

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
Health and Human Services Committee March 6, 2018

**ERDMAN:** [00:00:00] Thank you for coming today. Welcome to Health and Human Services hearing. My name is Steve Erdman. I represent ten counties in the Nebraska panhandle. I serve as Vice Chair of the committee and I'll be in charge of the committee today. Senator Riepe had another meeting. The committee will take up the appointments in order posted. Our hearing today is your public part of the legislative process. This is your opportunity to express your position on the proposed appointments before us today. To better facilitate the proceeding, I would ask the following things: please silence your cell phones or turn them off, and then move to the front if you're going to testify so you'll be ready to go. The order of testimony will be the appointee, proponents, opponents, and neutral. If you have testimony and you would like to be heard, please come to the front and speak into the microphone. Be concise with your comments if you can. There are sign-in sheets at the back and on the side if you need to do that, please use those and hand those to the committee clerk when you come forward. If you have any written materials you'd like to be-- you'd like distributed, please give those to the page and she will distribute those to the members of the committee. You'll need 10 copies of that. If you have written testimony but you do not have ten copies, our page is very quick and she'll return with enough copies. The committee members will introduce themselves today, and I will start on my left. Please introduce yourself. [00:01:26][86.5]

**LINEHAN:** [00:01:27] Hi. Lou Ann Linehan, District 39, which is western Douglas County. [00:01:30][3.4]

**WILLIAMS:** [00:01:31] Matt Williams, Legislative District 36.  
[00:01:34][2.1]

**CRAWFORD:** [00:01:35] Good afternoon, Senator Sue Crawford, Legislative District 45 which is eastern Sarpy, Bellevue, and Offutt.  
[00:01:39][4.0]

**KRISTEN STIFFLER:** [00:01:40] I'm Kristen Stiffler, legal counsel.  
[00:01:40][0.3]

**ERDMAN:** [00:01:44] Steve Erdman, as I said. Tyler. [00:01:44][0.0]

**TYLER MAHOOD:** [00:01:46] And I'm Tyler Mahood, committee clerk.  
[00:01:46][0.3]

**ERDMAN:** [00:01:49] Okay, thank you very much. All right, so first up Michael is going to call in later, right? Tyler? Okay. Noelle Petersen, please come forward. Thank you for coming today. If you

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would please, state your name and spell it-- spell it and then tell us a bit about yourself and why you want to serve on the committee.

[00:02:07][18.8]

**NOELLE PETERSEN:** [00:02:09] My name is Noelle Petersen, N-o-e-l-l-e, and Petersen is s-e-n. I'm here because I joined a local foster care review board eight years ago when I was actually working here in the Legislature and that sort of-- that was the beginning of my interest and my involvement in child welfare. And having served on a local board, I have a desire to do more if I can. And when I saw the opportunity I thought this is-- this is another way that I can do more for children that are stuck in the system [00:02:39][30.7]

**ERDMAN:** [00:02:41] Okay. Can you share a little bit of your background and what you do, where you're employed and what you do, what your occupation? [00:02:48][6.7]

**NOELLE PETERSEN:** [00:02:48] Currently, I'm a stay-at-home parent to my daughter, Anyla, behind us. Previous to that, I worked in the Legislature for five years. I was an administrative aide for Mike Foley when he was a state senator. And then I stayed with the district and worked for Tony Fulton several years after that. [00:03:04][15.1]

**ERDMAN:** [00:03:05] Very good. So this is a new appointment for you to this committee? [00:03:07][1.7]

**NOELLE PETERSEN:** [00:03:08] Yes. [00:03:08][0.0]

**ERDMAN:** [00:03:09] Okay. Are you familiar with what the committee does? [00:03:11][2.3]

**NOELLE PETERSEN:** [00:03:12] Yes. [00:03:12][0.0]

**ERDMAN:** [00:03:13] Okay. Very good. Anyone have any questions for this young lady? [00:03:16][3.2]

**KOLTERMAN:** [00:03:17] I do. [00:03:17][0.2]

**ERDMAN:** [00:03:18] Yes. This is Senator Kolterman by the way. [00:03:20][2.1]

**KOLTERMAN:** [00:03:21] Sorry I'm late. [00:03:21][0.7]

**NOELLE PETERSEN:** [00:03:21] Oh, that's okay. [00:03:21][0.0]

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**KOLTERMAN:** [00:03:21] Noelle, so I understand you, Tyler, and my committee clerk, Katie, from my office, are on the same softball team, is that--? [00:03:31][9.6]

**NOELLE PETERSEN:** [00:03:31] Yes, that's true. [00:03:31][0.0]

**KOLTERMAN:** [00:03:36] Is that correct? [00:03:36][0.3]

**NOELLE PETERSEN:** [00:03:36] Yes, that is true. [00:03:36][0.0]

**KOLTERMAN:** [00:03:36] I have to get this on the record.  
[00:03:37][1.1]

**NOELLE PETERSEN:** [00:03:39] Okay. [00:03:39][0.0]

**KOLTERMAN:** [00:03:39] Is it true that Tyler hit a grand slam last season? [00:03:43][3.6]

**NOELLE PETERSEN:** [00:03:44] Yes, that's true. And he was the only one on the team to do so. [00:03:47][2.8]

**KOLTERMAN:** [00:03:48] Oh, okay. I think I can support you; thank you.  
[00:03:53][4.6]

**NOELLE PETERSEN:** [00:03:53] Thank you, Senator. [00:03:53][0.2]

**ERDMAN:** [00:03:59] [PHONE RINGING] Can you hold just a minute?  
[00:04:00][0.4]

**MICHAEL AERNI:** [00:04:00] Yes, I can. [00:04:01][0.3]

**ERDMAN:** [00:04:01] All right, thank you. Are there any other questions? Senator Crawford. [00:04:05][3.1]

**CRAWFORD:** [00:04:06] Thank you, Senator Erdman; and thank you for being here today, Nicole. [SIC] And I'm so glad that you're stepping forward, that really-- what makes all these committees and commissions and review boards work is people like you stepping forward. You mentioned-- you mentioned you're on a local foster care review board?  
[00:04:20][13.1]

**NOELLE PETERSEN:** [00:04:20] Yes. [00:04:20][0.0]

**MICHAEL AERNI:** [00:04:20] Yes, I am. [00:04:20][0.1]

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**CRAWFORD:** [00:04:20] Can you tell us just a little bit about what issue you see there that you are anxious [INAUDIBLE] with the state? [00:04:25][4.8]

**ERDMAN:** [00:04:25] Hold on sir, we're just visiting with another person right now. [00:04:27][1.3]

**MICHAEL AERNI:** [00:04:28] Okay, sorry. [00:04:28][0.4]

**NOELLE PETERSEN:** [00:04:29] Yeah, I think one of the primary issues that I've seen on a local review board is, first of all, that we have a really high turnover of case workers, which sometimes means that children linger in foster care when they don't need to, and that's a huge concern because foster care is just a tumultuous place for a child to be. And we know that zero to five is really important for them to be in a stable, loving, secure home environment. And I think-- I know the system is not working well for caseworkers, and that's why there's such a high turnover. But on the other hand, that's affecting kids that are stuck in the system as well and it's not their fault. Another issue we see is that sometimes children need to be seen by a third party that doesn't have a vested interest in the outcome of the case. And to me that's the most value that our boards can bring is to say that we don't have a financial, a legal, a personal interest in what happens, we just want to advocate for the best interests of the child. It seems like sometimes there aren't enough people doing that in particular, just looking out for, what does this child need? Are their needs being met? Are they in the best situation that they can be in right now; whatever that happens to be? So I think for me those are the two things that bother me the most. And I think-- I think there's more that we could do. [00:05:59][90.2]

**CRAWFORD:** [00:06:00] Excellent. I appreciate that answer. That is great work. We're so happy to have you stepping forward to bring that-- to work on those issues. Thank you. [00:06:07][6.9]

**NOELLE PETERSEN:** [00:06:09] Thank you. [00:06:09][0.1]

**ERDMAN:** [00:06:09] Any other questions? We appreciate your answers, we appreciate you being here. [00:06:13][3.8]

**NOELLE PETERSEN:** [00:06:13] Thank you. [00:06:13][0.2]

**ERDMAN:** [00:06:15] Did you win the championship? [00:06:15][0.5]

**NOELLE PETERSEN:** [00:06:17] No, not this year. [00:06:19][1.9]

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**ERDMAN:** [00:06:20] Okay. Well, Thank you. [00:06:20][-0.1]

**NOELLE PETERSEN:** [00:06:20] Maybe this next year; right Tyler?  
[00:06:20][0.0]

**ERDMAN:** [00:06:21] Thank you for your time. [00:06:23][2.0]

**NOELLE PETERSEN:** [00:06:23] Thank you. [00:06:23][0.0]

**ERDMAN:** [00:06:25] Are there any proponents to speak on behalf of the nominee? Any opponents? Any neutral? Seeing none, I appreciate that. Tyler, were there any letters? [00:06:36][10.4]

**TYLER MAHOOD:** [00:06:37] I do not have any letters. [00:06:38][0.3]

**ERDMAN:** [00:06:39] Okay, thank you. Okay. Michael, are you there?  
[00:06:41][2.2]

**MICHAEL AERNI:** [00:06:42] Yes I am. [00:06:42][0.2]

**ERDMAN:** [00:06:43] I'm Steve Erdman, I'm committee chairman today, acting chairman. Senator Riepe is at another meeting. So if you would, please tell us who you are, spell your name, and give us a little background on yourself. [00:06:55][12.0]

**MICHAEL AERNI:** [00:06:55] Okay. My name is Michael W. Aerni; last name is A-e-r-n-i. I am a retired educator. I spent six years as a classroom teacher for Raymond Central Public Schools; and the last 31 years of my career, I spent with Fremont Public Schools as an elementary principal at five different buildings over that amount of time. I am a local foster care review board member in Fremont, and I'm beginning in my fifth year this fall. [00:07:28][33.0]

**ERDMAN:** [00:07:31] Very good. I appreciate that. So you're a new appointment to the committee is that correct? [00:07:37][5.6]

**MICHAEL AERNI:** [00:07:38] Yes. [00:07:38][0.0]

**ERDMAN:** [00:07:39] Are you familiar with what the committee does, is it similar to what you do there in Fremont? [00:07:42][2.9]

**MICHAEL AERNI:** [00:07:43] I'm familiar with what it does, yes.  
[00:07:44][1.0]

**ERDMAN:** [00:07:45] Okay. Very good. Are there any questions from the committee? Senator Williams has a question. [00:07:49][3.7]

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**WILLIAMS:** [00:07:51] Thank you, Senator Erdman. And thank you, Michael, for your application. What is it about this foster care advisory committee that interest you? [00:08:01][9.8]

**MICHAEL AERNI:** [00:08:03] Well in my-- in my work history as an elementary principal, I was always an advocate for the child, because that's what we signed up to do. And in many times, being an advocate for a child involves helping parents and the system in what we can do. I'm also been known in my career to be always the oldest kid in elementary school because that's where I've always worked. And so that is something I'm very passionate about. One thing I'd like to see the Foster Care Review office work on it would be how we might help with the turnover of case managers from HHS that we have at the local level. And I believe part of the issue may be caseloads are sometimes being insurmountable in the amount that they have to do. I also have a concern as a local board member on what we might be able to do at the state level and how we can help guardian ad litem who are representative of the child that may not have a personal interest financially and otherwise, they actually visit with the child more often. One thing I've noticed in my four, five years on this board that a lot of times the guardian ad litem may not know enough about the child to help the board make decisions in regard to what we might want to recommend. [00:09:25][82.3]

**WILLIAMS:** [00:09:28] Thank you. [00:09:28][0.3]

**ERDMAN:** [00:09:30] Thank you for your answer. Any other questions? As Senator Williams said, we really appreciate you stepping forward. This is a very necessary committee. And it sounds like from your discussion, that you have a heart for this and you are committed to this, and I really do appreciate that because it is in the best interest of these young people that we have somebody in your position and I appreciate it. [00:09:49][19.5]

**MICHAEL AERNI:** [00:09:50] Why it's an honor to be appointed. Thank you. [00:09:52][1.8]

**ERDMAN:** [00:09:53] Thank you. Do you have any other questions anyone? Thank you very much. We look forward to working with you. [00:09:58][5.3]

**MICHAEL AERNI:** [00:09:59] Thank you very kindly. [00:09:59][0.5]

**ERDMAN:** [00:10:01] All right, thank you. That ends the hearing. Wait a minute, are there any proponents, anybody in favor of this nominee?

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Sorry about that. Any opponents? And how about neutral? Seeing none,  
that will conclude the hearing. Thank you for coming today.