

December 19, 2024

Stewart Vanderwilt
President & CEO
Colorado Public Radio

Dear Mr. Vanderwilt,

We, the undersigned, are outraged by the recent series of articles written by reporter Ben Markus and published by Colorado Public Radio (CPR) under the title "Cash for Caring." This series presents an inaccurate, unbalanced, and unfairly negative portrayal of the Caring for Denver Foundation (CFD)'s grantmaking, stewardship of public funds, and positive impact from community investments—even in its early years.

Additionally, this stigmatizing, racially-biased reporting falsely and incompletely characterizes several community-based grantees, many of which are led by and serve people of color. It does not recognize their leadership, qualifications, or integrity—perpetuating harmful narratives.

While we recognize the importance of transparency and accountability in public funding, we are deeply troubled by the report's tone and focus, which unfairly maligns grassroots organizations without acknowledging their critical role in addressing systemic inequities in mental health and substance abuse care.

Moreover, the implication that funding organizations led by people of color undermines the integrity of mental health services is deeply problematic. Communities of color have the right to design and deliver services that reflect their lived realities. CFD's commitment to funding such organizations represents meaningful progress toward correcting long-standing disparities. In framing this work as "unlicensed" or "inexperienced," CPR made the choice not to highlight the innovative, community-driven approaches these organizations are implementing to address mental health and addiction crises.

These articles further misrepresent and disregard the qualifications of people with lived experience in the recovery field, perpetuating the misunderstanding that all behavioral health services must be delivered by licensed clinicians. By definition, Peer Support Professionals—including recovery coaches, family advocates, and peer mentors—offer lived experience and meet rigorous qualifications and training requirements without requiring clinical licensure. CPR repeatedly devalues and demeans them despite peer support being a recognized best practice by SAMHSA and the Denver Department of Public Health & Environment. The contribution of peers deserves to be uplifted, not diminished.

At the Denver City Council meeting on December 9th, At-Large Councilmember Sarah Parady addressed the issue: *"I want to say very directly that I found [CPR's coverage] incomplete and honestly irresponsible. I really hesitate to criticize the press because they often do an excellent job, and they often shed light on things that we need to hear up on this dais. But with this particular reporting, I could give many examples of ways in which it was skewed and inaccurate."*

We agree. We believe CPR has ruptured community trust by spreading misinformation and false narratives. We demand that CPR correct or retract of this irresponsible reporting and take immediate, meaningful steps to repair the harm caused to CFD and the community organizations that CPR has unfairly maligned.

Sincerely,

Active Collective Trauma Community Summit
Apprentice of Peace Youth Organization
Bring Our Neighbors Home
Colorado Black Women for Political Action
Colorado Circles of Change
Colorado Civic Engagement Roundtable
Colorado Common Cause
Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition
Colorado Drug Policy Coalition
Colorado Freedom Fund
Colorado Mental Wellness Network
Colorado Providers Association
Crisalisa, Inc.
The Crowley Foundation
Embark Peer Coach Academy
Empowerment Program
EYE for Prevention / StrongerWithout
From the Heart Foundation
Fully Liberated Youth
Harm Reduction Action Center
Hazelbrook Recovery
Homies Unidos
Hope Homes Sober Living
It Takes A Village
Latino Coalition for Community Leadership
Legacy Foundation for Family and Youth Development
Life-Line Colorado
Make A Chess Move
Maxted Law
ParadigmONE
ProgressNow Colorado Education
Promotores de Esperanza
Public Health for Public Safety
Realness Project
Reciprocity Collective
Seasoned with Grace Unboxed
Second Chance Center
Soul2Soul Sisters
Spero Justice Center
Struggle of Love Foundation
Task Force for Reimagining Policing and Public Safety
The Reentry Initiative
The Road Called Strate
Therapist of Color Collective
Transforming Justice Project
Transforming Our Communities Alliance
Tribe Recovery Homes
Underdog Alliance
Wellpower
Women Uprising

