



# THE STATE OF THE STATE 2016

From Colorado's Moms  
to Colorado's Leaders

PRESENTED BY  **MOMS FIGHT BACK**



***Moms Fight Back is a community of powerful and passionate Colorado moms who are coming together, online and in their neighborhoods, to positively tackle the most pressing issues facing our kids today.***

Welcome to our State of the State for Colorado Moms 2016!

After a year of research, we're presenting the findings of our groundbreaking report where we look at the health and safety of Colorado families and kids from a mom's perspective.

We've surveyed moms throughout Colorado via our online survey, and in person at our Colorado Moms Tour held around the state.

At Moms Fight Back, we are focusing our efforts this year on three vital issues that keep us up at night – teen sexual assault, school safety, and family court reform. Next year, we'll use the findings from the Moms's survey to lead our next efforts which will likely add a focus on substance abuse and mental health.

We address each critical topic in the context of how they impact a child's life at home, at school as well as in the legislative and judicial systems.

We're building our network of advocates to 100,000 moms strong by 2018, we have 40,000 in our community today, and our momentum is gaining!

MFB is committed to maintaining a constant pulse on the most important issues facing our families through ongoing discussions with moms, civic leaders and proactive community outreach across the state of Colorado in an effort to support families and help make positive changes in these key areas of focus.

# “The Hand That Rocks the Cradle Rules the World”

## STATE OF THE STATE

### 1. What issues related to your family and/or community keep you up at night?

Drug and alcohol addiction are the number one issues of concern for parents, with about a quarter of those responding pointing specifically to marijuana abuse. School safety and school shootings were the second most worrisome areas for parents. Interestingly, the group was more troubled about the school shooting aspect of safety, as opposed to bullying. The overall mental health of their children and teens came in at third for this group, with depression and mental stability being the overarching theme. Several moms talked about the aspect of “kids growing up too fast.”

### 2. What do you think are the three most important issues generally facing our families today?

Moms have varied answers to this question – especially given that they were being asked to name three issues as opposed to one.

One theme rang clear, however, and that is that **financial/economic issues as it relates to family are paramount**. Many moms indicated that financial woes are a real issue: from exorbitant rent, to high taxes, to low paying jobs, to excessive child care costs, and finally unaffordable health care. Other moms surveyed talked about economic issues in a less personal way, noting that poverty, a lack of jobs and an overall crumbling economy were issues that need to be confronted.

**Education** was the second most important issue to the moms surveyed. Most surveyed talked about the need for better schools and an overall higher quality of education to better prepare children and youth for the future. Some noted declining graduation rates. Others talked about the increasing costs related to education and schooling at all levels.

**Drugs and alcohol** came in third. Moms are very concerned with the drug issue, in particular, and marijuana was the most cited drug. Many surveyed mentioned the legalization of marijuana in an unfavorable way.

**Safety**, in general, was the fourth most important issue according to the moms surveyed. While a few specified school safety, most were focused on violence in their communities. A few mentioned safety in terms of national security and terrorism.

Interestingly, the fifth most agreed upon issue was **stress and an unhealthy work-life balance**. Moms are overwhelmed with managing jobs and families. Time is a new luxury, and life is constantly rushed.

### **3. What issue do you think requires the most action by our state and community leaders?**

This question cuts right to the heart of leadership. Here, moms spoke directly to what they view as the larger role of the government, elected officials and community leaders. The number one area moms feel like leadership is critical, **education**. And this concern for education was voiced in many different ways – from “quality of teaching” to “access for low income children” to “better public school options,” and “education reform” – **moms in Colorado want more engagement from state leadership**. Some moms focused on school funding, and as one put it “proper investment in education cradle to career.”

The second area of concern was **safety** (ie violence in their communities) for Coloradans. That said, about a third of this sub-group singled out school safety as being paramount of the safety issues.

The third area, where moms are looking for leadership is that of drugs, and most specifically, **marijuana**. Moms want to see leaders ensure that a strong message is being sent to their children on legality and that the legalization is regulated effectively.

#### 4. What kind of solutions would you propose to help solve this issue?

The response to this question varied greatly, which is largely the result of moms having differing ideas on what the most critical issue is in Colorado. However, consistent with drug/alcohol use being the #1 issue of concern for Colorado moms – the majority of proposed solutions centered around drug usage. The solutions ranged from:

- Amending the marijuana law to better deal with edibles; to
- Better regulating the marijuana laws; to
- Better educating citizens on edibles; to
- Repealing the law; to
- Providing drug education programs; to
- Focusing on drug treatment at mental health facilities.

The next greatest agreed-upon subset of moms believe that overall **leadership** – and bringing great people into leadership – is important to solving Colorado’s issue areas. And, to clarify, ‘leadership’ did not mean government for all moms. For some it was politicians, but for others it was the church, school, and leadership at home.

The third agreed-upon subset of moms believe that addressing **gun violence** is critical for school safety and safety issues.

#### 5. Which organizations do you think are doing the best job in trying to solve these challenging issues?

42% of those surveyed either did not respond or said, “I don’t know” or “none” in response to this question. This means that almost half of those moms surveyed do not believe that there is help to be had in addressing difficult issues like drug abuse and school safety. There seems to be a disconnect between the leadership of this state and the citizens of Colorado with respect to what the state can and should be doing to ensure the safety and well-being of our children.

Interesting that another 60% of those moms surveyed pointed to non-governmental organizations as the entities best fit to help solve challenging issues in Colorado. **Specifically, moms pointed to 1) non-profit organizations followed by 2) the church and 3) schools. The clear theme is not government.**

## 6. What aspect do you feel is the healthiest about our community? What is it about our community that make you (and especially your children) feel the happiest?

Colorado moms feel strongly that it is the **natural outdoor areas, parks and outdoor activities** that that keeps Coloradans healthy and happy. 48% of moms surveyed felt strongly about this point. In addition, they highlighted how outdoor activities and parks are ‘family friendly’ and free.

Outside of Colorado’s great outdoors, Moms found the **community of people in Colorado** to be the next most important contributor to Colorado’s overall health and state of happiness. People, community and neighbors were words that people repeated.

**Church** was the next largest entity of importance to Colorado moms and their kids. Moms talked about the positive aspects of the church providing leadership, positive discipline, and a sense of ‘community’. Here, again, the theme of community is stressed. People want to connect with people...and nature.

## 7. What aspect do you feel is the unhealthiest in our community? (Please cite specific examples that relate to our children and their development, our ability to be happy spouses, our ability to be a happy family unit?)

### 1. Drugs, and specifically, the legalization of marijuana.

- *The legalization of marijuana. This opens the door to drugs for kids.*
- *Pot being normalized.*
- *Legalization of Marijuana. Our crime rates have gone up, our number of homeless people have increased and the number of kids who have been exposed to marijuana has increased.*
- *Heroin*
- *Unbelievable level of drug and alcohol abuse in our community, by children ages 15 and up - as well as in our young adult population (35 and younger). How do we meaningfully study and educate people about the consequences of legalized marijuana use, on our health, our brains, our motivation, our crime, our diligence at school/work, our community safety?*

Note: Linking of homelessness to drug use. **Homelessness was the #1 issue for many of those surveyed.**

- *Large number of homeless, mentally ill people, and drug addicts with little to no treatment resources.*

## **2. Schools, and the overall unacceptable quality of public schools in Colorado** (especially as compared with other states).

- *Colorado is a great place to live if you are middle-class or above; it is much harder if you are poor, since the amount of public services we have in this state, compared to other states, is quite low. For example, per-pupil spending in public schools. Wealthier families can work around this by sending their kids to private schools, or hosting crazy fund-raising drives, but poorer families don't have the means.*
- *Our school system is terrible. Lacking in true education rather than becoming a social experiment.*
- *Poor schools & teachers.*

## **3. Mental health issues, and the failure to address these issues.**

- *Failure to discuss mental illness.*
- *Frenzy, exhaustion, too much stress. Prescription sleep & pain med addiction. Mental illnesses like anxiety, depression. Self-injury, suicide, date violence, poor judgment among teens and adults.*
- *Lack of programs and affordability for mental health and homelessness*
- *Not enough children and families getting support for mental health needs. Still a stigma. Still a challenge related to healthcare.*

## **8. In what ways do you feel government is working well for us?**

For this particular survey question, it's important to note that **64% of the moms who participated in the survey either chose 1) to not answer this question, or 2) to clearly voice that the government was not working well for anyone in any shape or form.** More specifically, 32 survey participants skipped this question entirely, while 24 offered some version of no, not at all or **is this a joke.**

The overwhelming majority of the 36% who did answer this question in a positive manner either focused on what the state government of Colorado was getting right or law enforcement writ large.

- For those who were focused on Colorado government – public transportation, state parks, and the growth of new business in CO were at the top of the list.
- For those focused on law enforcement – police, firefighters and 911 responders were at the top of the list.

The fact that 64% of our survey respondents were disillusioned with government is a very large statement in and of itself. With that said, this response tracks perfectly with [national approval polls](#) on the Direction of the Country dated 5 September 2016 and 7 September 2016 (Source: Real Clear Politics).

Specific polls can be read here:

[http://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/latest\\_polls/state\\_of\\_the\\_union/](http://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/latest_polls/state_of_the_union/).

Race/Topic	Poll	Results
Direction of Country	Economist/YouGov	Right Direction 28, Wrong Track 62
Direction of Country	GWU/Battleground	Right Direction 27, Wrong Track 66
Direction of Country	Reuters/Ipsos	Right Direction 22, Wrong Track 64
Direction of Country	Rasmussen Reports	Right Direction 28, Wrong Track 65

## 9. In what ways is government not working well for us?

73% of the moms surveyed responded to this question. The top two themes in this survey were **1) tax/economy related followed by 2) the government itself, meaning it is dysfunctional.**

**Taxes & the economy were top mentions.** Moms feel like the government is constantly wasting tax payer dollars. They question what is happening with tax-payer dollars, and why they are not seeing any specific benefits. They question how their taxes continue to rise – and welfare continues to grow – but nothing



changes that is tangible to them or their families. As for the larger economy, they are frustrated with our increasing debt and a lack of jobs. An underlying theme is that hard-working, middle-class families are struggling in face of over taxation and over regulation.

**With respect to government, or the lack thereof**, Moms expressed concern over the lack of leadership or “poor leadership”. They believe that those governing often act out of self-interest and are “not tuned into voters’ concerns”. One mother put it this way, “Congress does not act. Politics and greed and status ambitions hinder righteous indignation”. For others, it wasn’t the elected official her/himself but the quagmire that partisan politics has become in this country. A subtext to government argument, was that Federal government is burdensome and that overregulation is hurting families and the economy – Moms argued for more local control and less ‘big’ government. “We have a federal government that spends too much money on things we don’t need while ignoring the problems our country faces.”

## 10. What characteristics of our schools are frightening or unhealthy for you and/or your children? Why do you think it is this way? Do you have any thoughts or opinions on what the causes are?

The moms surveyed view **bullying**, following by **drug and alcohol availability & use**, as the #1 unhealthy issues of concern in schools. Bullying is noted as being more frightening to the students themselves, while drugs and alcohol are a threat to parents, students, families and society overall. One mom passionately wrote this:

- *Drug and alcohol abuse is rampant in our schools and we don’t have good ways of identifying possible abusers and getting kids help to stop. I live at ‘ground zero’ of the marijuana experiment, and I think we are not even discussing the major unintended consequences on our children, their health, their safety, and their long-term abilities of deciding to ‘legalize the party.’ We just shifted the war on drugs from the cartels to our schools! Who do you think the new drug dealers are? That nice boy scout down the street, that’s who! We said marijuana was ok, and all we did was role model drug use to kids who don’t have the brain capacity to make well-reasoned decisions about their health. Nice job, Colorado.*

The moms surveyed are also in large agreement on the unhealthy aspect of the **lack of recess** and the unhealthy aspect of that in their children's educational experience. They went on to discuss the enormity of **stress in their overall school day**. Moms want recess and believe in recess.

A sub-theme to bullying, drugs, and stress is the overall safety of schools and the lack of funding for safety protocol and standards.

Moms **view teachers and unions as a part of the problem as opposed to being part of the solution**. Union control of schools is seen as a negative, and teachers are not teaching to their potential. In addition to teacher quality, moms mentioned a lack of discipline and maturity in teachers with respect to the classroom.

- *My 8th grade son has shared stories of teachers unable to manage a few students who are not threatened by a trip to the principal's office or expulsion. That leaves those teachers without options, other students distracted and classroom time being spent on the unruly student. I have also heard far too many stories of teachers themselves acting like middle schoolers, angry and too quick to yell or punish, often to the wrong party. Turnover of staff can be a good thing. I know I would be easily frustrated with that age group. But there are so many new teachers applying for these few teaching jobs who are excited to teach! Let's let a few more of them have a chance and let disgruntled teachers move on and find happiness.*

**Teaching to tests** is also something that mothers noted as a cause for concern.

## **11. What changes do you think could be made in our community over the long term to help your family? How do you think we, as a community, can achieve those goals?**

Answers were quite varied, in general, to this question. However, three trends stood out. Essentially, communities would be best served by **1) better schools, greater investments in schools and greater school choice 2) greater communication between and amongst people in their specific communities about the issues they are facing and 3) greater resources to encourage family activities and time at home as well as incentives to encourage**

**marriage and families.** Outside of these three themes, there was mention of the need for greater drug regulations, better job opportunities and an increased focus on crime.

Given that 35% of the Moms who answered this question believed that better schools and education is the key to better communities, here is a sample of their responses:

- *Making teachers, school boards and elected public officials more accountable. Stop the free rides.*
- *Too much time is spent on testing. The kids miss out on a lot of teaching. Teachers are frustrated with this, teachers are not allowed to correct children with behavior problems, class sizes are too large, not enough of the \$ for schools finds its way to the classroom, etc.*
- *More quality charter schools and more affordable private schools.*
- *We need every community to have a voice in how we educate our children.*
- *Provide great public education so we have a literate non-dependent community.*
- *More parent control of schools and programs, less union control.*

## 12. What do you believe is the role of businesses in our community?

Only 59% of those surveyed answered this question. The majority respondents were in close agreement that the **role of businesses is economic as opposed to being arbiters of change in society** (less than 10% suggested that businesses should have a leadership role in policy, etc.).

For those making the economic argument, the majority believe that businesses exist to create jobs, encourage local spending and grow small business development in their communities. In short, businesses exist to contribute to a healthy economy.

More interestingly, a subset of those surveyed (28%) feel that businesses do not just exist to contribute to a healthy economy, but should give directly back to the community via charitable contributions and otherwise. Here are a sample of the responses:

- I believe that businesses are part of the community, and as result, should not just “receive” but also “give back” to the community.

- To meet the needs of the community locally and globally, and to give back resources that can best meet the needs of the community--non-profits, education resources, etc.
- The role of business is to make a profit by serving the needs of the public, according to the current state of the marketplace. Local business should also provide charitable contributions to public services that better the community.

### 13. What do you believe is the role of businesses in our community?

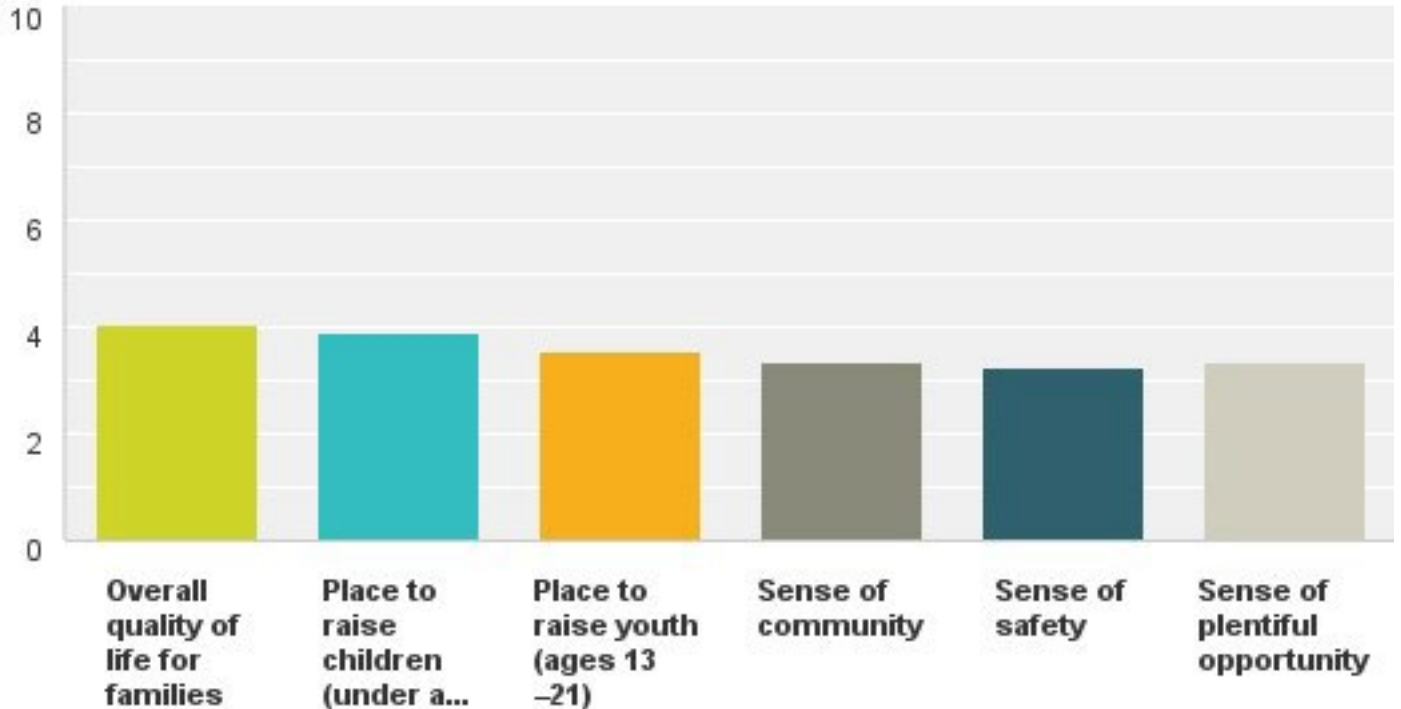
Roughly **70% of those surveyed (62 out of 89) believe that the individual has some level of responsibility with respect to being a ‘change maker.’**

For 8%, the role is small and is conveyed through voting. For another 16%, the role is more social and is geared around being neighborly, helping others and treating other people in a kind manner.

The remaining 76% was focused on more specific forms of activism, wherein people are actively working to make changes within their community. For some, this is about ‘speaking up’ and calling for change. For others, this is about volunteering time, talent and resources to be a part of the change. For still others, this is about becoming educated on municipal and state government and being active in local politics:

- *Contribute to common good with time, talent and treasure as you are able. Citizens have a responsibility to know their community and how their community government is governing.*
- *Volunteer, speak up with proposed solutions, encourage neighborhood participation in our educational system and business. Be a “Do-er.”*
- *Find what you are passionate about and find a group that you can align with to do concrete work. Groups of people=force multiplier.*
- *I think the only place change happens is at the individual level. When more people begin to embrace new ideas, or alternative ways of acting, you will eventually see change at the community level. I guess I believe ‘grass roots’ begins at the blade-level - the individual.*

## 14. How would you rate your family's life in Colorado when it comes to the following: (on a scale of 1 to 5).



The scale of 1-5 ranged from 1 (not good) to 3 (just O.K.) to 5 (very good). What is immediately obvious is that a **majority of the respondents did not award the score of 5 to any of the 6 categories** that they were asked to rank:

- Overall quality of life for families.
- Place to raise children (under 12).
- Place to raise youth (ages 13-21).
- Sense of community.
- Sense of safety.
- Sense of plentiful opportunity.

The majority of rankings for all 6 categories rested in the 4 (most) to 3 (second most) ranking range. The good news is that for moms surveyed responses in the 2-1 range were less than 20%, except for in the “sense of safety” category, wherein 21% of those surveyed indicated that Colorado was not good or less than ok. Not surprisingly, moms felt better about raising children under 12 in Colorado, as opposed to those aged 13-21.

Colorado moms were most positive about the “**overall quality of life for families**” in the state. Conversely, moms were most negative about the “sense of safety” in the state from the purview of their family.

### **15. Are you interested in learning how you become a change-maker in your community?**

75% of moms who completed this survey answered this question. The response was essentially split down the middle with about half of those moms saying they are interested in becoming a changemaker and the other half stating that they are not interested in becoming a changemaker. We should note that of the total pool surveyed, 38% found the idea of ‘becoming a change maker’ appealing.

We will continue to collect these survey questions from Moms in Colorado through next year to expand on our results, and track trends in the data.

If you have questions or comments, please email us at [hello@momsfightback.org](mailto:hello@momsfightback.org) or call Heidi Ganahl at 303-248-6457.