive sexual education.¹⁰

Undocumented Immigrant Safety

Undocumented immigrants in Southwest Colorado reported feeling unsafe at work, school, and in their housing. Many said they felt vulnerable to the power landlords have over them. Participants said that one landlord allegedly imposed extra charges on families that use diapers, while others refused to repair properties in compliance with the 2008 Warranty of Habitability.¹¹ It was a common concern in the conversation that undocumented tenants feel the need to endure unreasonable treatment for fear that landlords may contact ICE if they protest.

Housing Insecurity Among Students

In our conversation with Fort Lewis College students, we heard many concerns about housing



Residents gather on November 15, 2021 to discuss the barriers they face in Delta County, Colorado.

insecurity in the city of Durango that is impacting students on campus. From 2021 to 2022, rent prices in Durango and surrounding areas increased substantially.¹² Several students said that they resorted to living in their cars. One student said they snuck into the campus gym to sleep one night.

We reached out to Fort Lewis College about students' concerns and a spokeswoman said the college shares the same concerns. In a statement, Fort Lewis College's communications strategist Lauren Pope said, "The rapid rise in housing costs and the reduced supply of rental units available to students in Durango is a great concern for Fort Lewis College – because of expensive and limited off-campus housing options, continuing student housing applications increased by 35% over last year."

In response to the housing crisis, Pope says Fort Lewis College has partnered with local apartment complexes and hotels to accommodate housing for every student that requested it for the upcoming semester. It is also looking at long-term solutions for students and staff like developing a mortgage down payment assistance program, increasing the supply of on-campus housing, and has also dedicated \$1 million to support and staff in obtaining homeownership in the area.¹³¹⁴

Another Fort Lewis student said that the lack of housing is causing commuting problems for some

Indigenous students. 41% of students who attend Fort Lewis College are Indigenous.¹⁵ Some of the students live on reservations over an hour away, making the commute to school difficult, if not impossible. That student said that at the time they felt, "there was not infrastructure and resources in place to support indigenous students." One media report shows Fort Lewis College has acknowledged its troubled history with Indigenous communities in its region; one that it is working to improve.¹⁶

Comprehensive Sex Education

In 2019, Colorado enacted Comprehensive Human Sexuality Education, which requires public schools to teach comprehensive sexual education (sex-ed) if they choose to teach sex-ed to students. Comprehensive sex-ed includes healthy consent, LGBTQ+ health needs, and avoiding an emphasis on abstinence-only as a core value of intimate relationships.¹⁷

Nevertheless, students reported that schools in Southwest Colorado continue to push for abstinence-only sex-ed and have been excluding the needs of LGBTQ+ students. When students attended a school board meeting to advocate for the enforcement of comprehensive sex-ed, they were faced with counterprotests organized by local churches.¹⁸

Greeley

In June 2022, we traveled to Evans for a conversation with 12 attendees co-hosted by the Immigrant and Refugee Center of Northern Colorado (IRC NoCO).

Serving a diverse population of immigrant, undocumented, and refugee communities, IRC NoCO assists people as they navigate the immigration process. In Evans, IRC NoCO hosted a conversation to share the challenges they experience throughout northern Colorado. Their top concerns included immigration system resources, policing and ICE, housing, healthcare, schools and local power in politics.

Attendees advocating for the rights and resources for U.S. immigrants detailed the numerous barriers



**“IT’S LIKE SCREAMING IN
SILENCE.”**

— Advocate and staff member at IRC NoCO

that exist for undocumented, immigrant, and refugee communities, and what they described as the lack of political will to address these barriers. Advocates and undocumented communities continue to grapple with a fundamentally broken immigration system.

They described the bureaucratic frustrations and the arduous and confusing legal process that immigrants are forced to endure to obtain citizenship or permanent resident visas. One attendee detailed a community member’s citizenship interview. They said United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) officers humiliated this person by mocking their inability to speak English fluently; the experience was so hurtful that this person doubted whether they should continue with the process.

Advocates detailed the multiple barriers undocumented communities face in finding adequate housing in Northern Colorado. In the rental application process, landlords and property managers often require a social security number, making it difficult to find housing. “Do people need to have a social security [number] for housing? It’s a basic human need,” one participant said.

Advocates at IRC NoCO have raised these concerns with elected officials. Though the officials were sympathetic to concerns, they asked for additional legal documentation of these issues — something many undocumented communities

**“DO PEOPLE NEED TO HAVE A
SOCIAL SECURITY [NUMBER]
FOR HOUSING? IT’S A BASIC
HUMAN NEED.”**

— IRC NoCO conversation participant

lacked. Advocates bemoaned the disconnect between limits of legal recourse and the extralegal living arrangements of undocumented communities. Despite recent laws intended to protect tenants and immigrants,¹⁹ advocates reported these laws were not being followed. Advocates described multiple families crammed into a single basement, replete with insects, water leaks, and rodents. In the face of these challenges, a conversation attendee admitted, “people give up on fighting for justice.”

Language Barriers

In Greeley-Evans School District 6, there is a reported disconnect between the languages spoken by parents and the language resources available at school, making it difficult for some students to take full advantage of their education. Many federal laws, including the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974,²⁰ require school districts to provide equal opportunities to learn and take action to overcome barriers to students’ equal participation, including providing adequate language services. Conversation participants feel that more accessible language resources, such as adding Spanish-speaking staff, would help improve student engagement and success.

Denver Metro

We held 21 conversations in the Denver Metro area with 143 attendees. The most pressing issues mentioned were education, housing security, homelessness, and criminal legal reform.

Education

Parents in Sheridan School District No. 2 described a disconnect between community decision-makers and the community at large. They said they are heavily involved in community affairs yet experience institutional barriers within the school district. Parents said they feel school board members make consequential decisions on school affairs, despite a lack of in-person contact with students and added that disconnect is reflected in district policies. For example, parents felt language translation services were under-resourced, making



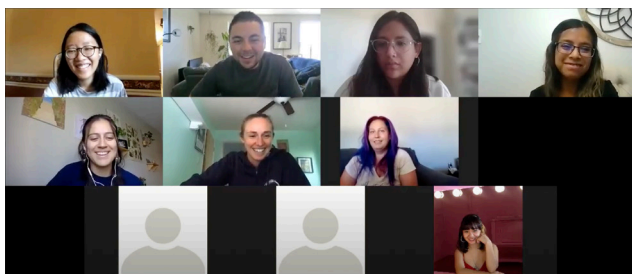
Denver Metro Conversations

1. Northglenn High School
2. Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network (RMIAN)
3. Denver Homeless Out Loud
4. Metropolitan State University of Denver
5. The Empowerment Program
6. University of Denver – Black Community Experience
7. Sheridan Rising Together for Equity – Vecinos en Sheridan

it difficult for them to help their children navigate school.

Students at the University of Denver (DU) reported a lack of support for Black and Brown students after they were admitted to the university. Participants felt that DU failed to implement institutional policies to support students of color. Students of color described taking diversity and equity courses with outdated materials, a white-centric curriculum, and having unqualified and unprepared instructors. They also reported an underrepresentation of Black faculty at the college and a campus climate that dilutes discourse about racism.²¹

Faculty at Metropolitan State University Denver (MSU) talked about the diversity of the student body; 57.7% of fall 2021 undergraduates were first-generation college students and 50.3% were students of color.²² MSU students felt faculty did not reflect the student body and commented on the need to hire additional Black and Brown staff.



ETFJ staff members joining Sheridan Rising for a virtual conversation on October 5, 2021.

We reached out to MSU for comment and MSU Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion Michael Benitez, Jr., Ph.D., said MSU maintains one of the most diverse faculties in Colorado. “MSU Denver employs the highest percentage of tenured/tenure-track faculty members of color (26.9%) among four-year public institutions in the state and has the third-highest percentage of Latinx faculty members (9%) and the highest percentage of Black faculty members (4%),” said Benitez.

“STUDENTS THRIVE WHEN THEY HAVE TEACHERS WHO LOOK LIKE THEM.”

– Student participant at MSU conversation

MSU Students also discussed barriers in meeting their accessibility needs.²³ For example, students described not being provided with closed captioning or optimized resources for screen readers. They also expressed a need to emphasize the intersectionality of the identities of people with disabilities.

Benitez’s statement also addressed these concerns. “MSU Denver’s Access Center provides a suite of student-disability support services,” said Benitez. “The center consistently approves closed-captioning accommodation, directing faculty members to exclusively provide auditory media that is closed-captioned. MSU Denver encourages students to review the tools available at the Access Center and speak with staff members regarding special accommodation needs.”

Housing and Homelessness

Skyrocketing rents and property prices²⁴ were mentioned in almost all conversations. Already marginalized communities such as unhoused residents, individuals with low income, justice-impacted people, Black, Brown, and Indigenous people described being disproportionately impacted by the rising cost of living.

“No matter what we do, we have nowhere near the income for a standard apartment,” said an attendee who was laid off during the height of the pandemic and subsequently lost his apartment. He currently

“IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO GET
BACK TO LIFE WHEN WE HAVE
NO STABILITY IN LIFE.”

—Unhoused Denver resident

camps near downtown Denver. His situation was not unique; we spoke to many others at the encampment who lost their jobs and housing amidst the pandemic, leaving them with no option but to live on the streets.

“It is impossible to get back to life when we have no stability in life,” said an unhoused resident who lost her identity documents and housing application materials during one of the many sweeps she has experienced.²⁵ Many attendees noted that sweeps occurred much more frequently at the encampment near Coors Field when baseball season starts.²⁶

“We are valued less than baseball fans,” they said.

Attendees from The Empowerment Program, which provides short-term housing for women with criminal records, spoke on the lack of housing support for individuals recently released from jails and prisons. “With a felony record and no credit history, no one would rent to me. I would have been homeless if I couldn’t live here,” said a program attendee. “Now I have a place to live and a job.”

When asked about the availability of shelters, attendees shared their experiences, including limited information on shelters; being turned away when unintentionally arriving at the wrong time or shelters are full; not meeting the living requirements; stringent restrictions imposed by shelters leading people to sleep on streets; and women, transgender people, and domestic violence survivors not feeling safe living in shelters.

Criminal Legal Reform

ACLU of Colorado has been at the forefront of championing criminal legal reform. In our conversations with local activists, community members, and organizations we focused on listening.

Our conversations centered around structural barriers justice-impacted people face in their everyday lives, particularly after their release from

jail or prison. Justice-impacted people desired to reintegrate into the community yet continue to face barriers in doing so.

During our conversation with Denver Homeless Out Loud and the encampment located at Champa and 22nd Street, our conversation touched on the intersection of housing and the criminal legal system. Numerous encampment residents had been previously incarcerated and discussed the lack of support they received after their release. They felt law enforcement officials did not treat their personal property with respect.²⁷ They also felt law enforcement and the city did not fully understand the consequences of enforcement actions that impact their sleep, safety, security, finances, and overall wellbeing.²⁸



Visions for Change and Our Response

With each conversation, we invited attendees to share ideas on how to improve their communities. This section is a compilation of the suggestions, solutions, and civic engagement strategies proposed by community members.

Education

Attendees expressed a strong desire for school districts to develop more robust protocols for language translation services. In times of crisis, parents, especially ESL parents, depend on school districts to obtain critical information. This demonstrates the need for districts to have efficient language translation systems in place.

The composition of school boards and school staff should be reflective of the racial and ethnic identity of the student body and community. This would cultivate a welcoming environment for students and parents.

Accountability is the first step in shaping inclusive school cultures. Attendees asked for better enforcement of anti-discrimination laws and regulations on school grounds, such as complying with the comprehensive sexual health education requirements established under HB19-1032 and support of Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs).

Criminal Legal Reform

Reintegration

Community members point toward the reintegration of justice-impacted individuals as a critical component of criminal legal reform. Across multiple regions and discussions, participants described barriers to obtaining employment, housing, civic

engagement, and education with a criminal record. More must be done to ensure justice-impacted individuals are not solely defined by their past and must be given the opportunity to see themselves as contributors to their communities.

Participants envisioned justice-impacted individuals as equal contributors in their communities. Justice-impacted individuals described being restricted to housing in neighborhoods with lack of public and private investment, thus hindering opportunities for them, their families, and their futures. Ideally, these individuals would have the freedom to live in the city and neighborhood of their choosing.

After spending months, years, or decades incarcerated, justice-impacted individuals struggle to navigate housing bureaucracy. Even when they can access affordable housing, a lack of credit history, for example, prevents many from being approved for housing. Additional community resources must be allocated to bridge these resource gaps.

Regarding employment, numerous community members and advocates demanded that justice-impacted workers earn an equal living wage, whereby they could build a new life after serving their time.

A Restorative Approach to Public Safety

While some participants expressed anxiety around homelessness, substance use fatalities and crime, they doubted the effectiveness of punishment-based approaches to resolve these issues. Some participants were frustrated with the ineffectiveness of police. Others recounted the persistent trauma of policing and barriers that follow involvement with the justice system. The stories and perspectives orbited around a single point: the

current punitive approach towards public safety does not work.

Pilot programs such as Support Team Assisted Response (STAR) in Denver have proven effective in addressing homelessness, mental health crises, and opioid overdoses without involving law enforcement.²⁹ Participants across the state wanted an expansion of these services to address homelessness, mental health crises, and substance use disorders.

Communities throughout the state have substance use treatment centers as alternatives to policing and incarceration. However, overworked staff, inadequate facilities, and long wait times for treatment hinder their effectiveness. Additional resources and accountability must be put in place to ensure that service providers are able to meet the needs of the community.

Community Empowerment

Community empowerment is a crucial part of our collective work to create change. Important ways to empower our communities include ensuring their concerns are heard and keeping our elected officials accountable to address their constituents' concerns. Public officials in Pueblo, who participated in our conversations, expressed the desire to reflect the will of their constituents. An informed and invested constituency creates a path to participation in the electoral process, resulting in better representation for the many rural areas of Colorado.

Housing

Access to affordable housing was an issue brought up in every conversation on the ETFJ tour. Primary concerns reported by participants included the price of rent, application and income requirements, zoning laws, camping bans, and how Denver's rapid development has impacted people in every region of Colorado. Many people asserted that housing should be a human right.

Participants who were justice-impacted envisioned a state where rental application requirements do not impact a person's ability to find a home. When talking about solutions, participants referenced the

need for rent control and Denver's Safe Outdoor Spaces – a program created in 2020 for people experiencing homelessness. Safe Outdoor Spaces are “healthy, secure, staffed, resource and service-rich environments that provide an outdoor, individualized sheltering option for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in Denver.”³⁰ Community members said in addition to Safe Outdoor Spaces, they would like a significant increase in city and state resources dedicated to mental health services to help prevent homelessness.

Our Response

These listening sessions significantly informed how the ACLU of Colorado will approach its work going forward. How our staff evaluates the needs of Colorado's communities will be impacted by virtue of what we heard and the relationships we formed during our statewide sessions. In addition, the ACLU of Colorado is committed to three actionable responses to ensure that ETFJ partners' needs, and priorities are meaningfully integrated into the ACLU's long-term work:

- 1. Choosing strategic priorities that match the needs of ETFJ partners.** The ACLU of Colorado is currently concluding a year-long strategic planning process, which includes the selection of several major multi-year issue priorities. Throughout this process, ACLU of Colorado has continuously brought ETFJ feedback into this decision-making process. As a result, the ACLU of Colorado will be making significant shifts in its policy priorities to focus on areas of importance to ETFJ participants. That will position the ACLU to work more closely in collaboration with these communities to address their areas of concern.
- 2. Overhauling our public education and Know Your Rights programs to focus on youth.** ETFJ partners made clear there is a need for issue and skills-based training for young people who want to be involved in the fight for civil rights and civil liberties, and a place for like-minded young people to gather

and network. In response to what we heard across the state, the ACLU has begun the process of reimagining its public education and Know Your Rights programs to make sure that we are reaching young people wherever they are across the state. This may include the formation of ACLU clubs or yearly convenings dedicated specifically to young people.

- 3. Creating the next evolution of Expanding the Table for Justice.** Finally, it is clear there is an overwhelming need to strengthen the networks between and among communities across the state who are facing systemic civil rights and civil liberties violations. Following the publication of this report, the ACLU of Colorado will be asking ETFJ partners what they see as the most urgent needs and the most exciting possibilities for making ETFJ a permanent vehicle for empowering and connecting communities across the state.

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Endnotes

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- 5 Yesenia Robles, *Aurora Board Approves Closing Two Elementary Schools as Enrollment Changes*, COLORADO CHALKBEAT (Jan. 19, 2021), <https://co.chalkbeat.org/2021/1/19/22240056/aurora-closing-two-elementary-schools-enrollment-changes>.
- 6 See C.R.S. § 27-65-105(1)(a)(I), which states: "When any person appears to have a mental illness and, as a result of such mental illness, appears to be an imminent danger to others or to himself or herself or appears to be gravely disabled, then a person specified in subparagraph (II) of this paragraph (a) . . . may take the person into custody, or cause the person to be taken into custody, and placed in a facility designated or approved by the executive director for a seventy-two-hour treatment and evaluation."
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- 9 3 C.C.R. § 708-1-81.6(A)(4).
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- 18 Nancy Lofholm, "Everyone is being crazy": *Conservative Delta County erupts over an effort to teach sexual education*, THE COLORADO SUN (May 28, 2021), <https://coloradosun.com/2021/05/28/sex-education-delta-colorado-gay-pride-transgender/>.
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Cyclical, and Growing, DENVERITE (Jul. 2, 2021), <https://denverite.com/2021/07/02/data-on-denvers-homeless-sweeps-show-theyre-cyclical-and-growing/>. Champa and 22nd is located in the “triangle area” where most sweeps happened.

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