DESTINATION FREEDOM & DESTINTION FREEDOM MEDIA GROUP
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A Cage Is Not a Cure

Why Destination Freedom Opposes Proposition 132

Facing a fentanyl crisis, Colorado is being asked to spend nearly $566 million building and filling prison beds while funding treatment at zero. We have seen this before. It did not work.

By Malik & Gale Washington



Fentanyl pills are displayed at a Drug Enforcement Administration research laboratory on April 29, 2025, in Northern Virginia. (AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein, file)

Photo credit: https://coloradosun.com/2026/10/02/proposition-132-explained-colorado-fentanyl/

Coloradans will vote on Proposition 132 on November 3, and we want to be direct about where we stand — and why.

We are not minimizing the fentanyl crisis. It is tearing Colorado families apart — and it is locking away people whose real problem is an illness, not a crime. We know the fear that drives this ballot measure, and we do not dismiss it.

But fear is not a policy. And a cage is not a cure.

What Proposition 132 actually does

The measure is simple in structure and extreme in effect. According to the state's own nonpartisan analysis — the Blue Book mailed to every Colorado household — a yes vote makes possession of any amount of fentanyl a felony and imposes a mandatory 8-to-32-year prison sentence for distributing any amount, eliminating the tiered penalties that currently distinguish a large-scale trafficker from an 18-year-old who shares a single pill. Judges lose discretion. Mitigating circumstances are off the table. The

measure even removes the reduced-penalty protection for people who report an overdose and stay until help arrives.

That last provision should stop every Coloradan cold. The Blue Book confirms that Proposition 132 "eliminates the possibility for reduced penalties in 'Good Samaritan' cases." In practice, that means a person standing over a friend who is turning blue will have to weigh calling 911 against a possible decade in prison.

The money: the state priced the staff and left out the buildings

Here is where the arithmetic gets uncomfortable, because Colorado does not currently have the beds to hold the people this measure would imprison.

The Blue Book estimates the measure drives total state spending up by **$68.2 million by year five** for courts, public defenders, and prisons. Then, in the very next line, it acknowledges the consequence it does not price: *"due to the estimated increase in the future prison population, the state may need to construct or contract for additional prison space."*

That is the sentence that should be in bold on the ballot. The state has told voters what it will cost to staff the system and left the buildings blank.

Former State Senator Pete Lee and former State Representative Shane Sandridge, writing from opposite parties, priced that blank. Put the two pieces together:

- **Roughly $142 million a year** in added prison and parole costs by year five, to house and supervise approximately 900 additional people incarcerated each year.
- **Up to $422.5 million** in capital costs, per the Legislative Council's own fiscal impact statement, if the General Assembly builds enough state prison beds to hold the full increase in the prison population.

That sums to **$566 million over five years**. It is not an advocacy group's guess — it is the state's operating estimate plus the state's own construction estimate, read together, because the Blue Book reports the first and defers the second.

And because Colorado's jails already run at or near capacity, private prison operators would be the practical beneficiary of much of that construction and housing money.

Table 1: What Proposition 132 costs

Cost component	Amount
Added state operating costs (courts, public defenders, prisons), year five	$68.2 million
Added prison and parole costs, per year by year five	~$142 million
Capital construction, if the beds are actually built	Up to $422.5 million
Five-year total, including construction	**~$566 million**
Cost per new prison cell	~$413,000
Cost per person incarcerated, per year	~$68,000
Treatment funding designated in the measure	**$0**

Which brings us to the part that should end the argument. The Blue Book states plainly that the measure "does not specify a funding source" for any of these costs, and that they are assumed to come from the General Fund. Colorado must balance its budget. So the $566 million comes out of the same pot that pays for health care, K-12 education, and higher education.

If you review the 2026 Fiscal Impact Statement, the funding source is here:

"Types of impacts. The measure is projected to affect the following areas:

"• State Revenue • State Expenditures • TABOR Refunds • Local Government

"Disclaimer: This fiscal impact statement has been prepared for a statewide ballot measure appearing at the 2026 statewide election. Any appropriations required to implement this measure will be addressed through the annual or supplemental budget process if this measure is approved by voters. For more information about this measure, please see the ballot information booklet."

We would be building prisons for people who need treatment and paying for them by cutting the treatment system.

The part that should worry everyone

A Colorado-specific modeling study by Dr. Joshua Barocas projects that Proposition 132 would produce **1,718 additional overdose deaths over five years — a 41.3% increase**. That is a projection, not a body count, and we should say so plainly. But it points at something we already know from lived experience: when people are afraid to call for help, afraid to seek treatment, afraid that asking for mercy will be used against them, they die.

The measure would not increase penalties on the highest-level traffickers. It would not reduce drug use or drug sales. It would not disrupt the supply. It would not expand access to treatment — and by mandating treatment in more low-level cases, it could lengthen the waitlists at the treatment centers Colorado already cannot staff.

Root, not symptom

Substance use disorder does not begin in a prison cell, and it does not end in one. It begins in untreated trauma, untreated mental illness, untreated pain, poverty, housing instability, and isolation — and it ends when a person can get care, stay in care, and come home to something better than what they left.

Shane Sandridge spent six years as an inner-city police officer during the crack epidemic and never once saw the fear of a longer sentence stop someone from getting drugs. The evidence points the same way: what works is treatment on demand, harm reduction that keeps people alive long enough to recover, and reentry support that gives people a reason to stay out.

More than 200 Colorado legislators, county commissioners, city councilors, district attorneys, sheriffs, and health care professionals have joined the opposition to Proposition 132. That coalition is bipartisan because the facts are.

Colorado, vote no on Proposition 132.
Treat the cause, not the symptom.

Sources

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4. Pete Lee and Shane Sandridge, "The Truth About Proposition 132, Fentanyl Crimes," Colorado Times Recorder, Oct. 27, 2026. coloradotimesrecorder.com
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7. Reason Foundation, "Colorado Proposition 132's proposed drastic penalties for fentanyl: A dangerous overreaction," Oct. 30, 2026. reason.org
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Destination Freedom is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit advocating for people impacted by the criminal justice system. Learn more at destination-freedom.org.



Malik Washington is an investigative journalist, U.S. Army veteran, and CEO of Destination Freedom Media Group, which he co-founded with Gale Washington. Destination Freedom Media Group, an independent nonprofit newsroom dedicated to accountability reporting at the intersection of civil rights, public integrity, disability justice, structural accountability within American institutions, and community survival.

He previously served as Editor-in-Chief of the San Francisco Bay View National Black Newspaper (2020–2021) and has been a published journalist for over 14 years.

With journalist Maura Corkery, he is co-author of The Unquiet Resignation, an investigative series on the San Francisco Unified School District produced in partnership with The Davis Vanguard.

His "Price of Being Poor" series — also produced in partnership with The Davis Vanguard — is the most sustained recent accounting of privatized public housing in San Francisco documenting the conditions at Alice Griffith Apartments that culminated in San Francisco's first-of-its-kind code-enforcement settlement of August 26, 2026.

His work focuses on government power, criminal justice, environmental justice, and the human consequences of policy decisions too often insulated from public scrutiny. Washington's reporting amplifies the voices of impacted communities while insisting on documentary evidence, transparency, and the unvarnished truth—especially when institutions demand silence.

His work appears on platforms such as Muck Rack, examining the intersection of justice, governance, and community.

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