



# CoPIRG

Colorado Public Interest Research Group



## 2017 Program Report

# Because Of You: An Update On Our Program Work In 2017

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*Dear CoPIRG member,*

*Why does such a great country have so many problems?*

*I'm talking about problems that we all share—problems that threaten or impact all of Americans' wellbeing. Problems that are neither liberal nor conservative issues. Problems of the public interest.*

*At CoPIRG we seek to address those problems. Because in this day and age, Americans shouldn't tolerate them.*

*For example, we shouldn't have to sacrifice consumer protection in order to reap the benefits of a robust financial sector in our economy. Over the past year, CoPIRG worked to keep the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, the nation's top consumer cop on the Wall Street beat, strong and independent.*

*Nor should we accept that if we want access to credit, our private information must be at risk of falling into the hands of hackers and thieves. In the wake of the Equifax hack, CoPIRG state and federal advocates led the call for free credit freezes—the best available safeguard against identity theft.*

*Nor does it make sense to gamble with the efficacy of life-saving antibiotics so the food industry can use them to raise cheaper chicken, beef and pork. In 2017, CoPIRG's antibiotics team helped convince KFC to join 14 other top chain restaurants in the U.S. that have taken steps to end the routine use of antibiotics in the meat they serve.*

*Finally, in this day and age we shouldn't have to worry whether our kids are safe when they play with toys or drink water. Last year, Target agreed to stop selling certain fidget spinners after CoPIRG Foundation research found unsafe lead levels. CoPIRG Foundation research also revealed that lead is more prevalent in school drinking water than previously known, prompting officials in California, Texas and other states to act.*

*Read on to learn more how CoPIRG staff and members worked together to find solutions to more problems we should no longer tolerate. None of our work would have been possible without the support of members like you.*

*Sincerely,*



*Danny Katz  
State Director, CoPIRG*



**STANDING UP FOR VETERANS**—Federal Consumer Program Senior Director Ed Mierzwinski speaks to veterans about the Consumer Bureau’s work to protect servicemembers.



**OUR CONSUMER COP**—Varsha Nair, staff with our sister group, PennPIRG, spoke at the release of our report detailing the CFPB’s work to protect consumers from unfair overdraft fees.

# Defending The Consumer Bureau

In the aftermath of the 2008 financial crash, we helped create the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) to serve as our consumer cop on the financial beat. The agency has excelled at its mission, returning \$12 billion to 29 million consumers hurt by big banks and lenders in just six years.

## The CFPB Is Under Attack

In 2017, the Trump administration, special interests and their allies in Congress ramped up attacks on the CFPB in the name of reducing regulation. We were there defending the agency every step of the way.

We filed court briefs supporting former CFPB Director Richard Cordray’s appointment of consumer champion Leandra English to the role of acting director when President Trump put long-time agency opponent Mick Mulvaney in charge. And our national staff fought back against the so-called Financial CHOICE Act, legislation that would have gutted the agency as we know it.

Our Federal Consumer Program Senior Director Ed Mierzwinski was a reliable agency defender, not only in major media outlets like The New York Times and The Washington Post, but also on Capitol Hill. Mierzwinski testified before multiple Congressional committees in opposition to bills intended to weaken consumer protections enacted by the Consumer Bureau—including

legislation that would have dramatically reduced mortgage market safeguards.

## Standing Up For Our Consumer Cop

One 2017 report by CoPIRG Foundation found that, because of CFPB action in response to complaints, at least 7,000 servicemembers have received either direct monetary relief or other kinds of relief, like stopping debt collection harassment or providing mortgage options to help a servicemember avoid foreclosure.

Another 2017 CoPIRG Foundation report highlighted the Consumer Bureau’s work to protect older Americans from mortgage, credit and debt collection abuses. The report found the bureau had collected 72,000 complaints from consumers 62 years of age and older, and took numerous enforcement actions against companies that received the most complaints.

It’s clear: The idea of the Consumer Bureau needs no defense, only more defenders. That’s why CoPIRG and our sister groups knocked on more than 300,000 doors across the country in the summer, mobilizing more than 60,000 citizens to sign our petition to Congress urging lawmakers to keep the bureau strong and independent.

With member support, we’ll continue defending this vital agency. ■



**KEEPING OUR MEDICINES EFFECTIVE**—Hannah Kim, a public interest advocate with our sister group Illinois PIRG Education Fund, spoke at the release of a report ranking America's largest fast food restaurants on policies relating to antibiotic use in their supply chains.

## Standing Up For Public Health

Thanks to your support in 2017, CoPIRG and CoPIRG Foundation worked to reduce the overuse of antibiotics, get the lead out of school drinking water, and cut the use of dangerous chemicals in farming.

### Save Our Antibiotics

Antibiotic overuse, especially on factory farms, breeds antibiotic-resistant superbugs that kill tens of thousands of Americans, and sicken millions more, every year. We shouldn't raise our food in ways that put public health at risk.

That's why CoPIRG Foundation and our national network have worked hard to push major restaurant chains to eliminate meat raised on antibiotics from their menus. In 2017, we helped convince KFC to join a growing list of companies that have pledged to stop serving chicken raised on human antibiotics.

Commitments like KFC's have sparked an industry-wide shift. The sale and distribution of medically important antibiotics for food production in the U.S. dropped 14 percent in 2016, according to the Food and Drug Administration, marking the first year-to-year decline in sales since recording began. Because of market-based action, we estimate that in the near future, close to half the chicken in this country will be raised without the routine use of medically important antibiotics.

CoPIRG Foundation's research and reports added to this urgent campaign, and earned widespread media coverage. Last fall, the group published its "Chain Reaction" report, which ranks the coun-

try's largest fast food and fast casual restaurants on policies relating to antibiotic use in their supply chains.

And with the help of our Health Professional Action Network—a group of more than 40,000 physicians and other health workers nationwide who have signed on to our efforts to combat antibiotic overuse—CoPIRG and our sister groups worked to support state-level legislation that would curb irresponsible antibiotic use on farms.

## Get The Lead Out

We now know that Flint, Mich., was just the tip of the lead-laden iceberg. Schools across the country have tested high for lead in drinking water—and millions of children are at risk.

Last year, CoPIRG drew attention to this quiet public health crisis and worked to solve it by sounding the alarm in the press, and backing legislation that mandates lead testing and infrastructure improvements in schools.

A 2017 report by CoPIRG Foundation confirmed the urgency of the issue, and pushed states and municipalities to be proactive in testing, pipe and fixture removal, and filtering—and the research helped spark results.

In the fall, after our state affiliate called on the San Diego Unified School District to adopt more stringent standards for lead in drinking water, our advocates joined school officials in an-

nouncing the district's new policy—the strongest adopted by any California school district at the time.

And in early 2018, after mobilizing hundreds of healthcare professionals and families to call on the state Legislature to act on lead in drinking water, our advocates in Wisconsin celebrated the passage of Leading On Lead, a bill that will allow water utilities to help pay for removal of lead service lines—the top source of lead contamination in drinking water.

## Healthy Farms, Healthy Families

Research shows we can dramatically reduce the use of synthetic chemicals in farming, while still growing as much food as we do today. It's shortsighted and dangerous to soak crops in chemicals when we know there are safe and effective alternatives.

In 2017, Rep. Earl Blumenauer (Ore.) unveiled a new blueprint for the federal Farm Bill—legislation that would cut wasteful agriculture subsidies that steer farmers toward harmful and unhealthy farming practices. The bill would also deepen U.S. investments in proven conservation programs that help farmers switch to sustainable farming practices.

With the help of our members, CoPIRG will continue to support bills like this and keep up our pursuit of commonsense farming regulations that protect our families, land and food. ■



**CLEAN WATER, HEALTHY KIDS**—Jason Pfeifle, a public health advocate with our sister group CALPIRG Education Fund, spoke at the release of "Get The Lead Out," a report that found widespread lead contamination in school drinking water.



**AN INDUSTRY SHIFT**—Our campaign has helped convince major restaurants to serve chicken raised without the routine use of antibiotics. Now, we're turning our attention to beef and pork.

## EQUIFAX BREACH &amp; CONGRESSIONAL RESPONSE

MIKE LITT  
U.S. PIRGWASHINGTON  
JOURNAL

**RESPONDING WITH RESOURCES**—In the wake of the massive data breach at Equifax, U.S. PIRG's Mike Litt spoke to national media outlets to inform consumers about how best to protect themselves.

## A Consumer Watchdog

In 2017, CoPIRG and CoPIRG Foundation warned consumers about defective cars, provided important resources after the Equifax data breach, and pushed for stronger consumer protections.

### Nearly 148 Million Americans At Risk: Our Response To Equifax

In September 2017, the credit bureau Equifax announced it had been hacked, potentially compromising the most sensitive financial data of nearly 148 million Americans—everything from credit card information to Social Security numbers.

The breach was unprecedented, and left a massive number of consumers vulnerable to identity theft and other devastating financial scams.

Our consumer advocates were able to provide urgent informational resources to affected consumers, testify before multiple Congressional committees about the Equifax hack and data security, and make the case for better consumer protections in the media.

Here in Colorado, we campaigned for a state bill that would eliminate the fees minors pay to freeze or thaw their credit—one of the only ways to prevent new account identity theft after a hack. After months of work, a bipartisan team of state legislators that included House Speaker Crisanta Duran introduced a bill that would eliminate freeze fees for minors, who often don't realize their information was stolen until they turn 18 and apply for their first credit card.

Heading into 2018, we've got the momentum to eliminate freeze fees not only for minors, but for all Coloradans. With the help of our members, CoPIRG will continue pushing for reforms that give consumers more control over their credit reports and other personal information.

## Consumer Protection

CoPIRG and CoPIRG Foundation work to ensure consumers are protected from dangerous products and unfair market practices. With your help, we'll continue to amplify the voices of Americans across the state.



1 CoPIRG Foundation research and advocacy spurred Target to remove two models of lead-laden fidget spinners from its shelves.



2 Abe Scarr (right), director of our sister group, Illinois PIRG Education Fund, spoke at the launch of "Trouble In Toyland," a CoPIRG Foundation report released at 39 different press conferences across the country.



3 U.S. PIRG's Kara Cook-Schultz spoke to national media outlets about the dangers posed by toys that contain toxics.

## Product Safety

For more than three decades, CoPIRG has worked to ensure the products we buy are safe—everything from the toys our children play with to the cars we drive.

In the fall, CoPIRG Foundation discovered two models of fidget spinners sold at Target that contained alarming levels of lead—up to 300 times the legal limit for lead in children's products. Within days of releasing our findings, Target had pulled both fidget spinner models from its shelves.

A report released by MASSPIRG Education Fund in 2017 found that CarMax—the nation's largest used car retailer—has more than doubled the percentage of defective cars for sale since 2015. We worked hard to publicize the research nationwide and warn consumers in the market for used cars.

## Defending Net Neutrality

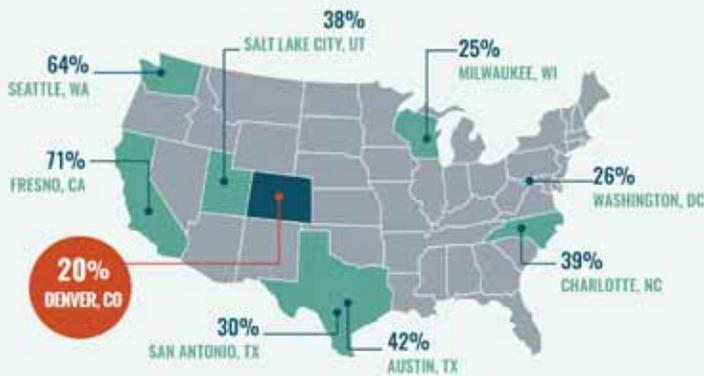
CoPIRG has campaigned for years in support of the simple idea that the web is a public resource, and internet service providers shouldn't get to pick winners and losers.

In 2017, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) dealt a devastating blow to that concept, known as net neutrality, by ending regulations that keep the internet free and open for consumers.

Still, legislators are making headway in efforts to overturn the FCC's repeal at the state and federal levels, and, with support from our members, CoPIRG will continue to back proposed protections that keep consumers in the driver's seat online. ■



FIGURE 3 HOW DOES DENVER'S RECYCLING + COMPOSTING RATE COMPARE?



**IMPROVING RECYCLING RATES**—A 2017 report released by CoPIRG Foundation found Colorado's recycling rates lag more than 20 percent behind the national average, partly because of the state's recycling policies.



**PATCHWORK POLICIES**—The state's patchwork of recycling and composting policies was evidenced in CoPIRG Foundation's 2017 report, "The State Of Recycling In Colorado," which earned widespread media coverage.

## Reevaluating Recycling In Colorado

Though many like to think of Colorado as a green state, a first-of-its-kind report released by CoPIRG Foundation and Eco-Cycle in 2017 contained sobering numbers about the Centennial State's recycling rates, which lag more than 20 percent behind the national average.

On average, each Coloradan is putting seven pounds of trash into landfills every day, partly because the state's recycling policies are pushing residents to throw their garbage in the trash can—not the recycling or compost bin.

The report, titled "The State Of Recycling In Colorado," details the systems and practices that lead to low recycling rates, and recommends actions that will help Colorado reach its newly adopted statewide recycling goals.

### Increasing Recycling Access

According to CoPIRG Foundation research, one of the biggest barriers to upping the state's recycling rate is a lack of access to curbside recycling and composting programs.

Only one in four Colorado residents automatically receives curbside recycling with trash service—and nearly 40 percent of Colorado counties don't offer any curbside recycling programs. Composting programs are even more rare in the state, despite compostable

materials making up nearly 50 percent of our waste stream.

The patchwork of recycling and compost program policy across the state becomes clear when comparing recycling rates from different communities. Loveland, for example, has a recycling rate of 61 percent, but Commerce City's rate is only 16 percent.

CoPIRG Foundation's report found that in Front Range communities like Denver, the problem is exacerbated by a lack of recycling services for apartments and businesses, which produce nearly 60 percent of the waste in Colorado.

"The single biggest thing we can do to stop filling our landfills with recyclable material is to ensure every Coloradan, especially the majority of us who live in cities and towns, has a recycling cart for cans, bottles and paper, and a cart for organic compostables," said CoPIRG Foundation Director Danny Katz. "This would immediately increase our recycling rates."

With the help of our members, CoPIRG will continue its work to ensure Denver and other cities expand access to cost-free compost and recycling services, and enact policies that will help reduce waste in a state that cherishes its natural landscapes. ■



**MOVING FORWARD**—CoPIRG State Director Danny Katz spoke to local media about the importance of using funds from Volkswagen’s emissions settlement to invest in electric vehicle infrastructure.



**BUSTANG BUMP**—Bustang saw ridership jump by 52 percent over its inaugural year. CoPIRG Foundation was there on Bustang’s two-year anniversary to celebrate the success of mass transit in our state.

# The Road To Zero-Emission Vehicles

It’s time our transportation system matched our changing needs, and investing in clean electric vehicle infrastructure is an important first step.

The widespread adoption of electric vehicles offers a slew of benefits for Colorado cities, including cleaner air and the opportunity to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Electric vehicles are far cleaner than gasoline-powered cars, with lower greenhouse gas emissions and lower emissions of the pollutants that contribute to smog and particulate matter.

In 2017, CoPIRG celebrated Colorado’s efforts to finalize its first-ever electric vehicle plan. Adopted in early 2018, the plan sets long-term goals for electric vehicle adoption and lays out a series of actions and strategies to electrify the state’s transportation corridors.

Before the draft plan was revealed, CoPIRG earned widespread media coverage for its work to push state decision-makers to use the \$68 million stemming from Volkswagen’s emissions scandal settlement to fund the construction of electric vehicle charging stations and the purchase of electric buses.

Our work got results. In the fall, the state included incentives to transition to electric buses in its spending plan for the Volkswagen settlement money.

While the settlement money won’t be enough to fund the entirety of Colorado’s electric vehicle plan, it will push the state forward on its path to zero-emissions. And with the help of our members, CoPIRG will continue to advocate for policies that drive our state toward an electric-vehicle future.

## Regional Bus Ridership Jumps

In 2017, Colorado’s first inter-regional bus service proved it fills a crucial gap in the state’s transportation system.

Bustang, first launched in 2015, saw ridership jump by 52 percent over its inaugural year. CoPIRG Foundation was there on Bustang’s two-year anniversary to celebrate the success of mass transit in our state and push for bringing the long-overdue service to more Coloradans.

Forty-one mayors and county commissioners signed our letter applauding Bustang—which provided nearly 156,000 passenger trips this year—and called for more service.

Bustang—which connects Denver to Fort Collins, Colorado Springs and Glenwood Springs—brings us a step closer to a 21st century transportation system that doesn’t require people to rely on individual, fossil-fueled cars to get around. ■

## CoPIRG

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