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Colorado lawmakers push for film production funds

Denver Business Journal by Ed Sealover, Reporter

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A bipartisan group of legislators introduced a bill Wednesday to increase incentives for film production in Colorado, pushing forward a proposal that previously had run into opposition by some members of the Joint Budget Committee.

House Bill 1286, sponsored by Rep. [Tom Massey](#), R-Poncha Springs, and House Minority Leader [Mark Ferrandino](#), D-Denver, would dedicate \$3 million to the Colorado Office of Film, Television and Media to use for tax breaks and for guaranteed loans to production companies. It also increases the amount of available incentives from 10 percent to 20 percent of a production company's qualified local expenditures and requires that recipient companies have Coloradans make up at least 50 percent of their local workforce, up from the current 25 percent standard.

Legislative supporters announced the bill at an early morning rally on the west side of the Capitol featuring several hundred film students and industry leaders standing in 20-degree weather to cheer it on. Massey and Rep. [Nancy Todd](#), D-Aurora, then convinced the House to pass a resolution lauding the jobs the film industry brings to Colorado — a unanimous vote met by thunderous applause by supporters gathered in the House balcony.

"The fact is, this industry puts people to work and puts dollars in rural economies and urban economies," Massey said. "We've been working on this for a number of years. We're making progress. ... We're going to see film actually come back to Colorado and we're going to see our economic drivers increase."

Massey has tried to pass similar bills throughout most of his eight years in the House but often has run into opposition from both liberal and conservative legislators who question whether the state

should spend tax money on attracting Hollywood films, TV shows or videogame productions.

This year, Gov. [John Hickenlooper](#) announced when presenting his budget to the Legislature that he wanted to increase the annual incentive fund from roughly \$400,000 to \$3 million. But two members of the powerful Joint Budget Committee again [panned the idea](#).

However, a majority of the 65 House members are listed as sponsors or cosponsors of the bill, virtually guaranteeing its passage through that chamber. And 13 of the 35 Senate members have signed on as sponsors or cosponsors as well.

At the cold-weather rally, Ferrandino listed several films that were made in Colorado in past years, including "City Slickers," "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid" and, in his words: "The seminal piece of film work that really talked about the Legislature, 'Dumb and Dumber.'"

But he noted too that Colorado has lost many movies in recent years to New Mexico, which has a much more lucrative incentive program.

"We're educating film students here in Colorado," Ferrandino said. "We need to make sure they have good jobs here in Colorado when they graduate."

Ed Sealoover covers government, health care, tourism, airlines and hospitality for the Denver Business Journal and writes for the "Capitol Business" blog.