To: Colorado State Legislators  
Subject: Colorado Sustainable Housing Coalition support for Senate Bill 23-213 with amendments on equity and environment  
Date: April 28, 2023

Dear Colorado Legislators,

The signatories below, members of the Colorado Sustainable Housing Coalition, support a strengthened version of Senate Bill 23-213 that:

- Restores minimum statewide standards for zoning.
- Continues to build upon the equity components around affordability and anti-displacement.

Our coalition of housing, environmental, transportation, affordable housing, disability rights, business, and community justice groups was formed last summer and members have been working closely with legislators and the Polis administration to develop policy concepts and bill language for SB23-213.

Colorado’s current land use and housing policies are driving up the cost of housing and transportation, putting significant financial stress on households, limiting access to opportunity and jobs, and intensifying our water supply and climate challenges. This story is not unique to Colorado and exclusionary zoning has produced similar results in many other growing states. By now it’s clear that entirely-local policy responses fail to address the problem, which is why state legislatures in Montana, Utah, Florida, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Oregon, Washington, and California have all taken steps to create minimum standards for housing production.

Our legislature has crafted minimum standards in other policy areas such as wages, affordable health care, environmental regulations, and building codes. Housing – one of our most pressing crises – deserves the same amount of attention and meaningful state policy. Why wait for our housing, transportation, environment, and water supply issues to get as extreme as they have in states like California before we decide to take action? How much worse does the crisis have to get?

While we are grateful for the communities that have been proactive about affordable housing, it’s also clear that they cannot solve this crisis on their own. As long as Colorado maintains the status quo, we will continue to experience an undersupply of housing, unfettered sprawl, rising housing costs, and involuntary displacement, particularly in our most vulnerable communities. We will continue to deny affordable housing opportunities for nurses, teachers, care workers, service industry workers, firefighters, EMTs, farmworkers, bus drivers, and childcare providers in the communities they serve.

Colorado needs state action on zoning reform because local governments are consistently undermined in their attempts to increase housing capacity. In just the last year, cities like Fort Collins, Colorado Springs, Glenwood Springs, and Englewood have all tried to legalize multifamily housing and affordable housing to support local goals, only to be obstructed by a small but vocal minority of wealthy homeowners fighting to preserve exclusionary zoning. To address this political bottleneck, SB23-213 requires cities to update local zoning regulations to allow more affordable housing options near jobs and transit. The legislation strikes a good balance, giving local governments plenty of flexibility to customize their
regulations and add housing capacity where it makes the most sense for their communities. It’s important to us that local governments maintain the ability to plan, zone, set design standards, and approve projects through meaningful community engagement, and we believe this bill creates more opportunities for community members and organizations to advocate for strong and equitable local regulations.

We also recognize that we cannot solve the housing affordability crisis with upzoning alone; we also need stronger affordability and displacement guardrails to serve low-income families and protect existing neighborhoods from involuntary displacement. We need a “both/and” approach with more market-rate housing production and more resources, tools, and requirements to expand affordable housing opportunities.

The amendments adopted by the Senate Committee on Local Government and Housing on April 18th, significantly watered down the minimum state standards, but also improved the equity provisions in the bill. We would like to see further amendments to add affordability strategies and requirements, list out the displacement mitigation menu strategies, require cities to implement those strategies before rezoning their communities, and ensure that new development preserves equal or greater affordability than what was there before. We would also like to see further amendments to strengthen the sprawl prevention sections of the bill and directly align the state’s permitting and funding decisions with more efficient and climate-friendly land use that encourages future growth near jobs, schools, grocery stores, and other key destinations.

Our coalition is working hard to ensure SB23-213 delivers on housing affordability and environmental sustainability, and we believe the bill was on the right track, following the amendments on April 18. We thank you for taking up these critical housing affordability, and climate issues, and urge you to take bold action. Housing affordability is a basic need and the state legislature’s failure to act will continue to harm residents, the environment, and the economy. Our communities cannot wait.

We urge you to support a strengthened version of Senate Bill 23-213 that retains statewide standards for zoning and continues to build upon the equity components around affordability and anti-displacement.

Thank you for your work to make Colorado a better place.

Sincerely,

Bedrooms Are For People
Boulder Progressives
Colorado Chapter of the American Planning Association (APA Colorado)
Colorado Sierra Club
Conservation Colorado
Denver Streets Partnership
E2 | Environmental Entrepreneurs
EarthJustice
East County Housing Opportunity Coalition (ECHO)
Good Business Colorado
Healthy Air and Water Colorado
League of Women Voters of Colorado
More Mobility
Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)
Neighborhood Development Collaborative
Protégete
Southwest Energy Efficiency Project (SWEEP)
The Nature Conservancy
Thrive Economics
YIMBY Denver
YIMBY Fort Collins