

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Appropriations Committee February 28, 2022

WISHART: Welcome to the Appropriations Committee hearing. My name is Anna Wishart. I'm the Vice Chair of the committee. I'm from Lincoln, Nebraska, and represent the 27th Legislative District. I'd like to start off by having members do self-introductions and we're going to start with Senator Clements.

CLEMENTS: I'm Rob Clements from Elmwood. I represent District 2, which is Cass County and eastern Lancaster.

McDONNELL: Mike McDonnell, Legislative District 5, south Omaha.

WISHART: Anna Wishart, District 27.

HILKEMANN: Robert Hilkemann, District 4, west Omaha.

VARGAS: Tony Vargas, District 7 in downtown and south Omaha.

DORN: Myron Dorn, District 30, Gage County and part of Lancaster.

WISHART: At each of the entrance, you are going to find green testifier sheets. If you're planning on testifying today, please fill out a sign-in sheet and hand it to the committee clerk when you come in to testify. If you'll not be testifying at the microphone, but want to go on record as having a position on a bill that is heard today, there are white sign-in sheets at each entrance where you may leave your name and other pertinent information. These sign-in sheets will become exhibits in the permanent record of the end of today's hearing. To better facilitate today's proceeding, I ask that you abide by the following procedures. Please silence or turn off cell phones. The order of testimony is introducer, then proponent, then opponent, then neutral, and then closing. When we hear testimony regarding agencies, we will first hear from a representative of the agency. We will then hear testimony from anyone who wishes to speak on the agency's budget request. Please spell your first name and last name for the record before you testify. So when you come up, the first thing you're going to do is spell your name so that our clerk is able to record them. Be concise. It is our request as a committee that you limit your testimony to five minutes. Depending on how many people plan on testifying today, because we want to make sure everybody is able to have a chance to speak, we may have to limit that to three, depending on how this evening goes. Written materials may be distributed to committee members as exhibits only while testimony is being offered. Hand them to the page for distribution to the committee and staff when you come to testify. We need 12 copies. And if you have written testimony but do not have 12 copies, please

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raise your hand now so the page can make copies for you. And our page is Jason over there, if you're wondering. With that, we are going to begin today's hearing with LB696. Good afternoon, Senator.

BLOOD: Good afternoon. So good afternoon, Vice Chair Wishart and the entire esteemed Appropriations Committee, friends all. My name is Senator Carol Blood, spelled C-a-r-o-l B-l-o-o-d, and I represent District 3, which is western Bellevue and eastern Papillion, Nebraska. Thank you for the opportunity to bring forward LB696. The COVID-19 pandemic has stretched its long arms over our society for the past two years, wreaking havoc in all it touches. It is past due time that we, as state lawmakers, acknowledge the sacrifices made by our essential workers who have been dedicated to keeping Nebraska functioning through these unprecedented times. Specifically, our public school educators and support staff have been hard at work throughout the pandemic to make sure our children continue to receive a quality education. However, this has been at great cost to their physical and mental health. NSEA, the Nebraska State Education Association, conducted a survey on over 3,000 teachers in the state and according to the survey, two in three teachers feel more stressed as a result of COVID and the increased workload involved. Over half feel like they do not have enough planning time for their classes. Three-fourths of all teachers have had to cover one of their coworkers' classes at least once a week. Teachers and school staff are struggling. They feel unappreciated and undersupported. One teacher said, we got information all the time about how to direct students to resources for health, mental health, and insecurities. Faculty gets emails about mindfulness and stress reduction breathing. My bill proposed to you today, LB696, would give bonuses to each teacher and school support staff member, excluding school administrators. I would argue that you cannot put a price tag on the increased workload imposed on teachers and school support staff as a result of the pandemic, but we can offer these bonuses as a thank-you to them. The sacrifices they have made for our children these last two years are absolutely invaluable and is the, and is the least we can do for our school employees who have been brought past their breaking points. As determined by the ARPA Final Ruling, the payments that LB696 provides would fall under its premium pay clause. In the handouts provided to you, I have included this section to review. Premium pay is defined as payments used by recipients to provide premium pay to eligible workers performing essential work during the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency. Childcare workers, educators, and other school staff are listed as eligible to receive premium pay. We estimate that a total of 48,290 teachers and support staff would be

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eligible for a bonus under this bill, which amounts to approximately \$51 million for a minimum payment of \$1,000 to each eligible employee. I did see on the fiscal note that it thought that this may affect TEEOSA funding for schools. However, I do question if this is-- as an incentive would be considered payroll. The State Department of Education would be responsible for administering a program to provide retention grants to all school districts. The amount of the grants provided to each school district shall be proportionate to the population share or the total amount appropriated and the school districts receiving such grants shall divide the funds evenly among all eligible school employees at the time of receiving the grant. Currently, schools are not running as they should be at no fault to the teachers and school support staff, yet they are expected to keep showing up every day without the needed tools and resources. And this is only what the staff are dealing with at school. We know that when they go home, they're faced with the reality of COVID in their personal lives. They have their own children, their own family members that they're responsible for, in addition to the responsibility of teaching and supporting the next generation, Nebraska's future. The burden on these individuals is real and it needs to be addressed now. The teacher shortage in Nebraska is also real; large, growing, and worse than many listening today may have believed. According to NSEA, more than 1,000 teachers have left the state's two largest school districts since the pandemic began and an additional 1,000 more Nebraska teachers are planning to leave their jobs at the end of 2021-- 2022, I'm sorry. With the current conditions they're working under, can you blame them? Teachers have been very vocal about what they need to feel like-- excuse me, teachers have been very vocal about what they need to feel like they can succeed, and one of those is to be compensated for the extra work that they've had to take on. It's time that we listen and continue to support these pillars of our society. If there are no teachers and no support staff, our schools can't operate. We have to act quickly in order to stop any more teachers from leaving the profession. Please consider this request seriously and move it forward to be debated by the full, full Legislature, or perhaps combine this with one of the other requests being made on behalf of those serving and educating Nebraska's future. Unfortunately, I will not be able to stay for my closing as I have a bill in another committee, but I do appreciate the opportunity to share this with you and to bring it forward.

WISHART: Thank you, Senator. Any questions, colleagues? Senator Hilkemann.

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HILKEMANN: Did you say that approximately \$1,000 per teacher is what this would broil down to?

BLOOD: I did.

HILKEMANN: OK. Did you get an email from-- I think it was someone from South Dakota that said they had given \$5,000 to their teachers there? Did you get that?

BLOOD: I did not get an email that said that, but I do know that many states, including South Dakota, Florida, and others, have given substantial incentives to keep teachers where they're at. I would not oppose a \$5,000 per teacher incentive, but it's true; many states realize that because, Senator, before this pandemic, we knew we were going to have a teacher shortage, just like we did with truck drivers and nurses and the list is long, and the pandemic has, has emphasized how important these issues are that we've ignored for years.

WISHART: Additional questions?

DORN: Yeah.

WISHART: Senator Dorn.

DORN: Thank you, Senator Wishart. Thank you for being here. I guess I'm just looking through the fiscal part of this that it doesn't say any total dollar amount or--

BLOOD: Right.

DORN: --what are you looking at? You-- it says grants, so grants per teacher or what are you looking at?

BLOOD: I did say that in my opening. I'll say--

DORN: Oh.

BLOOD: --I'll go back through that again just for that one part. We estimated how many people we thought there would be, teacher-wise and support staff, and what that number would be and I believe it was \$51 million, but let's look here.

DORN: Oh, I missed it.

BLOOD: I'm happy to go back through this for you, so. I'm sorry. I don't know what page it's on. Give me a minute.

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DORN: Well, somebody later can answer it too.

BLOOD: Here we go. We estimate that a total of 48,290 teachers and support staff would be eligible for this bonus and that would be approximately \$51 million.

DORN: OK.

WISHART: Additional questions? Seeing none, thank you, Senator.

BLOOD: Thank you for your time.

WISHART: Proponents.

JENNI BENSON: Good afternoon, Senator Wishart and Appropriations Committee members. For the record, I am Jenni Benson, J-e-n-n-i B-e-n-s-o-n, and I am the president of the Nebraska State Education Association. We support LB696 and would like to thank Senator Blood for introducing the bill. We also support several other bills that are coming forward and also support if they need to be combined for different things as well. The NSEA recommends that Nebraska use the federal stimulus funds to provide a one-time retention payment to every K-12 public school teacher and educational support personnel in the state. The payment would support stronger retention and recruitment of staff in these critical positions, as well as acknowledge their additional work during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since COVID disrupted our lives in the spring of 2020, school employees have taken on significant challenges to keep students learning and safe. As COVID hit, educators quickly pivoted from tradition less--traditional lesson delivery to teaching through video classrooms. During the previous year, many teachers found themselves preparing to deliver instruction simultaneously to both students in their classroom and students attending virtually, two very different methods of successful engagement. This year, school districts are having a tremendous difficulty across the state recruiting and retaining all teachers. Districts are struggling not only to staff classrooms with qualified educators, but also to fill bus drivers, kitchen help, and paraprofessionals. This creates an even greater stress on our current teachers as they take on additional duties to impact the lives of our students. Retention payments would help ensure these hardworking employees are recognized for their above-and-beyond efforts and sends a clear message that the state wants them to stay in public education for the benefit of their students they serve. Except for administrators, it would compensate all public school employees, from the teacher who found new ways to

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reach classroom of students to the bus driver who kept those students safe on the way to school. The proposal is not a new concept, as it was said earlier. Other states such as Georgia, Tennessee, Texas, California, and Colorado have used federal stimulus funds to compensate school employees. As mentioned, Georgia provided a one-time \$1,000 retention payment to every K-12 public school teacher and education support professional. It is using the state reserve portion of the Elementary and Secondary Schools Emergency Relief, the ESSER, federal stimulus dollars to provide these payments. Educating our students during COVID has been a team endeavor and all the members of the education team should be recognized for their hard work. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

WISHART: Any questions? Senator Erdman.

ERDMAN: Thank you, Senator Wishart. Thank you for being here. So this one-time bonus will be very similar to a signing-on bonus. Would there be a requirement that they stay in teaching for a year or whatever to get this money or could they just take the money and quit?

JENNI BENSON: Well, I think that it depends on when they disburse the money, I guess, because they're under contract, so, you know, it-- if it's going through the state department, like Senator Blood was talking about, then I would think there would be some, some parameters around it as well.

ERDMAN: I would think you'd need something.

JENNI BENSON: Yeah.

ERDMAN: Yeah. OK, thank you.

JENNI BENSON: You bet.

WISHART: Additional questions? Seeing none, thank you.

JENNI BENSON: Thank you.

WISHART: Proponents, additional proponents? Welcome.

KYLE MCGOWAN: Good afternoon, Vice Chair Wishart and members of the Appropriate-- Appropriations Committee, excuse me. My name is Kyle McGowan, K-y-l-e M-c-G-o-w-a-n, and I'm with the Nebraska Council of School Administrators, NCSA. Today, I'm also representing STANCE, which is Schools Taking Action for Nebraska's Children's Education,

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and NRCSA, which is Nebraska Rural Community Schools Association. We also would like to thank Senator Blood for trying to address this workforce crisis taking place in schools across Nebraska. We believe that step one in addressing this crisis is to try to retain the employees that we currently have. The Federal Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Fund has been created in at least some part to support the workforce shortage and the employee hardships that we've all experienced in the past two years. We do recognize that LB696 specifically precludes administrators from getting any of these funds and, and that's fine. We, we value our relationship with NSEA, as well as the-- you know, all-- the importance of having great teachers, not only great teachers but great support staff, and we feel any school is only as good as the employees that are in it. So we think that this bill recognizes all eligible employees and NCSA supports it.

WISHART: Thank you. Any questions? Senator Erdman.

ERDMAN: Thank you, Senator Wishart. Thank you for coming. So in your opinion, I know this is a hard thing to judge what happens, but in your opinion, do you think that \$2,000 is going to keep a person in teaching if, if they've already made the decision to go do something else?

KYLE McGOWAN: Well, I do think before they make a decision to go do something else, they're, they're thinking that \$2,000 might be worth staying. You've brought up a question before about what-- you know, the contract and if you're a certificated employee with the school district, you sign a contract for a year, so that-- I would agree that would have to be a-- a part of the requirement. The noncertificated staff, bus driver, paraeducator, those are at-will employees. So I do think some consideration needs to be made if you're going to get some type of, I'll call it, a bonus. And I think we need a commitment that you're going to stay for a period of time, whatever that might be. Otherwise, why are we doing this, right?

ERDMAN: Right. Thank you, Senator Wishart. The only, the only issue you have there, if you've already paid them, no matter what you had them sign, you may not get your money back. You'd have to wait till the end. You'd have to have a period-- you have to serve a period of time before you get the \$2,000. If you got them a \$2,000 check and they quit tomorrow, then you gotta go try to get it back.

KYLE McGOWAN: Yeah, the timing might be important on when the-- that money is paid out.

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WISHART: Additional questions? Seeing none, thank you.

KYLE MCGOWAN: All right, thank you.

WISHART: Additional proponents? Seeing none, any opponents? Seeing none, anyone in the neutral? Seeing none, Senator Blood waived closing. Oh, actually, and I do have-- I believe, for LB696, we have three proponents, zero in opposition, and zero neutral letters to read into the record. Thank you. That closes the hearing for LB9-- excuse me, LB696 and we will open the hearing for LB1085. Hi, Senator. Welcome.

PANSING BROOKS: Good afternoon, thank you.

WISHART: Good afternoon.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you, Vice Chair Wishart and members of the Appropriations Committee. For the record, I am Patty Pansing Brooks, P-a-t-t-y P-a-n-s-i-n-g B-r-o-o-k-s, representing District 28, right here in the heart of Lincoln. I'm here today to introduce LB1085 to fund Nebraska Career and Technical Student Organizations, or CTSOs, and administered by the Department of Education. Nebraska is the only state in the nation that does not approve-- appropriate General Funds to career and technical education and it is beyond time, in my opinion, that we change that statistic. It is time to invest in our state's future workforce. I'm really excited about this bill and I'm-- and I hope you are too. I have spent eight years of my legislative career fighting and working to stop the school-to-prison pipeline and this bill instead expands the school-to-workforce pipeline. I feel really positive and happy to be able to work on something like that when we know that the State Chamber's number-one issue in businesses across the state is workforce development. So I got to thinking-- I started looking at it when we first came back this year and thought, we've got to do what we can. And a lot, a lot of the work that's being done is to attract businesses, but this is, is an important program that helps keep our kids here and shows them the opportunities and possibilities that are available here in Nebraska, puts them in contact with people. So it's time to expand that workforce-- school-to-workforce pipeline, starting in school to connect students with careers and professionals so they can understand and experience the opportunities available in jobs that interest and excite them. These connections will show Nebraska students the possibilities available in the job market and keep more of our fabulous, young-- Nebraska's kids here. If you are not familiar with CTSOs-- I'm going to say it one more time, Career and

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Technical Student Organizations-- I'm sure you should have at least heard of it-- of them because almost all of you met these intelligent, fabulous students a week ago in the Capitol Rotunda. Some of them are back here today to tell you about the skills they've learned as a result of participating in CTSOs and how it has helped them for their future. There are seven CTSOs in Nebraska, each aligned to a grouping of career fields. Agriculture education has Future Farmers of America, or FFA. Business and information technology education has Future Business Leaders of America, or FBLA. For the health sciences, there is Health Occupation Students of America, or HOSA. Marketing and business students can participate in Distributive Education Clubs of America, or DECA. Future teachers can participate in Educators Rising. Skilled in technical sciences or the industrial arts align with the Skills USA program. And human service careers aligns with Family Career and Community Leaders of America, or FCCLA. As you can see, these are all areas where more workers are needed now and will also be needed in the next four to ten years, where-- in the next four to ten years that it will take for current middle school-- schoolers to become trained professionals in healthcare, education, science, arts, etcetera, in their communities. CTSOs are an extension of classroom extend-- instruction, applying classroom learning to real-world experiences. They are not after-school clubs. CTSOs are connected to middle school, high school, and postsecondary instructional programs and are integral to the classroom. Together, these seven CTSO programs have a membership of over 19,500 high school students across Nebraska that are interested in careers in healthcare, education, skilled trades, farming, information technology, robotics, and business. This session, we have heard from almost every entity that workforce is their top priority. What many people do not realize is that Nebraska currently has a strong workforce pipeline system through career and technical education in place that can immediately ensure high school and middle school students hands-on training and education aligned with Nebraska's economic priorities and workforce demands. We do not have to start from scratch and wait seven years to see if something gains traction. We do not have to look any further than funding our own career and technical education programs, in part through these seven CTSOs that serve as a statewide strategy currently in place where we can make an investment-- an immediate investment and see immediate results. Since the pandemic began, Nebraska CTSO memberships have decreased drastically from 2019 to 2021. That is a decrease in real-world experience for Nebraska's future workforce. We need to train bright-- these bright, talented students and keep them in our state whether it is in college, trade schools, or directly in

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the workforce. LB1085 requests two appropriations. The first is to provide \$1.3 million from the General Fund over the next two years to hire a full-time state adviser for each of the seven CTSOs, along with administrative staff who will work with the schools and businesses-- sorry-- across the state to increase student membership and participation in the CTSOs those that have been severely handicapped and hindered by the COVID-19 pandemic. This appropriation would put them in line with every other state that is already funding these positions from their general funds, an investment that gives states a competitive advantage workforce over Nebraska. The second request of LB1085 is to appropriate \$5 million of ARPA funds to the Department of Education to stabilize membership numbers, reinvigorate the programs, increase the number of schools-- of school chapters, recruit instructors, and invest in Nebraska's future. This is a very modest request and in fact, I wish I had really asked for more, but I'd be happy to take an amendment if anybody chooses, so. But I think this is such an important plan. It's a very modest request because these organizations primarily rely on volunteers, donations, and individual student membership fees to train our future workforce. Just think of that. Clearly, other states are using funds for programs that provide training for their workforce and to keep their kids in the state and welcome them and encourage them to stay here. It's long past time for Nebraska to make the same commitment to our students. I thank you for your consideration of LB1085 and I ask you to advance the bill. Again, if you want to add an amendment to increase that number, I would be happy about that. There are several eager, bright, fabulous, young Nebraska minds here who are willing to tell their stories about how the CTSOs have influenced their interests and preparation for their careers. So I'm happy to answer any questions, but just wait. You get to hear from these wonderful young people.

WISHART: Great. Thank you, Senator. Any questions? Senator Erdman.

ERDMAN: Thank you, Senator Wishart. Thank you for coming, Senator Pansing Brooks. One point of clarification: FFA no longer stands for Future Farmers of America.

PANSING BROOKS: Oh, thank you.

ERDMAN: They-- several years back, they voted just-- it just means FFA, if you can believe that.

PANSING BROOKS: Oh.

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ERDMAN: That's what it means.

PANSING BROOKS: Wow.

ERDMAN: So they also included girls in '69. I graduated in '68. That was a bad thing, but anyway.

PANSING BROOKS: Good.

ERDMAN: So talking about your appropriation--

PANSING BROOKS: Yes.

ERDMAN: --you're going to give-- your intention is to appropriate \$1.3 million of General Fund this year and next year and then \$500 million [SIC) this year. What happens, what happens when those funds run out?

PANSING BROOKS: Well, I hope that-- you know, we haven't run-- with anything with those funds, I hope that people behind me might consider about bolstering it. But right now, because of the needs for workforce development, we thought-- I, I didn't feel, since I'm not going to be here-- this is my last year-- that I could forge forward on, on requesting that for future. But I do think it's-- as I've talked to these groups, that that investment of funds will be really valuable for right now for them.

ERDMAN: OK. I appreciate you didn't say this is a one-time contribution--

PANSING BROOKS: No.

ERDMAN: --because it doesn't look like it is.

PANSING BROOKS: No, I think we need, I think we need to support this.

ERDMAN: And perhaps it shouldn't be, I mean-- you know what I'm saying?

PANSING BROOKS: Yeah.

ERDMAN: But-- and for the \$5 million, you should be embarrassed to come for \$5 million. You should have asked for \$20 [million] or \$50 [million] because that's pretty low.

PANSING BROOKS: I think it is too. Thank you for that. Good. Maybe we could write an amendment together.

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ERDMAN: That's what I told, I told Senator Murman. He asked for \$20 [million] and I told him if you don't ask for \$40 [million], don't come.

PANSING BROOKS: OK, well, I'm sorry to waste your time here. I should have asked for more, clearly.

ERDMAN: That was said in jest.

PANSING BROOKS: I know, I know.

WISHART: We just experienced a rare moment in this committee.

PANSING BROOKS: That was a rare moment. Wow. I'm so happy that I could throw that out. Thank you very much.

WISHART: Senator Vargas.

VARGAS: That, that was truly a rare moment. We should record that just for the future.

PANSING BROOKS: We did just record it.

VARGAS: I did want to thank you for bringing this bill. I say this as somebody that participated in DECA myself and had a wonderful next-door neighbor who was a 50-year OEA member, OPS teacher, and he was the head of a DECA-- his DECA at Central High School and he spent so much of his time working with students. This is just one example of the CTSOs, but appreciate you bringing the bill.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you, and I appreciate that, Senator Vargas. And I'm glad we've had this kumbaya moment, Senator Erdman. That was good. I just wanted to say, just for the record, that we have passed out an ARPA eligibility checklist. It seems to fit perfectly and I hope that you're all excited about this bill because I really am.

WISHART: Thank you. Any--

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you.

WISHART: --additional questions? Seeing none, thanks, Senator. Will you be around for closing?

PANSING BROOKS: Yes, thank you.

WISHART: We will move to proponents for LB1085. Welcome.

NANCY BURKHART: Thank you. Should I start?

WISHART: Yes.

NANCY BURKHART: OK. All right, good afternoon. My name is Nancy Burkhart, and that is spelled N-a-n-c-y B-u-r-k-h-a-r-t. I'm a retired Omaha public school teacher, the past Educators Rising Nebraska state advisor, and currently the NSEA liaison for Educators Rising of Nebraska. My role is to offer to the state advisor-- is to offer support to the state advisor and Educators Rising chapters throughout Nebraska. The NSEA supports LB1085. Career technical student organizations, known as CTSOs, such as Educators Rising, FFA, DECA, FBLA, FCCLA, Skills USA, and HOSA, are supported by the Nebraska Department of Education. CTSOs are co-curricular so many of the state competitions are part of the curriculum and the school day. CTSOs are an integral part of career education and workforce development. As I think back to my, my own experience in high school in Crete, Nebraska, that's where I was introduced to the world of CTSOs. I was a member of FCCLA, Family Career and Community Leaders of America, known as FHA back then, and I was also a member of the Future Teachers Organization. Those experiences are where I found my path to becoming a teacher. As I became involved as a chapter and district officer for FCCLA, I found my niche as a leader. I gained the confidence to enroll in college and pursue a teach-- pursue a teaching degree. I've seen firsthand the experiences CTSOs provide for students. I want to share those with you now. Leadership skills: students have the opportunity to become leaders in their school and communities. Each of the CTSOs have a team of officers at the local, state, and national levels. The skills learned by officers will follow them throughout their career choices. These may include postsecondary education, the workplace, the military, the public office, or community service. These students develop confidence in their abilities to set goals and to-- and work to attain those goals. Workplace skills: students are given the opportunity to develop real-world skills through meaningful internships. Students build relationships with local business, area schools, and healthcare providers, which are part of the co-curricular experience while they're in high school. These industries are struggling to employ qualified workers, and school districts are exploring teacher shortages, as we've been talking about, in all areas, including the career and tech curricular areas. Co-curricular experiences complement the regular curriculum and improve the learning experiences of students by helping them identify and develop their inner talents, for example, public speaking, and you're going to hear that soon. CTSOs are helpful in providing entry-level skills that

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they're looking for. These experiences can turn into an opportunity for students to secure advanced internships when they are in their postsecondary education. One of our roles as an educator-- for community service, one of our roles as educators is to teach our students how to give back to the community. CTSOs offer many projects centered around giving back to the community. Whether it's a clothing drive, a winter coat drive, a food drive designed to help someone less fortunate, or assisting in collecting donations for a nonprofit, students learn the importance of giving time to their community. These are just a few, a few of the ways students can learn important lessons, such as empathy, respect, and acceptance of others. Postsecondary experiences: students are introduced to area college campuses during CTSO events, listening to guest speakers, attending fall leadership events, college career fairs, and statewide competitions. Scholarships become a reality for these students as they are encouraged to navigate through the application process. Without the experience provided by a CTSO, some students would not have the opportunity to set foot on a college campus to explore the possibility of acquiring a college degree. As I've explained, CTSOs are vital to students' career exploration. The past two years, we have seen a decline in participation due to being-- events being canceled or reduced numbers because of the COVID-19 restrictions and limited class time. Organizations have not been able to fundraise enough to help students attend scheduled events such as state or national conferences and community service projects had to be canceled, limiting opportunities for students. LB1085 will provide much-needed funds in support of providing opportunities for high-school students in Nebraska. On behalf of your young constituents, the students in our state, I urge you to support LB1085 and I would like to thank Senator Patty Pansing Brooks for introducing LB1085.

WISHART: Thank you. Any questions from the committee? Seeing none, thank you. Additional proponents?

JOSHUA SANTIAGO: Good afternoon, Vice Chair Wishart and the rest of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Joshua Santiago, J-o-s-h-u-a S-a-n-t-i-a-g-o, and I'm happy to join you all again this week to voice my support for LB1085 to appropriate \$5 million of ARPA funds to carry out for the Center for Student Leadership and Expanded Learning act and for career technical education student organizations. The CTSO I have been involved with since my journey started at Northeast Community College was FBLA-PBL. The Future Business Leaders of America and Professional Business Leaders Organization was one I knew of during high school, but much like

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others who are going to graduate at a young age, I did not necessarily have a plan. I began my accounting curriculum at Northeast and was told by two separate instructors that I would make a good fit into the local chapter. Fast-forward a few years later and I am now the state president of Nebraska PBL. Since joining FBLA-PBL, I have seen doors of opportunity open in my life that I would have never thought possible. Our CTSO revolves around shaping young leaders in business and technology through community involvement and state competitions into the future leaders of America. FBLA-PBL also helps our members out by connecting them with potential employers through our powerful job network, with sponsors such as Lutz, Sandhills Global, Gallup, First Bank of Omaha, and OPPD and so many others. While I initially joined because I thought it would look good on my resume, it turned into something much more meaningful for my life and career. I started taking my future very seriously after surrounding myself with positive and forward-thinking peers and advisors. I challenged myself to put in extra study time to excel at my future competitions and I looked for mentors in the accounting field, and I was met with great leaders who offered sound advice and wisdom. My first experience competing was an absolute whirlwind of great joy. I took home second place in accounting analysis and decision making with my partner, Trent Jorgensen, at state. And then fast-forward two months later, Trent and I placed third in the nation amongst other freshmen through college seniors from 50 other schools such as UCLA, University of Texas-Austin, Florida State University, and the Wharton School of Business in Pennsylvania. This accolade was a tremendous experience, as I was not sure if I was the right fit for a business degree, let alone accounting. We placed third in the nation, even though we only took two accounting courses at Northeast Community College. Now, after three years of being a local chapter president and the state president of Nebraska PBL, I plead to you today to please support this bill in passing it. With competitions being held in-person again, it would be great to see some federal funds flow through all CTSOs to lessen the financial burden of hosting state conferences and propping up very strong advisors who shape us into the young leaders of America. Members of Skills USA, FBLA-PBL, FCCLA, FFA, and all of the other CTSOs offered here in Nebraska love representing the Cornhusker State. Outsiders are quick to call us a flyover state, but everyone in this room here today knows just as much as I do that counting us hardworking Nebraskans out is a very risky move to take. We love bringing home championships to show that we get as serious in the classroom and workplace as we do during the detasseling season or harvest. I spent a few of those detasseling seasons with corn rash on the arms, I'll tell you that.

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As my time is coming to an end with PBL this May, pending graduation, I cannot help but smile back on the opportunities and skills that this CTSO has given me. I learned how to build a strong network, present eloquently, and think critically while working as a team during my competitions and tenure in FBLA-PBL. I learned how to be a professional, caring member of Nebraska and my hope is, during this legislative session, that you will all empower the youth of today to help bring the prosperous fruits of labor for the future with this allocation of funds. Thank you for listening and I promise I'll stay out of your hair until the next legislative session next year. I'd be happy to answer any questions that anyone would have at this time.

WISHART: Any questions? Seeing none, it's good to see you back.

JOSHUA SANTIAGO: Thank you very much.

WISHART: Next proponent. Welcome.

DILLON KIM: Good afternoon, Vice Chair Wishart and the rest of the esteemed Appropriations Committee. My name is Dillon Kim and it is spelled D-i-l-l-o-n K-i-m. I'm a senior from Arlington High School and I'm here representing Nebraska FBLA, the Future Business Leaders of America. I'm here today to testify as a proponent for LB1085, which provides financial support to the Center for Student Leadership and Expanded Learning. That is the umbrella for all of our career technical student organizations. That includes Educators Rising, DECA, FBLA-PBL, FCCLA, FFA, HOSA, and Skills USA. When I moved from California to small-town Nebraska from my freshman year, I had a hard time making friends since oftentimes I felt like an outsider looking in. Many of my classmates had already established a stable friend group because they grew up together, so I felt like I did not belong. And because I wasn't the best at sports, I was discouraged from participating. Many of my classmates' friends groups stemmed from sports, but fortunately I was offered the opportunity my freshman year to join the Future Business Leaders of America chapter at Arlington High School. Joining FBLA changed the trajectory of my life. First and foremost, I gained friends, and while this may not sound like much in the grand scheme of things, it was revolutionary for someone like me. I was able to form friendships with many of my peers through conferences and local community service activities within FBLA. I quickly came out of my shell and for the first time since coming to Nebraska, felt like I belonged. Not only did it allow me to make friends, but I was also able to hone in on my leadership and public speaking skills, which I can confidently say are credited to the events that I have organized and the conferences I have

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attended. And my growth as a leader can be seen not only in FBLA, in which I am now a state officer, but also in my conduct in the classroom, as I'm able to apply what I am learning in FBLA to my curriculum and the various other activities that I'm involved in. I owe a lot to FBLA, but I worry about the upcoming future of CTSOs in Nebraska. The fact of the matter is that all of the opportunities FBLA provides members would not be possible without funding. And while career technical education in Nebraska is funded by the federal Perkins V, CTSOs in Nebraska do not receive this funding. This is a major problem, as if most, if not all, funds from CTSOs come from the local chapter and students themselves. LB1085 looks to address this issue. The approval of this bill would not only provide funds to CTSOs in Nebraska, but in turn would contribute to the dire workforce needs of healthcare and skilled workers. Nebraska CTSOs aim to entice students to take on careers in education, agriculture, informational technology, industrial technology, and even business fields. While CTSOs in Nebraska have successfully functioned with just their local funding since their inception, there's still untapped potential because of the limited funding, which could potentially strip a student of an opportunity of a lifetime. So this begs the question, how does this benefit Nebraska as a whole? This lack of funding stretches far beyond what could be possible for a student in a CTSO. It stretches into the posterity of Nebraska's workforce. The 20,000 students in Nebraska who are members of one or more CTSOs will be the ones pursuing to be Nebraska's future teachers, senators, plant workers, programmers, electricians, and even farmers, which is why it is so imperative that we are taking the time to invest in the future of Nebraska. It is no question that \$5 million is a lot of money, although a modest request, as stated by Senator Pansing Brooks. But the benefit that every school, student, and the businesses of Nebraska will reap is well worth the investment in our future leaders of this great state. Thank you.

WISHART: Thank you. Any questions? Seeing none, thank you.

DILLON KIM: Thank you.

WISHART: Additional proponents? Good afternoon.

ALLY SEDLACEK: Good afternoon, Vice Chairperson Wishart and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Ally Sedlacek, spelled A-l-l-y S-e-d-l-a-c-e-k, and I am a senior at O'Neill High School this year. Thank you for the opportunity today to voice my support for LB1085. You see, I would not be here today if it weren't for organizations like Family Career and Community Leaders of America, or

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FCCLA. FCCLA is a national career and technical student organization, or CTSO, that helps students learn how to make a difference in their families and communities and also prepare students for the workforce by addressing important personal, work, and societal issues. I joined FCCLA when I was a seventh grader and it has greatly impacted my life. When I first joined, I was very shy and wasn't very outgoing. I pretty much just kept to myself. I kept coming back to meetings and volunteering for things, though, because I found it very fun and rewarding to be a part of something. By volunteering in my community, going to meetings, completing several projects for competitions, and going to conferences throughout the next several, several years had changed my life completely. I became more outgoing and learned a lot, a lot of great public speaking skills, which will be very useful in my future career. I also have learned how to be a great leader by taking on leadership roles like becoming a chapter officer, district officer, and even state officer. By being involved with FCCLA for the past six years, I have gained many skills that I will use for the rest of my life. Without organizations like this, I do not know where I would be today. CTSOs mean a lot to me and other students across Nebraska. I would like to ask for your support of LB1085. This bill would help fund CTSOs in Nebraska because we are the only state in the country that does not receive matched Perkins funding. This additional funding would help increase access for students, allowing more students to participate, and would also help provide for additional materials and programming. With your support, students will be able to experience the benefits of CTSOs and learn valuable life skills for years to come. I know you have a difficult task and there are a lot of requests for these dollars. CTSOs are a critical link between students and business, students and business and industry within our state. This funding would help strengthen the link and help build upon the good things already happening. Again, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today in support of LB1085.

WISHART: Thank you for being here. Any questions? Seeing none, thank you. Additional proponents? Welcome.

MADISON STRACKE: Good afternoon, Vice Chairperson Wishart and senators of the Appropriations Committee. I am Madison Stracke. I grew up in a small rural town called Stuart, Nebraska. I served as the state president for FFA in the year 2020 to 2021 and I'm currently a student at UNL majoring in agriculture education. I attribute my leadership skills, agriculture knowledge, and so much more to my time spent in FFA. As stated, we know how CTSOs contribute to students' education and career development. We understand the

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impact that they have had for the last several decades on people and industries here in Nebraska. There is a huge need for workers in all fields that CTSOs relate to and serve. However, my concern of the decrease in enrollment in several of these CTSOs goes to the communities that rely on students wanting to come back to the area following their postsecondary education. Growing up in a small rural town in Nebraska taught me just how important having a strong FFA program was. Almost all of our business in Stuart are related to agriculture in some shape or form. Our community worked with students to understand what we wanted to see happen in our town to convince us to move back home in the future. Housing and safety were, of course, named, but the ones that I think plays one of the biggest factors was job opportunities. FFA showed us those opportunities. When I look at our school system, nearly all students participated in ag ed and FFA. Actually, my senior year, we had all except two students in FFA in our entire high school. This, of course, sounds promising, but this is not the case in many communities in Nebraska. Our community has recognized just how FFA can be a factor in determining the vitality of our town. I grew up on a ranch and farm and naturally fell in love with agriculture. However, I saw students around me have completely different experiences and backgrounds. With the help of our agriculture teacher and advisors, students found a passion and respect for the industry, which then allowed them to become better connected. There are countless communities in Nebraska that are founded on the basis of agriculture, but numerous of these towns don't have an agriculture education or FFA program. These are students with direct ties to the ag industry, but don't receive any technical knowledge prior to postsecondary, postsecondary schools. They aren't able to see the need to return home in the future because they missed out on the chance to see the opportunities their town truly holds. FFA programs do just that through career and leadership development events. Through supervised agriculture experiences, the third component of the ag education and FFA model, they are able to work next to industry professionals where they gain real-world experience. In short, I am one of those, those examples of a student who found their pathway to the industry through a CTSO. Furthermore, I'm someone convinced to move home because of my experience in FFA. I have seen the real opportunities our community holds, which would not have been possible without my ag ed teacher and experience in FFA. This bill is not only vital to the development and sustainability of all CTSOs, but is crucial to the survival of the rural communities in Nebraska. Thank you.

WISHART: Thank you. Any questions? Senator Erdman.

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ERDMAN: Thank you, Senator Wishart. Thank you for coming. So what was your supervised agriculture enterprise? What did you do?

MADISON STRACKE: Yeah, I was-- I had equine production, so I was one of those fortunate enough to rodeo and do that alongside my family, but I wish I would have extended mine more into some of the opportunities I had, such as cattle production and those things.

ERDMAN: How many students are in your school?

MADISON STRACKE: I graduated with ten, but in total our school runs from 40 to 50 students.

ERDMAN: So you have one instructor?

MADISON STRACKE: Correct.

ERDMAN: OK, thank you.

MADISON STRACKE: Thank you.

CLEMENTS: Excuse me.

WISHART: Thank you. Additional questions? Senator Clements.

CLEMENTS: I don't believe you spelled your name.

MADISON STRACKE: Oh, I did not. M-a-d-i-s-o-n S-t-r-a-c-k-e.

WISHART: Thank you.

CLEMENTS: Thank you.

WISHART: Thank you. Additional proponents? Welcome.

JENNA HAMILTON: Good morning, senators of the Appropriations Committee. I'm Jenna Hamilton, J-e-n-n-a H-a-m-i-l-t-o-n, and I'm the state secretary of Educators Rising Nebraska and I am here on behalf of Educators Rising Nebraska to promote the LB1085 because, as future educators, we are facing a giant lack of-- a lack of interest in our career right now. As we know from the teacher shortage, there is not enough teachers sufficient to teach the people who want to become business leaders and healthcare workers in our state. And so by promoting this, promoting this bill, you are giving money back to us and Educators Rising Nebraska. By becoming the future educators of Nebraska, we are therefore educating and bringing up all of these future workers in Nebraska. We really-- I urge you to support this

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bill because by supporting this bill, you are supporting the future workers in Nebraska. Thank you.

WISHART: Thank you for being here. Any additional questions? Seeing none, thank you. Additional proponents? Good afternoon.

NICHOLAS LORIAUX: Good afternoon, Senator Wishart and the Appropriations Committee. My name is Nicholas Loriaux, N-i-c-h-o-l-a-s L-o-r-i-a-u-x, and I'm here today on behalf of Lincoln Southwest DECA. I'm the president of our Lincoln Southwest chapter and I just wanted to start off by telling you a little bit about my personal DECA experience. I started off my freshman year, about halfway through, and honestly, I joined DECA because my parents wanted me to join something. All I did was play sports and they thought I should be in something else, so like, all right, whatever, DECA, that looks pretty fun. So I joined DECA and honestly, I instantly fell in love. I went to our state competition that first year and I think I placed like third or fourth. So for the first time, like, that's pretty good. So I came back the next year really encouraged and just ready to see all that DECA has to offer, and that was last year, and I ended up finishing second at our state competition and qualifying for the international competition in personal financial literacy. And unfortunately, all this was virtual, so I virtually attended the International Career Development Conference, Conference and I did pretty well and it was just a really great experience. This year, I became our chapter president and we already had our district competition and I placed first in personal financial literacy. We have our state competition coming up soon. This year, I'll be running for the state DECA president. There's about eight different people going for this position and I'm just really excited to be able to further my DECA career. I think one of the main parts of this bill that we need to consider is that any money that we're investing in these CTSOs is going to invest in people who are going to stay here in Nebraska and it's going to pay dividends down the road. Initially, when I started high school, I was thinking, oh, I'll probably go off to Chicago or New York, some big place for finance and get a job there. But through DECA, I've been able to see that there's so many opportunities here in Lincoln and Omaha and really everywhere on the around the state that I can have an amazing career here in Nebraska. And as someone who's going to be paying taxes here soon, I definitely want the money that I'm spending and investing into these CTSOs, I want that to stay here and I want that talent and these, these bright students. I want them to stay here and to continue to pay dividends for our state and just make it greater down the line. So I just also say just some of the areas that

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DECA especially needs funding is for students, like just this year, to be able to go to the International Career Development Conference in Atlanta, that's going to be almost like \$2,000 for a student who wants to go. And I don't know a whole lot of my friends or anything that just have \$2,000 laying around. It's a pretty great financial burden on families to be able to send their kids to these competitions. And I just think if we can get some funding-- I mean, the funding in this bill is great, but even more, it would be awesome just to make sure that anyone who-- any Nebraskan who has worked hard and deserves that spot at the international competition gets to go and compete to represent our state. And I just want to thank you all and thank Senator Pansing Brooks for introducing this bill.

WISHART: Thank you. Thank you so much. Any questions from the committee? Seeing none, thank you.

NICHOLAS LORIAUX: Thank you.

WISHART: Good luck. Additional proponents? Welcome.

SPENCER KRENK: Hello, Vice Chair and members of this committee. I am Spencer Krenk, S-p-e-n-c-e-r K-r-e-n-k. I am a freshman at Lincoln Southwest High School, a member of our DECA chapter, and just so thankful to be here today. So, members of this committee, you've already heard it from my previous colleagues who have said so much about these experiences, so much-- how important they mean to them. And I think they all really echoed the first year-- that freshman year, like, as I'm experiencing right now, is the key that determines whether you stay in that organization, you stay in DECA, for me, and you stay maybe in the state. And that is what it is just so important, I argue. So this kind of experience, what experiences are there? You know, for one-- some of my peers call it charity. That is one of the biggest things, going out into the community, giving back. Helping them, helping our community that helps us so much is just something we just love to do. And I would argue the competitions are awesome. It feels great to win. The previous-- as my previous friend mentioned, the districts-- I-- this was my first time competing and I managed to get first in our cohort and it felt great, but charity, going out into the community, helping people, it just feels great and it's good for the community too. It gives us experiences, recognizes the importance of us going out there. So later in life, not only are we going to be a business leader or a farm leader or an educator in our communities, but we're going to be helping them in so many more ways. For example, this fall, as part of DECA, we started a-- or we had a food drive at Southwest. And while it wasn't the most

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successful, it was something that was just so important. We got to help our community. Other schools in this Lincoln district got to help their communities. It is truly important. Also to touch on another thing, experiences. That is what drives it. And some of the first people up here have brought up the fall leadership conference. I've never experienced something like that where you get to go out and meet other people like you who have the same ambitions as you to be a business leader, to be a marketing leader, things like that. But to meet that-- to do the networking, to learn those skills like entrepreneurship, the financial skills, that is something that is just so important and you don't get experience with anything but a CTSO. The importance of these organizations just cannot be understated. Additionally, some of the skills that can be learned are just beyond important. Business, business skills, public speaking, as I'm trying to show today, marketing skills, these are some of the great things that can be learned through these organizations. And additionally, it just, I think, is important to recognize all this-- you know, all of these skills make students feel more appreciated by our state. They get to learn these skills that are going to make their lives better down the road, make the lives of their closest friends, colleagues, make the lives of anyone, everyone in their communities better. When we appreciate that by doing something like passing this bill today, getting that extra funding, it is so incredibly impactful for our state and it cannot, like I said, be understated, the importance of doing that. You know, I can't be sure what my future is going to entail. I'm still a freshman, but let me tell you this kind of bill, the funding that this proposes is nothing but, you know, just a cheer to say, continue with it, to keep going. And, you know, it's under-- yeah, thank you.

WISHART: Thank you. Well, it is clear you are going places, so I'd be remiss if I didn't ask you for your name and to spell it.

SPENCER KRENK: Spencer. OK, sorry. Spencer Krenk, so S-p--

WISHART: Oh, did you already do that?

SPENCER KRENK: Yeah.

WISHART: OK, good. Well, Spencer, you listed off education and ag leadership, but you should definitely think about senator as well. Any questions from the committee? Thank you. Any additional proponents? Welcome.

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KATHY LITTLE: Thank you. Good afternoon. I'm Kathy Little, K-a-t-h-y L-i-t-t-l-e, and I can tell you right now, my two students back there are shocked that I'm sitting up here. I am the DECA adviser at Southwest Lincoln. And so I asked them to speak. They had no idea I was going to do the same. I want to thank you for your time very much. I-- after hearing the first bill, maybe I should have spoken to that, as well, but that's a different story. I did not start in teaching. I actually took the business route and then became an educator as a second career. Being the DECA adviser was not on my radar when I first started teaching at Southwest, but I'm so thankful I've been able to do that. And what a blessing it has been to help these students find career paths, as well as just to really see them grow as individuals. For DECA, areas that they are able to focus on and learn about include business, business administration, marketing, hospitality, business finance, professional financial literacy, accounting, the retail industry, entrepreneurship. There are just so many opportunities and avenues and really something for just about everybody that maybe they don't want to necessarily go into business or be a business major-- maybe they want to run their business. Maybe they want to be the entrepreneur. Maybe they're looking at the financial side or in the hospitality industry, and DECA really has an opportunity for everyone. As the advisor, I also teach a marketing class, accounting, and info technology as part of my course load at Southwest. And as DECA, we do incorporate-- well, not just DECA, FBLA as well, FCCLA, Skills USA, we incorporate what we learn in our group in our curriculum. It's part of my marketing curriculum, and so it isn't just something that's an addition to my regular teaching duties, but it becomes part of my everyday life as well. It's been very exciting to take students to different conferences, to see them get very excited, and specifically about fall leadership conference, as Spencer alluded to, as well, to see students get to meet business leaders throughout the state and encourage them why they should stay in the state of Nebraska, which I think they should, and opportunities in education, as well as later on in careers here in the state. And so by funding this bill, you are indeed funding the future for our business leaders here in the state of Nebraska. It is-- I understand that money is always very tight and I respect that and I respect the difficult decisions you guys have to make, where the money goes. In fact, I was just teaching taxes yesterday in one of my classes, so-- or on Friday, so trying to teach these world-- real-world experiences to our students is really what it's about, and getting them to see that we want to stay here in the state, getting them to attend the state conference or, as Nick even alluded to, the international career development conference specifically for DECA.

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Those do take money. They take funding beyond what we are able to do always at the school level. And as advisors and, and teachers, we know that we spend extra money out of our extra stipend to help fund these as well. So what would we do with that extra money? The funding would go to these students and to expanding, whether it's the career that-- excuse me, the conferences, whether it is additional internships or getting to meet business leaders. That's where I see this going as well. And I really would like to work on the marketing aspect of it as well and encouraging more students to be able to involve in any CTSO, not just DECA, but all of them. And as CTSO advisors, we work together within our school. We are competitive with one another, but we really work together because we understand the benefits that these CTSOs have for all, all students. Thank you for your time.

WISHART: Thank you. Any questions? Seeing none, thank you.

KATHY LITTLE: Thank you.

WISHART: Additional proponents? Seeing none-- oh, additional proponents?

BARBARA PETERSEN: Hello.

WISHART: Welcome.

BARBARA PETERSEN: Vice Chair Wishart and members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Barbara Peterson, B-a-r-b-a-r-a P-e-t-e-r-s-e-n, and I'm a registered nurse with the Nebraska Nurses Association, or the NNA, and I'm here today to share the Nebraska Nurses Association's support for LB1085 to appropriate federal ARPA, ARPA funds to the State Department of Education for career and technical education student organizations. One program that this bill would impact is the Nebraska Health Occupation Students of America, also known as HOSA. Nebraska HOSA is a program that engages high school students interested in health professional careers. As you've probably heard, the nursing workforce in Nebraska is facing a critical shortage, which has only worsened with the pandemic. Programs such as HOSA could attract and recruit high school students who are interested in a career in nursing, which could help produce more future nurses in the state of Nebraska. Health science education in high schools is relatively new in Nebraska. It can be very difficult for-- sorry, it can be very difficult to support for smaller school districts. That being said, those communities are often where the need is the greatest in Nebraska. And as of right

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now, HOSA chapters are mainly in the Omaha-Lincoln area or other moderate-sized towns such as Kearney and Columbus. LB1085 could help HOSA extend their reach to the rest of the state and provide more opportunities for students in rural communities. Funds from LB1085 could also provide startup funding for new chapters, help reach new members and communities, provide additional resources and opportunities for those members, decrease the cost of programs for members, offset the costs for advisors, and provide additional training for health science teachers and advisors. The future of nursing needs long-term initiatives that can increase the pipeline of nurses in the state of Nebraska. LB1085 supports this initiative by capturing the interest of high school students as they're making these decisions for their future careers. Therefore, we encourage you to appropriate funds to these-- to this important cause and I thank you for the opportunity to be here today.

WISHART: Thank you for coming. Any questions? Seeing none, thank you. Any additional proponents? Any proponents? Seeing none, any opponents? Seeing none, anyone in the neutral? Seeing none, Senator Pansing Brooks, you're welcome to close.

PANSING BROOKS: Wow. First, I want to thank all the fabulous testifiers, and I also want to thank each of you for listening here. And you got to get a little bit of a picture of our fabulous future in Nebraska because of these wonderful young people. I also did a little poll while I was sitting here and out of the eight young people who testified, all eight are planning to stay here in Nebraska, so that's, that's a wonderful thing, I think. And I congratulate each of them on their ability to speak and to come forward in a situation that isn't always the most comfortable. I want to thank you all and if you have any questions or if you want to help me write an amendment to increase that, because clearly it's important for Nebraska, thank you.

WISHART: Thank you, Senator.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you for listening today.

WISHART: Senator Dorn.

DORN: Thank you, Senator Wishart. Thank you for being here and having all of them speak. And I was trying to-- one of my questions early on was I was trying to listen to a lot of them and explain what the programs were and stuff. But in the bill itself, you have \$1.3 million in General Funds to administer this.

PANSING BROOKS: Yes.

DORN: And I guess explain that a little bit. I-- generally, a bill this size, we don't have that size of a fund to administer it.

PANSING BROOKS: Yes, I think part of it is that there are eight different programs, so we need leaders in eight of the different areas. It's not like it's-- right now, the Department of Education has one person overseeing it. But by having eight different employees who can look over each of the different groups, from FFA to, to DECA to-- you've heard all of those different groups. So obviously HOSA is healthcare oriented so a businessperson wouldn't necessarily be in charge of helping the program for the healthcare industry across the state.

DORN: So part of this program, then, is that part of the program will be to, I call it, more of a statewide perspective?

PANSING BROOKS: Oh, it's definitely statewide, yes.

DORN: OK.

PANSING BROOKS: This is a statewide program and this is to beef up that program and to make sure that since we're the only state that hasn't had any funding for it from the state itself, that's what we're trying to do.

DORN: Thank you.

WISHART: Additional proponents? Excuse me, additional-- well, in this case--

PANSING BROOKS: I hope so.

WISHART: --additional questions?

ERDMAN: Thank you, Senator Wishart. I guess I'm in that category. I don't necessarily-- not in that category. But to follow up on what Senator Dorn said--

PANSING BROOKS: Yes.

ERDMAN: --if you look at the fiscal note, in the years out, you're going to have a program specialist and then you're going to have seven program specialists III, an office association, so the \$1.3 million going forward is going to be for instructors or whatever it

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may be those people are going to do. None of that money is going to go to the students because that \$1.3 [million] is going to be used up in administrative costs. It looks to me like the only money that could possibly go to students is the \$5 million coming from the ARPA contribution and after that, it's run out. It doesn't make any sense to me that we would have to hire 12 more people to do this job. The Department of Education has 512 employees. You ought to be able to find somebody to be able to administrate this money without having to hire 8, 9, 12 more people. That, that fiscal note doesn't make any sense because when that, when that \$5 million runs out, the students get nothing--

PANSING BROOKS: OK.

ERDMAN: -as far as, as far as the contribution. That was the idea, I think, that they said is each student would get some of this money to help them go to conferences and experience-- get more experiences in learning how to be leaders and all those things. But if you look at that fiscal note, it does nothing going forward as far as helping them except for just instructors.

PANSING BROOKS: I appreciate your comment, Senator Erdman. And what I will say to that is it is not just about salaries. It's also about getting the programs placed out across the state and to make sure that there are programs available in the various schools and so-- but I'm happy to, to look at that and see--

ERDMAN: Yeah, take a look at it. It doesn't, it doesn't-- as Senator Dorn pointed out, it doesn't make any sense--

PANSING BROOKS: OK.

ERDMAN: --that a program of that size would cost \$1.3 million to administrate.

PANSING BROOKS: OK, thank you.

WISHART: Thank you, Senator. Additional questions? Seeing none, thank you.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you very much.

WISHART: We also have 22 letters in support, zero opposition, and zero neutral in-- to read into the record. That closes our hearing for LB1085 and opens our hearing for LB1182.

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STINNER: Go ahead, Senator.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you. Thank you. Chairman Stinner and members of the Appropriations Committee. For the record, I'm Patty Pansing Brooks, P-a-t-t-y P-a-n-s-i-n-g B-r-o-o-k-s, representing District 28 right here in the heart of Lincoln. I appear before you today to introduce LB1182, which is intended to adopt the School Employees Pandemic Protection Act and state intent regarding federal funds. This bill will then establish the State Department of Education to create the School Employees Pandemic Protection Program on or before August 1, 2022, as an avenue for the-- for these funds to be distributed. These federal funds are to be used to reimburse school employees for the purchase of personal protective equipment in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. LB1182 will help school employees by using funds from the American Rescue Plan Act to fund grants up to \$200 per employee. Since the COVID-19 pandemic began in the spring of 2020, school employees have taken on significant challenges to keep student-- students learning and safe. As the pandemic intensified, educators quickly pivoted from traditional lesson delivery to teaching through video classrooms. During the previous school year, many teachers found themselves preparing to deliver instruction simultaneously to both students in their classroom and students attending virtually, two very different methods of engagement. This year, schools are struggling, struggling with a lack of substitute teachers, increasing numbers of school employees and students becoming ill. Now I have heard from teachers that school districts are not supplying the same number of masks and amount of cleaning materials this current school year compared to what they had supplied in previous years, causing teachers to dip into their own pockets to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. It does appear that the pandemic is now waning, but the Legislature should provide a mechanism in which those school employees may be reimbursed retroactively for these personal protective equipment purchases. The testifiers behind me include experts and educators. They will shed further light on the impact of this pandemic on educators and why some form of reimbursement is so crucial. We want to establish an environment that takes care of our teachers and school personnel and this job-- this bill does a great job of doing just that. Thank you for considering this important bill and thank you to my colleagues for cosponsoring this legislation. I ask you to move LB1182 to General File and with that, I'll be happy to answer any questions you may have or, of course, you can refer them to the experts behind me.

STINNER: Thank you, Senator. Questions? Senator Erdman.

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ERDMAN: Thank you, Senator Stinner. Senator Pansing Brooks, this fiscal note looks kind of similar to the other one. You have about \$85,000 to hire a grant specialist to distribute the money. Why is it that every time we're going to do a grant program, we gotta hire somebody new to do that?

PANSING BROOKS: Well, this is, this is what has been recommended because the schools have needed some help doing some of this and--

ERDMAN: Department of Education has 512 people employed. They should be able find someone to do this.

PANSING BROOKS: OK, thank you.

ERDMAN: That's my opinion, anyway. Thank you.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you.

STINNER: Senator Dorn.

DORN: Thank you, Chairman Stinner. Thank you for being here again. I guess I-- when reading the fiscal note, too-- and this is something that we-- I guess we really haven't looked at much as we've talked about ARPA funding, because halfway or two-thirds of the way down that page it says revenue, and it says they estimate an increase of \$500,000 in General Funds revenue going forward due to the taxable income of the employee salary of these ARPA funds. And I, I, and I just bring that up as a factor-- fact that I don't know if we've ever had a bill that showed that and I don't know where that came from or whatever, that inadvertently-- not inadvertently, but somewhere down the road, many of these ARPA funds will create some revenue. I don't know what or if this is right or anything, but I, I know I questioned you on the other fiscal note. And this one here, I go, oh, I haven't seen that yet in any of them, or at least I haven't picked up on it. Thank you for bringing it, though.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you.

STINNER: Should I answer that? I mean, they're not-- I'm hearing that it's about income tax, so I-- we can probably answer your question later.

DORN: Yeah.

STINNER: Any additional questions? Senator Erdman.

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ERDMAN: Thank you, Senator Stinner. I'll just make a comment. Senator Pansing Brooks, the other issue, the schools got about \$546 million in the COVID money. It would have seen that someone there could have figured out how to buy protective-- PPE for their employees.

PANSING BROOKS: It's, it's my understanding that we are back to the same situation where when, when my kids were in school, they were bringing-- we had to take Kleenexes to the schools because otherwise the teachers were paying for them. So maybe we need to change it so that the schools can use that money to reimburse teachers, but that's not how it's done now. And the teachers are spending their own money, and so I don't think it's appropriate. We didn't spend the money to put up the barriers between us in the Legislature ourselves, and it seems appropriate that the teachers get reimbursed. Thank you for the question.

STINNER: Any addit-- additional questions? Seeing none, thank you.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you.

STINNER: Proponents? Good afternoon.

ROBERT MILLER: Good afternoon, Senator, Appropriations Committee. My name is Robert Miller; that's R-o-b-e-r-t M-i-l-l-e-r, and I'm a 20-year educator for the Omaha Public Schools and I currently serve as the Omaha Education Association president, as well as Nebraska State Education vice president. I'd like to thank Senator Pansing Brooks for introducing LB1182 and the NSEA supports LB1182. Educators have always known the trials and tribulations in our classrooms and school districts, but the pandemic has revealed a clear picture of the public-- to the public to see and hopefully understand the struggles and inequities that our students and families are facing. Educators throughout Nebraska have done some heavy lifting during the COVID pandemic. The asks kept coming and the teachers are expected to make it work with no time being allowed for planning or implementing. Teachers found themselves preparing to deliver instruction simultaneously. The learning continued because, as difficult as it was, educators made it happen because it mattered to our students, our families, and school staff. During this time, teachers continued to reach deeper into their pockets to feel safe and to follow safety measures being directed by the local, state, and federal agencies. From purchasing replacements for needed masks, Clorox wipes, hand sanitizers, and makeshift dividers to allow small group instruction to take place, teachers made sure the students had what they needed to be as safe as possible. Granted, school districts may have

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provided cleaning supplies, but they didn't fully consider the frequency of using it. The supply and demand were affected, with every school district requesting similar items. This created the need to make adjustments on the items being asked by buildings. Classrooms are the primary place where teaching and learning takes place, which means precautions must be taken to help make everyone feel safe. A clean and sanitized environment is imperative and for the sake of safety, teachers covered many of those costs. We wouldn't expect a doctor to pay for or provide the needed latex gloves, gown, mask, or headwear for surgery that is being planned. However, teachers do just that. It is a time-- it's time consuming because in order to make a request and receive the item in a timely manner, doesn't happen. The picture continued to be made clearer on staffing. Districts are struggling with a lack of substitute teachers and the constant need to have existing staff cover classes. When a teacher goes weeks on end without having their required planning time, that planning work must take place somewhere else and usually it's the non-duty hours, which is typically at home, which takes away time from their own families and other personal responsibilities. LB1182 would show educators that they did-- what they did and supplied during this ongoing pandemic was valued not only by their students and families, but by the state of Nebraska. Nebraska may not be for everyone, but for the 28,000 NSEA members who live and work here, it is; and providing an environment that is welcoming, safe, and clean for our educators and our 335,000 Nebraska students, it matters. Please support LB1182. Thank you.

STINNER: Thank you. Questions? Senator Erdman.

ERDMAN: Thank you, Senator Stinner. Thank you for coming today. So I conclude from your comments that you think the PPE is one of the reasons we have a shortage of substitute teachers.

ROBERT MILLER: Well, the substitute teachers, their ages where they are, typically, they, they are-- fear coming to the classroom without the needed PPE.

ERDMAN: Several years ago, when I was on the Education Committee, I introduced a bill to help with the substitute teacher shortage and the department shot that down, and that's where the problem is. The problem isn't that you don't have PPE. The problem is with the regulations you've got in place, people can't qualify to be substitute teachers.

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ROBERT MILLER: Yeah, there's a variety of reasons, and like we currently have, the substitutes right now, they were worried both for their safety and--

ERDMAN: Yeah, I understand.

ROBERT MILLER: Yeah.

ERDMAN: But that's not the issue.

ROBERT MILLER: That's not the only issue, correct.

ERDMAN: Right. Thank you.

STINNER: Additional questions? Seeing none, thank you.

LINDA FREYE: Hello. Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Linda Freye. That is spelled L-i-n-d-a F-r-e-y-e, and I live here in Lincoln and I'm here today to share with you my perspective as a 35-year-plus classroom educator in support of LB1182. I am in the classroom and I was-- I actually was able to get a sub today to come and do this. And I will give her credit, she's a UNL student and trying to pick up the pieces of not having enough substitutes and came to my room today, and I hope they're having a great afternoon. I've had the opportunity to work with kindergarten students for the last 20-plus years. So in an average school year, kindergarten students share hugs, they're holding hands, they sneeze without covering their nose, and they cough on everybody and me. So when the pandemic hit, I knew this was going to be fun and a struggle for everybody. So how many of you-- and, well, plus myself-- has had trouble wearing a mask? Too tight, too loose, itchy, wet, flimsy, all that stuff, and even in kindergarten, doesn't have the right Paw Patrol person on the cover. As the daily wearing of masks continued, kindergartners could go through three disposable and/or cloth masks per day, depending on humidity outside and the temperature outside and what they had for lunch and all of that, food, sweat, mucus-- my littles would call it snot-- all gets in the mask. I wouldn't-- I don't like having a dirty mask and I didn't feel they did-- needed to have one either. So what did I do? As the holes and wearing on the tags-- you know, they're five and some of them have no noses whatsoever, so to make that mask stay on-- you know, and if it's frayed and they're-- and it's not their fault. So as the daily wearing of that happened, they just-- it got to be so much and I just went out and started buying masks. So we-- I heard somebody ask questions about supplying of schools. My

school did supply me a classroom cloth set of masks at the beginning of the pandemic and then another one at the middle of the pandemic and then I asked for another set this year, OK? They also had disposable ones when you come into the building and such, but when you're in the middle of a lesson and that kid has oozed all over, you kind of want to give them a mask quickly. And I will also say parents have been very good about sending extras, and so donations have happened, but I have been-- in these last couple of years, I couldn't even tell you how-- I said I probably have purchased six large, bulk packages of the disposable ones. And a kid can't wear an adult mask. That's just something I found. I did notice on the cloth ones that the district provided us-- they were good. They stayed on. They researched it. But on the tag, it said good for 30 washes. So that tells me-- you know, how many of us had a special mask that had "Go Big Red" or whatever? I'm mama duck in kindergarten, so I had a duck mask. But, you know, they don't last forever either. So as I worked to deal with that, I also-- you know, in kindergarten, you still have snack, thank goodness. And, you know, you got to have a clean environment to have that snack. So we, we were supplied bleach. Well, I don't-- you know, in a, in a bottle that they bored a hole in so that we could squirt the bleach out. Does that make sense? I couldn't control the bleach. So after I started doing that, I figured that's not good for five-year-olds, so I bought disposable wipes, sanitizing wipes. We can go through many of those a day because, again, we, we wash the tables before and after snack. We wash the tables in between art things and use of Play-Doh and whatever, again, so we could stay safe. So while today I talked about two things, masks and wipes and I bought them and my fellow teachers and staff have bought their own, I would be remiss if I did not tell you that I know many people who have also purchased-- I guess I'll call them what we had at lunch, those plastic-- what do you call them? Word, anybody?

WISHART: Dividers?

LINDA FREYE: Thank you. Dividers, hand sanitizers-- big deal on hand sanitizers-- and tons of plastic baggies and paper sacks. By sharing this, I-- I'm glad Senator Pansing Brooks brought this up because, no matter what the money it is or whatever, it needs to be discussed that, yes, there is pandemic money out there from the government, but I never saw any of it. I haven't gotten a bonus, nobody's reimbursed me, so I guess I'm glad that I can come here and tell you I'm your average teacher just trying to do a good job, and anything that you can do to help us in a way to keep our kids safe and keep our kids able to learn would be great. And I thank you for letting me talk. Oh, I got the red light. I'll be quiet.

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STINNER: Thank you. Additional questions? Senator Dorn.

DORN: Yeah, thank you, Chairman Stinner.

LINDA FREYE: Sorry, I got to take a drink. Go ahead.

DORN: My question is, do you have any kind of an estimate or idea how much you spent out of your own pocket on this type of stuff?

LINDA FREYE: I hate to look. For just the PPE?

DORN: Yeah, two, three, four, five--

LINDA FREYE: I mean, I buy every-- I'm just going to be honest. Teachers buy everything. We buy pencils and erasers and paper. So on a good year, I spend \$1,000 of my own money on that for-- yeah. Think about it, kindergartners, we had to have everything in a separate baggie: crayons, pencils and glue sticks. Twenty times ten is 200 baggies, and you know how long a baggie lasts, so I would say for just the pandemic, I spent \$100 every two months, so \$50 a month at least.

DORN: OK, thank you.

STINNER: Thank you. Additional questions? Seeing none--

LINDA FREYE: Thank you so much.

STINNER: --thank you. Good afternoon.

JACQUELLE LANE: Hello. Good afternoon. My name is Jacqelle; that's J-a-c-q-e-l-l-e, and my last name is Lane, L-a-n-e. I want to extend my sincerest gratitude to Senator Pansing Brooks for bringing this bill about today. She has continued to be an excellent advocate, not just for NSEA but for teachers across the state of Nebraska, so thank you. And thank you to the Appropriations Committee for listening to my testimony today. I have been a teacher since 2009 and I am speaking today in support of LB1182 to reimburse school employees for the purchase of personal protective equipment. You know, most of the teachers that I know and work with often take funds out of their very own pockets to pay for their students' necessary classroom materials and sometimes, sadly, even their students' essential personal items. If you are a teacher and you see a child struggling with poverty and sometimes, unfortunately, neglect, it is impossible to turn a blind eye. Such acts of kindness only became more frequent during this pandemic. With the fear over COVID-19 spreading throughout the

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nation's classrooms, there was understandably a push to maintain cleanliness in all of our schools. Even the Centers for Disease Control weighed in with recommendations for schools and teachers in particular: clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects in a classroom. The question was, who would pay for the products needed to protect students and teachers at this time? As it turned out, most teachers used their very own money to cover the cost of such things as hand sanitizers and wipes, according to a survey, a survey by the Economic Policy Institute. That expense is in addition to the average \$459 that teachers spent on school supplies for which they were not reimbursed, and that was even before the COVID-19 pandemic. We know that that number is much higher now. Finally, over the COVID-19 pandemic, the average teacher spent an average of \$750 on school supplies out of pocket during the 2020-2021 school year. This is the highest amount ever, according to an assessment of teachers' psychological and financial well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. I urge the committee to vote in support of LB1182 so that hardworking teachers and staff who provided personal protective equipment during the pandemic and placed their students first can be reimbursed for a portion of those expenses. And I thank you so very much for your time.

STINNER: Thank you. Questions? Seeing none, thank you.

JACQUELE LANE: Thank you.

STINNER: Additional proponents? Any opponents? Anyone in the neutral capacity? Seeing none, would you like to close, Senator? Senator waives her closing. We do have two letters in support and one in opposition to LB1182. That concludes our hearing on LB1182. We will now open on LB1198.

McDONNELL: Chairman Stinner, members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Mike McDonnell, M-i-k-e M-c-D-o-n-n-e-l-l. I represent Legislative District 5, south Omaha. LB1198 appropriates \$2.5 million to the State Department of Education to provide programming for mentorship, career exploration, and access to job readiness or postsecondary education at no cost to students who qualify for the federal free lunch program. Also included in my handouts is AM2044, which appropriates \$6 million from federal funds for fiscal year '22-23 to the State Department of Education from the Federal Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Fund pursuant to the Federal American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 to create six regional high school internship programs. Each such program shall be aligned with the high-demand labor needs in the retrospective region that it falls.

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Internships are extremely important to creating a pipeline of workers to relieve our current worker shortage by helping with career exploration. Over the past two years, many high school kids could not participate in career exploration opportunities internships due to COVID restrictions. In addition to limited opportunities, the lack of internship time led to learning loss. If we are to recapture the lost time, we have to be very intentional. By creating six internship regions, the department could work with the six community colleges to ensure continued experience and make sure that they are focused on the needs of the region. Nolan Beyer from Millard Public Schools is here to answer any questions you may have on the amendment. We have 51,000 open jobs right now in the state of Nebraska. We have 19,000 open jobs just in Douglas County. We have a number of kids-- and my wife being a schoolteacher in Omaha Public Schools, I had an opportunity to meet with kids prior to COVID and talk to them about the trades and their opportunities. I think sometimes it's not so much the kids wouldn't want to pursue something, for example, in the trades, or, or some kind of career, they just don't know about it. And right now, we've got to look at the state, I believe. Of course, as senators, we always are trying to look east, west, north, south in the state. How do we help? But there's different needs in the different parts of the state and different opportunities for, for those kids to, to explore. And I was kind of shocked, when I first started getting involved in some of the mentorship, that you have to try to capture those kids in sixth grade. I was a person-- I would think, well, you know, they're seeing-- their freshman year in high school, that's when you should start talking to them, but in reality, it's junior high and it's sixth grade that you should start talking to them. So the people behind me that will testify are subject-matter experts and I'm here to try to answer any of your questions.

STINNER: Questions? Senator Erdman.

ERDMAN: Thank you, Senator Stinner, and thank you, Senator McDonnell. I believe this is not shovel-ready.

McDONNELL: It is not shovel-ready today.

ERDMAN: Anyway, so this will be an ongoing program?

McDONNELL: Yes.

ERDMAN: This won't end when when-- when the [INAUDIBLE]

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McDONNELL: No, I don't want it to end. I want it to be successful. I want it to go on forever.

ERDMAN: OK. So as we look at that, the department or-- the Department of Education and education in general got millions, millions of ARPA money, millions of COVID money. And I ask as you were here when I asked the department chair-- director to give us an accounting for what he did with the money. I'm still waiting for that report. It seems to me that they should have been able to find out of those millions or billion dollars they got, they received, they should have found a way to fund some of these programs you're asking to fund today. So do you know anything about why they didn't fund this?

McDONNELL: I agree, but-- and as Appropriations, I would like to have that, that discussion of-- to follow up on your request, which was not answered. How have they spent that money? And if they have not spent all of that money, potentially, we could look at programs like this that they've already had funds sitting there.

ERDMAN: That bothers me when we have \$1 billion go to education and then you have to come and ask for more money to support the program they should have used the money for in the first place.

McDONNELL: I agree.

ERDMAN: That's a problem. Thank you.

STINNER: Additional questions? Senator Dorn.

DORN: Thank you, Chairman Stinner. Thank you for being here. I guess I'm just trying to sort of get a little bit of clarification because I haven't looked at all this-- other amendments and stuff. But part of this, you said they had to-- it's only open to students who qualify for federal free lunch program.

McDONNELL: That-- when you--

DORN: OK. Are you changing that or is that-- I, I guess I don't know--

McDONNELL: There's two, there's two different--

DORN: --if that goes on to high school, yeah-- I mean, on to college or it's just high school.

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McDONNELL: Yeah, there's two different things. If you look at the amendment with the six regions, my original bill was concentrating on those people that had the free lunch program.

DORN: OK.

McDONNELL: So now if you look at the amendment, that's-- I'll have someone speak to the amendment behind me.

DORN: OK, good. Thank you.

STINNER: Additional questions? Seeing none, thank you.

NOLAN BEYER: Good afternoon--

STINNER: Good afternoon.

NOLAN BEYER: --Chairperson Stinner and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Nolan Beyer, spelled N-o-l-a-n B-e-y-e-r. I'm here today representing Millard Public Schools. First of all, I want to thank the senator for introducing LB1198, which emphasizes the importance of mentorships, career exploration, and access to job readiness for high school students across the entire state of Nebraska. A successful internship experience must be an extension of the classroom. You apply the knowledge and skills gained in the classroom by transferring them to an employment setting. Work-based learning and career and technical education, often referred to as CTE, in our high schools is critical for equipping, equipping our students with the academic knowledge, technical skills, and credentials necessary to enter and exceed in the labor market. But it is, but it has been almost impossible to maintain these onsite experiences during COVID. The number of high school internships available has dwindled. Community colleges, the primary provider of postsecondary CTE, have seen their student populations decline by 13 percent since the start of the pandemic. LB1198 is essential to our recovery efforts in the state of Nebraska. It provides a blueprint to introduce students in secondary education to internships that would increase CTE at the postsecondary level. It follows a model established in the pre-pandemic. In 2019, our school district, Millard Public Schools, and other metro school districts partnered with Avenue Scholars to provide our high school seniors with access to internships through the Intern Omaha program. Under the Intern Omaha, students earn high school credits, earn dual credit with Metro Community College, and work in a professional workplace while, while receiving regular feedback and support from a mentor. The model

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provides quality and intentional implementations. After an initial interview process, students intern in a workplace for 20 to 40 hours per week in the summer after their junior year and then continue 10 to 20 hours per week in the fall and spring of their senior year of high school. Our students receive instruction in dual-enrollment classes on the interpersonal skills, the soft skills necessary to be successful in the workplace. Then they train to learn the skills necessary to engage in paid, meaningful work in their internship. The internship requires students to engage in career coaching and grow more self-aware throughout the experience. Throughout the program, both employer and students receive proactive support from a dedicated internship coordinator. Beyond paying the intern a competitive hourly wage, there is currently no cost to the employer to join the program. For employer-- employees, internships provide an opportunity to strengthen recruitment and hiring efforts with a continuous pool of highly qualified students. The advantage for the students is they are able to explore possible career opportunities and earn school credits while earning a wage. The advantage for school districts is that instead of, instead of us having to work with 30 to 40 different employees who are interested in engaging our students in internships, we deal with one nonprofit organization. And the advantage for area businesses is an informed, engaged, and trained pool of candidates for future workforce throughout the state of Nebraska. This program is currently right now limited to the Omaha and Blair areas. We believe programs like this and others across the state provide a structure for connecting students, school districts, and employers, resulting in positive outcomes for all three of those groups. LB1198 will reengage and prepare learners for the post-pandemic economy and to make up for lost learning due to the COVID-19 public health emergency. I thank you for the opportunity to be in front of you today and would welcome any questions if you have them.

STINNER: Any questions? Senator Hilkemann.

HILKEMANN: Just a quick comment. I've, I've heard if you, if you lecture to a student, they pick up about 10 or 15 percent of it, but if they're participating, isn't it like 70 to 80 percent that they'll pick up when you do a program like this?

NOLAN BEYER: Thank you for the question, and I don't know the exact numbers and there's a lot of research behind it. What I do know is students learn in different ways, but I also know if you can involve a student in an activity in which they are engaged in, in which they're motivated to do, outcomes are going to be a lot better.

STINNER: Additional questions? Seeing none, thank you.

NOLAN BEYER: Thank you.

STINNER: Good afternoon.

ASHLEY KROESE: Good afternoon. My name is Ashley Kroese, spelled A-s-h-l-e-y K-r-o-e-s-e. I'm an agriculture education major at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I am here to testify as a concerned future agriculture educator and student mentor. High school agriculture education programs offer, offer coursework in multiple career pathways, including agribusiness, animal science, plant science, natural resources, food products and processing, and mechanics, power, and structural systems. Additionally, students participate in FFA, which introduces them to leadership opportunities in agriculture, professional networking, and motivational aspects through agriculture competitions. Finally, students participate in work-based learning projects outside of the classroom that can include internships, starting their own business, experimental research, and intensive service learning. So basically, to summarize that, ag teachers are expected to learn a curriculum for up to 14 different classes, be knowledgeable in over 50 FFA contests and every student's SAE, they have to have the ability to support that student through all of their future endeavors in their work-based learning experience. FFA and agricultural programs have increased by over 50 percent since 2010. At that time, there were 133 schools that offered agriculture education and FFA, most being Class C and D schools. Today, there are now 202 Nebraska high schools that offer these programs, with ten additional schools trying to start a program this coming August that include Class A and B schools such as North Star, Omaha Concordia, Omaha Bryan, and Boys Town. On top of all of this, schools with multiple agricultural teachers have increased from 6 to over 30 today. This growth is incredible and beyond exciting, but as a future teacher, I can't help but feel overwhelmed with the expectations. Teachers, especially in agriculture, need the support of the state through funding of nonprofit mentorship organizations not only to reduce the size of their overwhelming workload, but to ultimately set up each and every student for success in any career path they find themselves in. I know I wouldn't be successful in finding a career in agriculture if I didn't have the support of both my agriculture advisor and multiple mentors because ultimately I was one of those students who was an extrovert in class and would seek the opportunities. So I would go out to my ag advisor and take information from him to help me find the, the mentoring people that I needed to be successful. But many of the students who aren't as

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extroverted as I maybe was in class don't have access to those mentors and they need to be put into place so they can become as successful as they can be in whatever career pathway they decide to go to. So there are close to 60,000 jobs that are open-- that open up every year related to agriculture, food, and natural resources in the nation and about half of these jobs are not being filled by qualified graduates, according to the study at-- by the USDA and Purdue University. This is where mentorship programming can fill in. As a mentor, my goal is to assist students in finding their value as community members and to be a tool to help students develop a passion for careers in agriculture. Teachers and students both need the support and there are entities willing to offer this. However, the gap between the two is funding for these mentorship programs. Thank you and I'm ready for any questions.

STINNER: Thank you. Questions? Senator Erdman.

ERDMAN: Thank you, Senator Stinner. Thank you for coming. So what year are you in at the university?

ASHLEY KROESE: I'm a sophomore.

ERDMAN: You're a sophomore. So how many ag teachers are we short now?

ASHLEY KROESE: That is a good question because in my class alone, we already had four [INAUDIBLE] teachers that were going to be future ag teachers drop out, so, like, it decreases every single year, the amount that we're short. And I think last year, we had at least eight programs that completely shut down because they were not-- the positions weren't being filled.

ERDMAN: So what was your SAE when you were in FFA?

ASHLEY KROESE: I had a cow-calf operation and then I also had an equine enterprise where I raced horses.

ERDMAN: OK, so your ag teacher had a great impression on you?

ASHLEY KROESE: Yes, he did. But I think because-- like, the way that he had a great impression on me is because I went out and asked him for advice. I asked him for these things, but not every student was like that. And I think having mentorship for every single student is what is the most important thing, and not every student gets that because not every student is willing to ask for it. And the ag teachers just can't go around from every single student in the classroom to do so.

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ERDMAN: My three sons were involved in FFA. Two were state officers. And in our school system, the ag teacher had the greatest influence on those students than any other teacher they came into contact with. So thank you for doing that.

STINNER: Thank you. Additional questions? Seeing none, thank you.

ABBY MILLER: Good afternoon. Thank you for allowing me to speak today. My name is Abby, and that is A-b-b-y, Miller, M-i-l-l-e-r. I'll start off today answering your question, Senator Erdman. I checked yesterday. There are 23 current job openings, and that's before the regular hiring season is, so that's what those numbers are right now. I'm currently a student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln studying animal science and ag education. I'm employed by the Nebraska Department of Agriculture to organize NAYI, a youth career discovery institute over 200 high school students will attend this year. I also write personal and team development curriculum for the Leadership Center, a nonprofit organization in Aurora founded by agriculture educators. For example, Josh, who was-- spoke here on behalf of PBL, we, we trained their team. I'm testifying as a proponent to LB1198 as (1) a student who benefited from career exploration mentorship and (2) a representative of an organization qualified to potentially receive these funds to offer mentorship to Nebraskan students. I'm a very proud FFA alumni. For the work-based learning portion of my FFA experience, or SAE, I managed a student organization within our FFA chapter called Blooming Smiles. We rearranged donated fresh flowers and delivered them to nursing homes and other community members. Essentially, I ran a small business with a team donating over 1,500 arrangements. I learned skills through this experience that cannot be learned in a classroom and that have translated to career success today, including a current business venture. My wonderful FFA advisor, Mr. Blomendahl, was instrumental to the project's success, but because of his other teaching responsibilities, it would not have been possible without my mentor, Brad. Brad taught us floral design techniques, goal setting and implementation, how to apply for grants, and prepared us for opportunities such as speaking at donor receptions. I'm so thankful for Brad and his impact on my future, but there's only so much of Brad to go around. Without-- with adequate funding, there are more people like Brad who are prepared to mentor students. The Leadership Center is home to some of these individuals. In fact, a program is already being built before this bill was brought to my attention, with the only obstacle being funding. If granted a portion of these funds, the Leadership Center has the expertise and qualifications to offer premier career exploration mentorship to students interested in

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all career pathways across Nebraska, combining goal setting, planning, mentorship, and ultimately individuals who really care. I attribute most of my success to simply the belief from another adult that I could be successful. Nebraskan students need more of this and there are people willing to help. The Engler Entrepreneurship Program, housed at UNL, is in its fifth year of coaching students aspiring to build enterprises while in high school. As an Engler student, I not only have seen the value, but have met students who have gone through that program and the impact is evident. I hope you not only recognize the need, but see that there are tangible places for these funds to go. I don't see a better place to invest in Nebraska's youth. What I noticed earlier today after listening to LB1085, which I'm in support of, where this bill differs from that is there are students who don't get to be a part of the great CTSOs we have in the state. For example, I am aware of a student in Aurora, Nebraska. We had an educator friend. She asked him, hey-- he's 16 years old-- what do you think you're going to do after high school? And he said, I don't know. She said, like, do you know what you want to be when you grow up? He said, I don't know, somebody has never asked me that question. There are those students and these funds that could be granted to nonprofit organizations offer that mentorship, that's where it helps here. So I'm ready to answer any questions that you have.

STINNER: Any questions? Seeing none, thank you.

ABBY MILLER: Thank you.

STINNER: Additional proponents?

WENDY VAN: Good afternoon.

STINNER: Good afternoon.

WENDY VAN: I'm Wendy Van. I was here last week to talk about the part of the appropriations bill that dealt with the business side of internships and today I'm really excited to be able to talk about the students and what this bill could mean for the thousands and thousands of students that really need to connect to a job in our economy. I just want to thank you for considering this bill, particularly for disadvantaged students facing economic barrier, barriers, so that they can bridge that gap between high school and beginning career in our state. Here in Lincoln, for example, we know that from the many, many years of-- not many, many, but maybe four years-- of vital science research that kids and families with poverty

are consistently more likely to struggle in school and to be underemployed. While difficult information to swallow this, the good news is that this data point we largely know how to improve and the funding from this bill would help us create that system and a program to do this with a supportive system of mentorship, career exploration opportunities, and internships. As you may have sensed in your hearings, the word is out on internships. And to answer your question, so many kids learn so much from an internship that they'll never learn in their classroom. They'll learn all those soft skills: how to interact with your colleagues, how to really get your point across. And if you aren't raising your hand and participating in one of these programs that our schools are able to offer en masse, like a career academy or something, you don't get those opportunities. So I get excited about a program that actually reaches out and identifies kids to help them reach their full potential. I told you last week about there are about 30 community members who came together in Lincoln to form a steering committee, and we were focused on identifying and strategizing the gaps between high school and jobs. As part of this work, we also studied Avenue Scholars and Intern Lincoln. We called it Intern Lincoln, its Intern Omaha, though. As you've heard, these are super, super successful high school programs that bridge programs and it effectively connects low-income students and in-demand jobs to that city. Now, our group was very impressed. You heard all the details from Millard, but things stood out to me, like I think it's a 98 or 99 percent graduation rate from high school for kids that participate in these programs. In order to graduate from the program, you have to have a career-based program-- a career-based job or path, which means that we're not waiting till they, they become seniors and we wave them-- wave at them at the door and wish them good luck to try to find that community college or that job or that internship. Programs like this will stay with those kids, so it actually bridges that gap that we all see happen. So many kids fall through those cracks. The conviction in our group was really clear: to give every kid, especially those who face barriers of poverty, a chance to succeed by wrapping services and support around them so that they can compete professionally and academically. So many kids just don't know where to start. Maybe I've never met an engineer or a welder or an ag scientist or a banker. Maybe all I know is what my parents did or what my neighbors did. Programs like these expose kids to so many different opportunities that they never would have thought of before and don't have those caring adults to show them what they possibly can do. And these, these proven systems are led by caring professionals who know exactly how to connect to kids and help them realize their potential. So for my role, working with

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the businesses who want to connect with LPS kids, I know that that work of connecting education and workforce is something that our teachers cannot do on their own and the businesses cannot do it on their own. We know the time constraints of K-12 teachers and there just isn't room in those packed schedules to shepherd them through. From the student side of the education, young people who raise their hand, who are supported and driven, easily seek out these internships. However, high school students who face barriers, who may not have a caring adult, who are struggling with poverty, can't even see the path. With a coordinated, scalable education workforce system, many of these young adults simply get lost. And of course, we've got the data about how many jobs we have available in our community. These are high-skill, high-paying, high-demand jobs. This bill establishes funding for that coordinated system that K-12 education needs to connect kids to those jobs and they're local jobs and local students. And like Millard said, with these kinds of programs, we're able to do it at scale. A final important note is that employers absolutely love these programs. Our state is ready for this. We have people and the proven practices and the will and all that's missing is the funds to operationalize what we already know and take it statewide. We have an opportunity to address a persistent and growing need in all of our communities. I would be happy to answer any questions and I thank you for considering this.

STINNER: Would you like to spell your name?

WENDY VAN: I'm so sorry. Wendy Van, W-e-n-d-y V-a-n.

STINNER: Thank you. Questions?

STINNER: Seeing none, thank you very much.

WENDY VAN: Thank you.

STINNER: Any additional proponents? Any opponents? Anyone in the neutral capacity? Seeing none, would you like to close, Senator?

McDONNELL: I just wanted to thank everyone for being here that testified, and I'll answer any questions. Otherwise, I'll waive closing.

STINNER: OK. Questions, anyone? Seeing none, thank you. We have three letters of support for LB1198, and that concludes our hearing on LB1198. We'll now open our hearing on LB1217-- I'm sorry, LB1220.

WISHART: Who is that?

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STINNER: Who is LB1220? Senator Adam Morfeld, come on down. Anybody know where Adam Morfeld's at, what committee he's in or--

WISHART: Julia is coming in. I think she's going to testify.

STINNER: OK.

WISHART: You found him. Wonderful.

STINNER: Senator Morfeld, great to see you.

MORFELD: Yeah, it's great to see me too. [LAUGHTER] Opening on four bills today, so it's just--

STINNER: Oh, my gosh.

MORFELD: --one thing after another. Sorry I'm late. Chairman Stinner, members of the Appropriation Committee, for the record, my name is Adam Morfeld, A-d-a-m M-o-r-f, as in "frank," -e-l-d, representing the "Fightin'" 46th Legislative District, here today to introduce LB1220. LB1220 would appropriate \$1 million from the federal funds allocated to the state of Nebraska from the Federal Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Fund to the State Department of Education for the purpose of providing \$1,000 to each teacher working in underserved communities, as determined by the State Department of Education. Teachers have done an excellent job continuing to go to work during the pandemic, ensuring that our kids are being educated during this very difficult and challenging time. The purpose of LBB1220 is to recruit, attract and retain those teachers who work in underserved communities, as determined by the Department of Education. One of the reasons why I'm introducing this is because I've heard from a lot of folks that teachers in underserved communities in particular are a really tough (1) to attract but (2) to retain, and so I think that we should be dedicating some funding to school districts that are having a tough time retaining and attracting those teachers. I've kept it pretty broad, quite frankly, so that Department of Education can best determine where these funds are directed towards, but I've heard from a lot of teachers and a lot of administrators that this is a seriously challenging problem. We have to take some type of action. This is the most straightforward course of action that I can think of, and I trust the Department of Education to-- to address it accordingly.

STINNER: Thank you. Questions? Senator Erdman.

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ERDMAN: Thank you, Senator Stinner. So, Senator Morfeld, thanks for coming. So \$10,000 for 100 teachers, correct? And the department will determine who those 100 teachers are?

MORFELD: Yes.

ERDMAN: I congratulate you on your fiscal note. First time I've seen one that they didn't cost as much as the million dollars to distribute the money. That's amazing. Secondly, the question-- the question comes up, will there be some kind of caveat or a retention portion of that \$10,000? If you give a person \$10,000, is there a requirement to teach for one year, two years?

MORFELD: Yeah, then they leave the next day or something? Yeah. No, there probably should be a retention. That's a really good idea, actually. I'd be willing to put in some kind of retention component. Maybe it's \$5,000 on the front end and \$5,000 on the back end once they've completed their service, whatever length of time that may be.

ERDMAN: Yeah, I-- I think if you give them \$10,000 and they quit the next year, then--

MORFELD: Yeah.

ERDMAN: --you know, that's a-- that's an issue.

MORFELD: Well, and I-- I would say most probably won't do that, but you never know, and I think that we need to protect the investment.

ERDMAN: So will that be based on school districts that have the most reduced and free lunches, or how will they go about determining what--

MORFELD: Yeah, so that's why I left it up to the Department of Education, is to determine that. I think that poverty could be one indicator of high need. I think also rural communities have a hard time retaining and attracting certain folks in certain fields, usually STEM but not always just STEM, can be another determination and factor as well.

ERDMAN: All right. Thank you.

MORFELD: Thank you.

STINNER: Additional questions? Seeing none, thank you.

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MORFELD: I have to now go open on the other bill in Education, so--

STINNER: Yeah, OK.

MORFELD: --Senator Hansen is getting lots of questions, so I thought I could see--

STINNER: Do you intend to waive closing?

MORFELD: I will waive closing. Thank you.

STINNER: OK, thank you. Proponents?

JANE SEU: Good afternoon.

STINNER: Afternoon.

JANE SEU: My name is Jane Seu, J-a-n-e S-e-u, and I'm testifying on behalf of the ACLU of Nebraska in support of LB1220. LB1220 appropriates federal funds allocated to the state of Nebraska from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 as direct premium payments to essential workers, specifically teachers working in underserved communities, people in communities who have been most impacted by the pandemic. This legislation embraces an important issue in gender justice. Women make up the majority of the teacher workforce, and this legislation targets those serving underserved communities, which has important economic and racial justice implications. LB1220 represents an important measure to recognize the essential work and contribution of individuals who are impacted by the inequities further exposed by the pandemic because of the disparate impacts on women, low-income individuals, people of color, and individuals with disabilities. Even before the coronavirus pandemic, racial discrimination and gender bias created numerous barriers for equality for people of color and women, including unequal economic opportunities and a lack of educational equity. Many of these inequities have only been exacerbated by the COVID pandemic. LB1220 is an important step toward using federal COVID rescue funds to address the negative economic impacts of the pandemic and to distribute premium payments to essential workers. As such, in supporting educational professionals, we urge you to consider this policy with other pending measures that provide similar opportunities to assist frontline essential workers in other industries, such as childcare, healthcare, and organizations serving those most impacted by the pandemic. Additionally, in this debate, it is important that this and other measures be broadened to include essential workers in meatpacking and food production and processing who continue to work,

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often without adequate safety measures and protection, to ensure-- who work to ensure that Nebraska and the rest of the country still have food on the table. We urge the committee to consider allocation of federal rescue funds in a manner that prioritizes the needs of Nebraskans most impacted by the pandemic in light of the disproportionate impacts on women, people of color, immigrants, and people with disabilities. Thank you for your time and I'm happy to answer any questions.

STINNER: Thank you. Questions? Seeing none, thank you.

JANE SEU: Thank you.

STINNER: Additional proponents? Any opponents? Anyone in the neutral capacity?

JEREMY EKELER: Good afternoon, Chairman Stinner, members of the Appropriation Committee. I didn't actually plan to come up and testify on this one, but I wanted to make an important point that underserved communities also include student-- or teachers from nonpublic schools, from private schools, and this bill, I think I wrote a letter of support, but wasn't real clear if that-- if this bill is inclusive of-- of such schools. We have quite a few schools, especially in Omaha metro, that serve 100 percent poverty in at-risk neighborhoods. So I'm coming in neutral just to, you know, bring up the point that it wasn't-- it wasn't designated in the bill what type of educator this would encompass. Any questions?

STINNER: OK. Questions? Seeing none--

HILKEMANN: What's the name--

STINNER: --did you--

JEREMY EKELER: Yes. Oh, sorry. J-- Jeremy Ekeler, J-e-r-e-m-y; Ekeler is E-k-e-l-e-r.

STINNER: And anybody else in the neutral capacity? Seeing none, we have two letters of support for LB1220 and that concludes our hearing on LB1220. We'll now open our hearing on LB1240. Senator Albrecht.

ALBRECHT: Hello.

STINNER: Very good to see you.

ALBRECHT: The very first time in six years that I've been before you.

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STINNER: Is that right? Maiden voyage here.

ALBRECHT: So you'll have to take that into consideration. May I?

STINNER: Very good. Thank you, Senator.

ALBRECHT: Good afternoon, Chairman Stinner and members of the Appropriations Committee. For the record, my name is Joni Albrecht, J-o-n-i, Albrecht, A-l-b-r-e-c-h-t. I represent Legislative District 17 in northeast Nebraska, which includes Wayne, Thurston, Dakota, and portions of Dixon Counties. LB20-- excuse me, LB1240 may sound familiar, as this bill is part of the Governor's American Rescue Plan Act of 2021. This recommendation includes \$30 million in fiscal year 2021 and 2022 and, in addition, \$30 million in fiscal year 2022 and 2023 for a three-year temporary program provided the family medical-- or family-directed education recovery accounts for low-income children and families. This three-year program will protect-- or, excuse me, it will provide direct assistance to children in K-12 for 2022 through 2025 school years. For each school year, up to \$20 million will be allocated to the parents for educational expenses to address learning loss caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The over-reaching [SIC] purpose of these accounts is to put students most impacted by the pandemic back on the right path and avoid the long-term negative impacts that occur with significant learning losses. The pandemic's impact on education has far-reaching negative ramifications. According to a July 21, 2021, report, students lost on an average of five months of math and four months of reading, which will lead to a lower lifetime income of at least \$49,000 and reduce the annual economic growth of at least \$128 million. Deeply concerning is the fact that the students most affected by the crisis were already behind their peers before the pandemic. This temporary program will give parents resources to close these gaps and it is available to eligible students, whether they're in public, private, or homeschool. In other words, this temporary recovery bill is for Nebraska's most vulnerable learners. Eligibility for Nebraska children will be determined if a child is eligible for federal free lunch program and attends grades K-12 in public, nonpublic, or exempt schools. A child can receive up to \$2,000 of a benefit per school year for educational services that include, but are not limited to, private school tuition, tutoring, digital learning subscriptions, exempt school curriculum, and other K-12 educational services. This program does not authorize the purchase of computing devices or equipment, as other federal funding has been made available to make these devices accessible to children covered in this program. I appreciate your attention to this matter. This is a critical

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opportunity to make an important investment into our children and as we know, only we get one shot at our K-12 education, so let's make sure that these children and our economy don't experience long-term repercussions because of the pandemic. I ask you to consider LB1240 and advance it to the floor of the Legislature. I'd be happy to answer any questions.

STINNER: Thank you. Questions? Seeing none, thank you.

JEREMY EKELER: Ready for supporters? OK. My name is Jeremy Ekeler, J-e-r-e-m-y; Ekeler is spelled E-k-e-l-e-r. Thank you for having me. It's kind of déjà vu all over again. We're talking about the same concept that we talked about with LB1017 here. LB1240 provides Nebraska's most vulnerable students with the direct financial means necessary to make up for learning losses experienced throughout COVID. It's a proposal that empowers parents, as the child's primary education aligns with our ARPA statute and its final rule. OPS Superintendent Cheryl Logan asked the right question last fall, one we agree with. She asked, you've seen your children the last 15 months, what do they need? Throughout the pandemic, I have spoken with hundreds of folks across the state from all settings, public schools, Catholic schools, nonpublic schools, homeschools. I posed the same question: what do your kids need, especially in light of COVID's impact on their learning? Many folks were already down on their luck when COVID hit, but they all shared these things in common: their kids are reeling from the impacts of COVID, number one; number two, this temporary program would change their kids' educational trajectory. We actually considered giving Senator McDonnell a run for his money on number of testifiers from shovel-ready projects. We had people lined up to come in here-- thanks-- but we decided to peel it back to some short, sweet, yet impactful testifiers that you'll hear from today. All of the feedback, anecdotally, is consistent with the reporting and data we're seeing nationally. The families that have been most impacted by learning losses are also the same families that report additional significant economic hardship and financial instability throughout the pandemic. Such circumstances have made it all the more difficult for these families to pursue supplemental and alternative educational opportunities at the same rate of families who have the means. For instance, you may recall from the first hearing that our Catholic schools alone have lost 14- 1,463 students. These came from families who couldn't make ends meet. In response to this, the education recovery accounts were crafted with the goal of education recovery, a temporary handout for kids who need it most. To date, we've given families zero direct support at helping their children close learning

gaps. Public schools in Nebraska have received three rounds of federal funding, amounting to over \$775 million. That's 75 percent of the entire ARPA budget, over 75 percent. Nonpublic schools have received aid, as a fraction of the public amount, but have also received aid. But by focusing on direct support like LB1240 does, we ensure that these families receive the fair and equitable support they need to address their specific learning needs regardless of where they attend school. Also, these funds absolutely support proven educational practices-- little ambience music-- also, these funds absolutely support proven educational practices ranging from private education to tutoring. No one has more desire to see a child succeed than their parent. Let's trust them to choose the right path. Furthermore, we know that direct payments to individuals are a proven method for allowing citizens to use their tax dollars to directly address their need. All this data is included in my testimony. I'd point you to the packet, the attachments you have on your sheet. Finally, this program is available to any child, regardless of where they go to school. Public school students look to benefit, as do nonpublic, as do homeschool. As long as they have a need and meet the criteria, they will benefit. This is a bill about vulnerable kids, not public versus nonpublic. We can't split hairs on this issue when the future of Nebraska's most impacted students are at risk. We just need to get help to them. LB1240 is a temporary program that provides access and opportunity to our most vulnerable Nebraska children. It's a critical investment in our future, as Senator Albrecht pointed out, the financials-- the financial impact. So I close by asking you to empower Nebraska children who need a hand up. Please support LB1240 and the wonderful families these funds would support. I'm open to any questions.

STINNER: Any questions? Senator Erdman.

ERDMAN: Thank you, Senator Stinner. Thank you for coming. So this, this is \$60 million. At \$2,000 per grantee, that's about 30,000 students.

JEREMY EKELER: Correct, yes.

ERDMAN: So are there places where 30,000 students can get alternative education? That's a significant number of students.

JEREMY EKELER: Sure, so it, it could-- they could use these funds for-- like tutoring is-- tutoring right now is one of the uses and that's about \$85 an hour. That's kind of a sad statistic because tutoring used to come in at \$20 to \$35 an hour, so now we've priced

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out the same population, so that's one use. And then we do have-- you know, you're talking about Catholic schools, private schools. Some of the testifiers behind me are going to talk about some of the alternative schools they went to or education settings they use as well. So we actually think the need is greater than the bill. We think the need is greater than the bill, but we do think that the allowable uses, like the broadened menu, will, will disburse it amongst all the uses, if that makes sense.

ERDMAN: Thank you.

STINNER: Senator Hilkemann.

HILKEMANN: Now you said one time. This is not what the-- I don't know if you've read the fiscal note on it. Fiscal note says this is a pilot program.

JEREMY EKELER: Yeah, we talked about this last time. I think I would, I would amend that to say a sunset program. It should not be listed as a pilot program. It is a-- it is temporary relief over the course of three years. Funding is only good for three years, so.

HILKEMANN: OK, and-- OK. And the money goes to the parent?

JEREMY EKELER: Right, yep, and they make the decisions with it to supplement the, the educational experience they're having now.

HILKEMANN: OK.

STINNER: Senator Erdman.

ERDMAN: Thank you, Senator Stinner. That-- his comment-- Senator Hilkemann's comment brings up a thought or question.

JEREMY EKELER: Um-hum.

ERDMAN: So you just won't give it to the parents. They have to have some kind of proof that they've spent this money on education, correct?

JEREMY EKELER: Correct, yeah, absolutely. There's checks on this. So a parent would apply using their financials. They have to be eligible for free lunch, I believe, is the qualification. And the bill sends the money to the NDE, who then contracts with a third party. A third party-- I don't want to list anybody here because I'm not trying to promote anybody, but a third party would be an institution that would

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actually do the distribution; set up the accounts, distribute the funds, and do the audit or-- there's a lot of ways to do that. We say-- there's a lot of these models around the country, but yes, there would be full transparency on these funds, yes. These companies specialize in that.

ERDMAN: So would it make sense if the funds went directly to the person who's doing the service?

JEREMY EKELER: That's possible, as well, that they could pay directly. It depends on how this-- they would set this up, yeah, the, the third party, um-hum.

ERDMAN: Because the worst thing could happen, we give them \$2,000 and they don't--

JEREMY EKELER: Right.

ERDMAN: --spend it on education.

JEREMY EKELER: Right. I would say that would be the cleanest model, that the money goes, you know, from these funds to the NDE to the third party, who directly funds. But I will- I just wanted to mention that we have seen other, you know, receipts and reimbursements and this sort of stuff.

ERDMAN: Thank you.

STINNER: Additional questions? Senator Hilkemann.

HILKEMANN: I just was yesterday attending a funeral of a-- of my cousin's wife and--

HILKEMANN: Oh, I'm sorry.

HILKEMANN: --involved with rural area of Nebraska. They have-- everybody gets school lunches now. There is no-- there is-- yeah, and, and I understand that that's happening. It doesn't make a difference what your economic is. And you're saying that that's the criteria that we're going to use for this.

JEREMY EKELER: You have to be eligible for it to use it. So right now, yeah, everyone's getting free lunch, but there's still a process at which you apply for free lunch, so they would still have to prove the financials that they would be eligible for free lunch. You're right, everyone is receiving it right now, but we wouldn't, we

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wouldn't use the free lunch program, which is a temporary program. We would use the standing paperwork for how people apply for free lunch. So it's about being eligible for it.

STINNER: Any additional questions? I'm having a-- I'm struggling with trying to see how this is going to work in Scottsbluff, Gering, Morrill, Mitchell, Bayard, those types of towns. For one thing, I know that Gering Public Schools does offer tutoring for math and reading and a few of those other things, so they have already incorporated quite a few of those tutoring functions. And I think we all understand that it was a lost year or two for our kids. There's no question about that. I'm trying to think of who in the world is a tutor out there that you're going to hire for \$85 an hour, that, that makes that work. I--

JEREMY EKELER: Hopefully--

STINNER: I, I, I've-- frankly, they're either teaching in the public school or the private school already, providing some of those services already. Are you going to ask them to broaden what they're doing or-- I mean, I heard somebody say, well, they can go to the Sylvan Learning Center. Well, good.

JEREMY EKELER: Yeah.

STINNER: That might be in Lincoln and Omaha--

JEREMY EKELER: Um-hum.

STINNER: --but we don't have such a-- so I'm really struggling with this.

JEREMY EKELER: Yeah, no, I think that's a great question. I spent some time in those communities, one of the exciting parts that's happening in tutoring. Eighty-five bucks an hour, I would recommend we get better prices than that, and there's a resource in here as well. Online tutoring has shot through the roof and college students are now using-- are now making extra income helping students online. So whether you're in Gering or Lincoln or Omaha, you can connect with an expert, get tutoring, receive the help. And I'll also tell you, from talking to Julie Brown and the folks in your district, they could use more help. They could use resources. These schools-- none of these schools is saying we need less to support these kids, and you're gonna hear from some of those families today and you'll hear some of those stories, as a matter of fact. But, yeah, I think there's a remedy for that, for sure, Senator.

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STINNER: Senator McDonnell.

McDONNELL: Thanks for being here. So in the summer, would a parent have the ability to go to a teacher that's off for the summer?

JEREMY EKELER: Yeah, great, great question. Yep, a teacher could use this program, be a tutor, get some, get some money from this and, and help with summer-- and summer is a great chance to catch up. We can use our summers wisely.

McDONNELL: Thank you.

STINNER: Any additional questions? Seeing none, thank you.

JEREMY EKELER: I appreciate it.

ANTHONY WILLIAMS: Good afternoon, Chairman Stinner and members of the Appropriations--

STINNER: Good afternoon.

ANTHONY WILLIAMS: --committee. For the record, my name is Anthony Williams, A-n-t-h-o-n-y W-i-l-l-i-a-m-s, and I support LB1240. I am privileged to serve as the principal of the Omaha Street School, which is a faith-based private alternative high school for at-risk youth in the inner city of Omaha, Nebraska. I have worked ten years in public education as both an educator and an administrator and now, over the last three years, I've served as principal of this school. Omaha Street School is committed to an intentionally smaller experience for students, with an 8:1 classroom teach-- student-teacher ratio focused on helping students who struggle academically and socio-emotionally. A large percentage of our kids have already attempted school in the public school system. In fact, almost 98 percent have endeavored elsewhere before finding us at the Omaha Street School. It is important to note that 80 percent of our students come from underprivileged homes with incomes at or below the poverty line. Not only are we committed to helping students experience success in the classroom, but we off-- also offer support with mental health. We have a full-time mental health professional on staff, and every student has mandatory small group therapy each week and individual therapy one to three times per month. I want to share a, share a story about one of our students. We'll call him Jerry. Jerry enrolled at the Omaha Street School about three semester, three semesters ago as a sophomore. After several assessments, we found out that Jerry was functionally illiterate and only reading at a preschool level. In fact, Jerry didn't even like reading aloud in

front of others. But with the level of supports that we have been able to offer Jerry thus far, and coupled with his own desire to better himself, he is now reading at a fourth-grade level and happily reading aloud in class. He is scheduled to graduate from high school next school year. As I understand this bill, LB1240 is a start in granting parents from high-poverty households the ability to have access to opportunities in the education of their child because it allows them to cater their education to the child's need. That's what we do at the Omaha Street School. We partner with families so kids get what they need. This bill is a bill of opportunity, an opportunity for parents to truly consider school enrollment in the best interests of their children, not bound by geographic location or affordability. At the end of the day, shouldn't any family, regardless of socio-economic status, choose the best education for their child? Now, although the Omaha Street School is a private institution, the only state or federal funds we typically receive are title funds. Title funds are based on student enrollment, which for us typically means we receive about \$1,200 to \$1,500 in total per year. You should know that it costs us approximately \$23,000 per child per year to educate. The pandemic also afforded us additional funds through the court-- Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security Act, CARES, of 2020 and the Emergency Assistance to Nonpublic Schools, EANS 1 of 2021. So how did we use those funds? We implemented new support for our struggling students and we worked with families to do so. That's our winning formula at the Omaha Street School and it's the same formula this bill would use. We purchased student choice books for our library. We hired reading paraprofessionals and implemented new curriculum and instructional techniques to support our kids. We also implemented additional professional development opportunities for our staff in the hopes of not only retraining our adults, but also re-educating ourselves on how to best help struggling adolescent readers. So why is this bill so important? I will reiterate. Every parent should have access to what and where their students receive an education. If you think about it, for families with means, educational opportunity already exists. However, less-fortunate families have little recourse and must send their children to the nearest public school, where they have little to no choice in what or how their children will experience education. I ask you to consider helping parents and nonpublic schools over the next three years so that we can showcase more success stories like Jerry's story for our community. Thank you and thank you for your service to the state of Nebraska. I welcome any questions.

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STINNER: Thank you. Additional questions? Senator McDonnell.

ANTHONY WILLIAMS: Yes, sir.

McDONNELL: Thanks for being here.

ANTHONY WILLIAMS: Thank you.

McDONNELL: Also, thanks for the opportunity to tour the Omaha Street School. I appreciate that.

ANTHONY WILLIAMS: Yes, sir.

McDONNELL: Going back to Jerry, so Jerry had transcripts that said he was a sophomore--

ANTHONY WILLIAMS: Jerry--

McDONNELL: --from another school.

ANTHONY WILLIAMS: Correct.

McDONNELL: How many of the kids come to your school that have been expelled from another school? Do you roughly have a percent?

ANTHONY WILLIAMS: Roughly about 10 per-- 10 to 15 percent of our kids come from schools where they were expelled.

McDONNELL: Do you know what their success rate is if you, if you looked at those kids that have been expelled, come to your school? Are they at 85 percent graduation, 90 percent graduation?

ANTHONY WILLIAMS: Right now in the last three years, every kid that comes to us, that begins their senior year with us and stays and endeavors throughout the year, we boast 100 percent graduation.

McDONNELL: Thanks for being here.

ANTHONY WILLIAMS: Thank you.

STINNER: Senator Erdman.

ANTHONY WILLIAMS: Any other questions?

ERDMAN: Thank you, Senator Stinner. Thank you for-- Mr. Williams, for being here.

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ANTHONY WILLIAMS: Yes, sir.

ERDMAN: How many students do you have?

ANTHONY WILLIAMS: We have 36 students right now.

ERDMAN: Thirty-six, so you had 8:1 register-- between the teacher and the students. How many-- you have five teachers?

ANTHONY WILLIAMS: We have four full-time teachers and some part-time instructors.

ERDMAN: OK. Where does the majority of your funding come from?

ANTHONY WILLIAMS: Grassroots, from philanthropic institutions, from donors, from churches, from corporations.

ERDMAN: Very good. So what-- all grades?

ANTHONY WILLIAMS: All grades 9-12. We're a high school--

ERDMAN: OK. OK.

ANTHONY WILLIAMS: --Rule 10- and Rule 14-approved.

ERDMAN: Thanks for what you do.

ANTHONY WILLIAMS: Thank you, sir.

STINNER: Any additional questions? Senator Clements.

CLEMENTS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Mr. Williams.

ANTHONY WILLIAMS: Yes, sir.

CLEMENTS: The question I had was the student goes full time to your school or do they go part time to a different school also?

ANTHONY WILLIAMS: Well, majority of our kids are full time. I have a young lady this year who was in my building for half the day and because she's behind in enough-- in credits, she also attends independent studies in the afternoon with Omaha Public Schools.

CLEMENTS: And if you received some of this funding, do you have ability to expand your student numbers?

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ANTHONY WILLIAMS: We are always looking for an ability to expand our student numbers. We, we have to turn away 10 to 20 kids each year because I, I can't staff the building with the current student ratio that, that we exist on.

CLEMENTS: Is the building big enough, is what I'm asking.

ANTHONY WILLIAMS: Yes, the building is big enough, big enough, but our--

CLEMENTS: It's finance--

ANTHONY WILLIAMS: --coffers are not.

CLEMENTS: It's finances to hire another staff is the problem.

ANTHONY WILLIAMS: Correct.

CLEMENTS: All right. Thank you.

ANTHONY WILLIAMS: No problem.

STINNER: Any additional questions? Just for the record, we do have alternative schools in western Nebraska, as well, and they do a great job, but I thank you for what you're doing.

ANTHONY WILLIAMS: Thank you for having me.

STINNER: Thank you. Good afternoon.

ALBERT MARIBAGA: Hey. Good afternoon. My name is Albert Maribaga, A-l-- A-l-b-e-r-t, last name, M-a-r-i-b-a-g-a. Senators and Chairman of the members of Appropriations Committee, my name is Albert, as I mentioned. I work for Catholic Social Services of Southern Nebraska. I am here today to advocate for the passing of the LB1240 bill. I am a refugee who came from Sudan 20 years ago, started new life here in Lincoln, Nebraska, and as I mentioned, I work for Catholic Social Services as employment specialist. I work mostly with, I say, a lot of people, different backgrounds from all over the world. I can say Latin America, Africa, Middle East, all over the world. And during my work with those communities and families here in Lincoln, I have heard a lot of stories from those families expressing to me that they would like education access and opportunity for their children, but that is impossible due to lack of financial capability and they cannot afford the education opportunity they wish for their children. This is always a problem for the families I work with. Poverty is

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growing in Nebraska, and so this issue is worse every day. As you know, the pandemic has hurt poor families like those the most. LB1240 offer fund to help their children recover their learning loss. It is a temporary and needed support for the most vulnerable. They also happen to be our future. In order to overcome the educational setback that some of those families are facing, I am asking Chairman, Senator, and the member of the committee to pass this bill. Doing so will serve unmet needs of low-income families like those I serve. Access to more qualified-- quality education programs would not only benefit those children but also the whole community, and this bill is an investment in our future. In closing, the families I work with are displaced or poor or out of chances. They need choice, access, and opportunity, but as much as they need it, their children need it more. LB1240 would help those families have choice, access, and opportunity in the middle of a pandemic. Education is a gateway to opportunity and LB1240 will help countless children access that opportunity. In doing so, all of Nebraska would be better. Thank you.

STINNER: Thank you. Questions? Seeing none, thank you very much for coming.

ALBERT MARIBAGA: Thank you.

CAMILLE CLARK: Chairman and--

STINNER: Good afternoon.

CAMILLE CLARK: Good afternoon. Whew, waiting all afternoon. Anyway, I have to think about my kids who I gotta pick up soon. My name is Camille Clark, C-a-m-i-l-l-e C-l-a-r-k-- sorry. I come before you today as a parent. I have seven children, five who are currently attending public schools, three with IEPs and one with a 504, and I've been involved in the different schools my children have attended or are attending and I take an active role as their lead teacher. That's my job. Since the pandemic, I've seen a greater increase in the decline of public schools-- not necessarily pointing fault, it's just you can feel it-- in meeting the needs of the children. The major form of assisting children has come in the form of electronic-based learning, and that means that my child is supposed to get the majority of their skills and knowledge based from an electronic. I never heard justification for this, you know, from my district particularly, that it's OK. And meanwhile, doctors who can't be bought have continuously told me that it's not a viable means to help supplement or support their educational needs. Summer school presents a one-size-fits-all for my children to catch up. Instead of

students being put in groups based on their educational needs, they're given a preselected electronic-based curriculum that everyone else is doing. And my children, who are gifted, are bored. They're missing out. They're not excelling at the rate you would expect. There's, there's nothing for them, and one has completely lost all inhibition. My children, who need more remediation, hunger for that personal one-on-one human interaction, as they easily become distracted with electronic-based sources. Not trying to hamper on it, but just stressing the fact that diversity is needed, particularly in the educational field, and the opportunity just is not seeming to be presented at the current state. I've implemented my own curriculum, particularly with my youngest child. He was in kindergarten at the start of the pandemic. He's felt the hardest decline in skills, so, you know, that basic skill training that you think you would get being in kindergarten, missed out on it, missed out on the social interactions. And because of the continued push of electronics, there's continued to be that lack of basic skills. So as a parent very much involved in my child's education, I've gone out, I've purchased resources, I've purchased the materials so he can practice, I've continuously tried to put that out in front of him, but it's, it's my own curriculum. It's, it's what I put in front of him. It's what I feel passionate for and trying to help support what he's missing out in school, filling in those gaps, and feel like the school is not listening to what my child really needs. You know, he needs that one-on-one interaction. He needs some additional instruction. So my children need more of that special individual education instruction that can only be offered, you know, through that human interaction, an interaction that is based upon their needs, not-a-one-size-fits-glove kind of directive that unfortunately does hinder more on an electronic basis. My children need something more and I can't see-- I see other children in the same-- you know, who maybe need that exact same type, especially in our lower-income families, and funding is costly. It's not cheap to go buy curriculum. It's not cheap to buy these additional supplemental materials. I'm very selective. I'm very cost-- noticing of what things cost and I have to first think about the cost before I purchase it. I have to look at what the price tag is. There are some things that would be more beneficial to my child, but that's not in the budget. It would be beneficial to their education to put cost as not that first priority, which is what that LB1240 would help assist with, is not having to think so much about what's this going to cost us. So that's why I would-- just in support of LB1240.

STINNER: Thank you. Questions? Seeing none, thank you very much.

CAMILLE CLARK: Thank you.

KAYLA BUCHAN: [INAUDIBLE]

STINNER: Doing pretty good so far.

WISHART: Yeah, I would say so.

HILKEMANN: [INAUDIBLE]

DORN: That's a good point.

WISHART: Yeah.

STINNER: A little upset you left and--

KAYLA BUCHAN: OK. Hi, Senators. My name is Kayla Buchan, K-a-y-l-a B-u-c-h-a-n. I'm a mother of five children, including one son who was in middle school when the pandemic began. I have also been a preschool teacher for almost 20 years. I saw firsthand how detrimental remote learning was, both because of how it affected my own son and how it affected 30-plus students that we helped, or, should I say, tried to help, navigate school through an iPad during COVID. I'll start with my own son, Makye. He was a seventh grader at Millard North Middle School when schools went remote-- excuse me. My son had always struggled in school. He had made an amazing turn for the better once he went to middle school. The new flow of classes and overall supportive environment and a fresh start seemed to be exactly what my son needed to succeed in school. His grades were great. Teachers were telling me what a joy he was in class, all welcome but uncharted territory for us. Then remote learning began and all of these strides he had made were lost. It was devastating to us, but especially for him. The support he had from classroom teachers, resource teachers, and paras were now teaching through a screen and there was no longer supports to help Makye succeed in classes. Not only did my son not learn from remote learning, he lost his momentum and unfortunately fell back into his old and all-too-familiar failures in school. This also impacted Makye's mental health, going into depression, some of which we're still dealing with today, a lot of it, actually. Basically, Senators, my son is one of the many who need the support this bill provides. But like I said, I also took care of other people's children as a childcare provider or teacher at Crayon Castle. We were committed to help these children whose lives are completely turned upside down. We set up our own classrooms with as much staff as possible to provide the space and support for remote learning. Despite the heroic efforts of our staff, this was a

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disaster. We had children from kindergarten to seventh grade from eight different schools all trying to learn while staring at a screen all day. I saw complete meltdowns from all the kids. We had kindergartners, who were-- at one time, were filled with joy and excited to be going to school, now bawling in a corner, screaming, crying, saying they didn't want to do this anymore. We saw students displaying more anger and outbursts than ever before. Many of these kids were already behind to begin with, but when COVID and remote learning hit, they became completely lost. The system broke down. Senators, kids were honestly robbed of their education. This bill is a step to prepare that-- to repair this. It's actually a modest step, but it's a-- but it's big in this way: it funds parents, not the system. These children are our future, so it is vital that we give them the education, support, and skills they need to be prepared for life. With all of the learning loss and emotional trauma our children have experienced from the past two years, we have a responsibility to make it right and I believe that starts here with this bill. Let the parents, who we all know know their children best, determine what is needed to get their sons and daughters the support and resources they need to get caught up and back on track with their education.

STINNER: Thank you. Senator Hilkemann.

HILKEMANN: If you were given \$2,000 today, how would you use that for your kids?

KAYLA BUCHAN: Well, when she was opening and, and talking about the bill, she said that it wasn't limited to the things that she had listed, tutors and curriculum and those kinds of things. Right now, my concern-- my biggest concern for my son is his mental health. It-- he's struggling, so using it in, in that kind of way. Also, I think tutoring and some one-on-one help would be very beneficial for him. I have looked into the Sylvan Learning Center and it's outrageous. It's so expensive. I can't afford it. So it would be nice to have some options.

HILKEMANN: OK. Thank you.

STINNER: Additional questions? Seeing none, thank you for being patient.

KAYLA BUCHAN: Thank you.

YADIRA CAMPOS: Good afternoon.

STINNER: Good afternoon.

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YADIRA CAMPOS: My name is Yadira Campos, spelled Y-a-d-i-r-a C-a-m-p-o-s. I would like to start by asking a question like, what will you do if you run out of your business account? What will you do to provide to your family? I was a pre-K teacher at Dual Language Academy. Currently, I'm a substitute teacher there. I'm a mom of a 14-year-old daughter and a, a year-old daughter, and I would like to share in my testimony how these Catholic schools have helped me during the difficult time. In 2018, I became part of this team. Right away, it felt like it was like home. Principals, administrators, staff, and parents worked to get it together to build this community, which we call now "familia," which means family. Dual Language Academy distinguish itself for-- from helping and serve others. For example, while I was working there, if a family needed transportation, food assistance, tuition, tutoring, we work, all coming together to help. I'm really proud of being part of this great family. Moreover, this pandemic has impact many families. Unfortunately, in-- in April of 2021, COVID has impacted my family. Therefore, my father got sick with COVID in Mexico and he was hospitalized for eight months. During this time that my dad was in the hospital, I had to travel to Mexico many times due to-- due to-- sorry-- due to his surgeries and also to support my family. Sadly, in December of 2021, he passed away due to the consequence of COVID. As a result of this event, I had to use my savings, my savings accounts to travel to Mexico. And like I mentioned, I was a teacher. I couldn't keep up my work as a teacher. My income was not the best. This impact my, my financial situation and my family. I was having that based on not just losing my father, but my children would also lose the school that was best for them, Dual Language Academy. It is important for me to keep my girls in an environment, environment where they feel supported, loved, and minimize the changes that they were going through. A temporary recover-- recovery program like this will change the life for many kids. This will also change the, the lives of many kids that I work with. COVID has made the-- life nearly impossible for people who were already struggling. Every child learns different. Everybody has mentioned this. Everybody has different needs, every child have different needs. For people with no money or who do not have any-- who did not have a tragedy like losing a dad to COVID, their life may not have been, been so impacted. But for my family and many like us, we could use a little help to get our, our kids on track so they have a good future too. People may use these funds for school, for some tutoring, for-- or for some-- and other reasons. And no matter how they use it, I will tell you for sure that the parents, they would do-- take whatever they-- they would-- sorry-- they would do whatever it takes to get their kids back on

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track. And I really ask you for-- to support the LBT-- L-- I'm sorry-- LB1240. It's the right thing to do. Thank you.

STINNER: Thank you. Questions? Seeing none, thank you very much. Good afternoon.

KATHLEEN BURNS: Good afternoon. I apologize if I don't look up. I'm going to try not to cry. Thank you for taking the time to hear our stories today. I don't want to speak just for myself, but for other parents who may be in the same situation that I've been in, who may--

STINNER: You might want to spell your name, ma'am.

KATHLEEN BURNS: Oh, sorry. My name is Kathleen Burns.

STINNER: OK.

KATHLEEN BURNS: And it's spelled K-a-t-h-l-e-e-n B-u-r-n-s. And I don't want to speak for just for myself, but for other parents who may be in the same situation that I've been in, who may be praying for the help that you can give them. I'm the mother of five children, four of which who have attended private school, with two of them still attending. My oldest child is autistic and I have children with PTSD and ADHD. The time that we spent home during COVID was difficult. I was working full time from home and four of my children were trying to learn remotely. They had over 45 scheduled Zoom meetings per week. It's easy for a child to fall behind in this situation, especially children who are-- have special needs. They really needed in-person learning. As difficult as this sounds, I can only imagine how difficult it was for other children whose parents weren't blessed enough to be able to work from home. I'd like to share with-- why I sought private education for my children. July 5, 2011, I came home from work to hear my three-year-old daughter tell me that her father had sexually assaulted her. I called the police and within 30 minutes, he was being walked out of the house in handcuffs. He was sentenced to 25 to 40 years, and I was alone with a four-year-old, a three-year-old, an 18-month-old, and I was 30 weeks pregnant. My children developed PTSD. They were in trauma therapy and my son was showing signs of autism. I had PTSD too. I found myself on the floor of the church, sobbing and begging God for help. And when I finally rose up, I saw a bulletin on the wall about the Catholic School Consortium. I didn't have money, but I called the principal and I shared my story with her. She didn't hesitate, but she got me the financial aid I needed to enroll my children. Little did I know that it wasn't just an education that the school would provide for me

and my children. They provided love: teachers who stayed late and did homework with my kids because they knew I had a second job; teachers who created spaces in their room for my children to go to when they were having panic attacks or flashbacks; teachers willing to go above and beyond for children with special needs, including giving their personal phone numbers; a principal who went to the celebration of my daughter finishing her therapy. I have children in both public and private schools and I'm thankful that the bill is for both. I know that it's a common misconception that private schools are filled with rich children from affluent families, but it's not the case. Private schools are filled with children who have been blessed with financial aid from people with big hearts or nonprofit organizations who believe that education is the way to lift a child out of poverty. They understand that a child in poverty or a child with a single parent needs the extra community, love, and support system that comes along with being in a private school. I'm sad to know that not every child has access to this support. There are thousands of other children like mine in private schools, not because we're rich, but because somebody cared enough to help provide for our children. But thousands more are unable to access opportunities. LB1240 could help parents get tutoring for their children who fell behind, pay for school uniforms, school supplies, or the portion of tuition that isn't covered by financial aid. There are parents in desperate situations praying for help, parents who need the community, love, and support that their schools provide. Please be the answer to their prayers and help these children and families. Fast-forward ten years and my daughter is here to speak to you today. She wants to help families like ours and children like her. Thank you.

STINNER: Thank you. Questions? Senator Wishart.

WISHART: I want to thank you for being here today and having the courage to tell your story, and I'm so glad that you and your family found a safe place to land after so much trauma, so thank you.

KATHLEEN BURNS: Thank you.

STINNER: Thank you. Additional questions? Seeing none, thank you.

KATHLEEN BURNS: Thank you.

STINNER: Afternoon.

ISABELLA BURNS: Good afternoon, Senators. My name is Isabella Burns, I-s-a-b-e-l-l-a B-u-r-n-s. I'm 13 years old and I attend Holy Cross

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Catholic School. My mom told me that my principal called and asked if she would share our story with you. I wanted to come with her because it's my story too. Learning during COVID was difficult for my brothers and I. Having PTSD means struggling with short-term memory loss. It also means that sometimes it's hard to push away memories and you miss things that are happening in class. During remote learning, it was hard to hear what the teachers were saying, hard to see what they were teaching, and hard to focus. Having ADHD or autism like my brother made it even worse. He would be so frustrated he would cry. Sometimes so would I. When we are in school, the teachers are able to help us and let us stay after so they can work with us. During COVID, all of that went away. I also wanted to come because I wanted to be like you. I wanted to be an attorney. I want to be someone who can help other people, people like my mom, my brothers, and myself. I love my school. I'm so thankful that people helped my mom so that she could send me, but know-- but I know that going there had meant we had to sacrifice a lot of things, especially my mom. She didn't know it, but we could hear her crying and praying at night after she thought we were already asleep. We could see how sad she was when we would ask for something that she couldn't afford to get us. We couldn't afford to get school picture packages that other kids got at school, couldn't afford to buy books from the Scholastic Book Fair, but sometimes our teachers would get them for us, couldn't afford haircuts, so she learned how to cut all of our hair, even her own. We never had cable. We never had big birthday parties with all of our friends. We couldn't afford to be in Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, or sports. We missed out on time with our mom because of how much she worked. She would take extra jobs folding laundry and cleaning office buildings. My mom tells us that our education is the most important thing, that if we work hard enough, we can do anything. She tells us that a good education means that we grow up. We can live in a safer neighborhood and in a nicer house. Where we live now, we know that we have to lay down if we hear a gunshot or come inside if we see the police helicopter. She says that with a good education, I will be able to support myself and not get stuck in a bad relationship because I can't afford to get out. With this bill, you can help families like ours be able to afford tutoring, school supplies, and even tuition. Even more than that, you can help kids like me achieve our dreams so that we can be like you and help people too. Thank you.

STINNER: Thank you. Senator Wishart.

WISHART: Thank you for being here today. I have absolutely no doubt that with the courage you've already shown in your life, you can do whatever you want to do. Thank you for being here.

ISABELLA BURNS: Thank you.

STINNER: Additional questions? Seeing none, thank you. Good afternoon.

SURAYA WAYNE: Good afternoon. My name is Suraya Wayne, S-u-r-a-y-a W-a-y-n-e. I'm here today to testify in support of LB1240. This is a bill which prioritizes the education of our children. My son is eight years old and currently attends Holy Name Elementary. My son attended OPS prior to the pandemic and was transferred to private school in order to prioritize his education, as COVID began to alter the normal academic environment. My son never attended preschool and his kindergarten year was cut short due to COVID. His first full year of formal education occurred last year in first grade, where it was discovered he would need extra assistance in handwriting and math. My son is now currently in the second grade and his academic transformation within this last year has been remarkable, as per the emails from his teacher. This year is also the first year I have felt my son has received necessary resources to set him up for success, including the fantastic support of the teachers and staff at Holy Name Elementary. I, as well as I'm sure many other parents, would like my child to continue to rebound from the inconveniences and obstacles that COVID has imposed. As a single parent and full-time student at Creighton University myself, I find it incredibly difficult to manage the added responsibilities necessary to supplement my son's education and attempting to repair some of the educational fallout from COVID in between my own part-time work, full-time class, LSAT test prep, and my son's after-school activities, Cub Scouts, and wrestling. I believe this bill will provide the resources necessary for many children to receive the resources vital to their success in the crucial climate in which we live. I want the best for my son and I prioritize that by demonstrating the significance of my education through my own academic achievement, as well as by prioritizing hearings such as this. Thank you.

STINNER: Thank you. Any questions? Seeing none, thank you very much. Any additional proponents? Any opponents? Afternoon.

JACQUELLE LANE: Hello again. Good afternoon. Hello, my name is Jacquelle Lane. That's J-a-c-q-e-l-l-e; last name is L-a-n-e. I want to thank you for allowing me to speak here today on behalf of the Nebraska State Education Association in opposition to LB1240. This bill would appropriate \$60 million in federal dollars over the next two years for a program to provide a family-directed education

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recovery account. For each school year, up to \$20 million would be allocated to parents for educational expenses to address the unfinished learning caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This bill specifically states that these public dollars can be used to pay for private school tuition, which the Nebraska State Education is opposed to. However, I want to talk about the concern that there is for unfinished learning during the pandemic and what we believe is a much better approach with how to deal with it. With the significant issues that COVID-19 has brought forth, the mental health of our children is at the forefront of necessary attention. The solution LB1240 suggests is that unfinished learning may be addressed by providing \$2,000 to certain students to cover their private school tuition costs. This is tuition money that already would be paid by a parent annually to cover their child's private school tuition. Unless a child in a private school failed to advance a grade or was withheld from advancing, I am unsure of how this would constitute addressing the issue of unfinished learning. Providing subsidies for employing an outside tutor to help catch a student up in math or reading class might have merit, but using public dollars to cover regular private school tuition costs would not. To help children deal with the trauma of the pandemic, a better use of these public dollars would be to direct that money towards providing more mental health supports in our schools. We know that mentally healthy children function better at home, in school, and within their communities, and also have greater chances of leading a happy and successful life. In contrast, poor mental health during childhood can severely impact the way a child learns, behaves, and handles their emotions. We ask this committee to consider allocating these funds to hire additional psychologists, school counselors, and other critical personnel for our public school districts. Sound mental health is as important as physical health during childhood for achieving developmental milestones. It helps children with their emotional well-being and social skills. The COVID-19 pandemic brought a complex array of challenges that had mental health repercussions for everyone, including children and adolescents. Fear, grief, uncertainty, social isolation, increased screen time, and parental fatigue have negatively affected children's mental health. Friendships and family support are strong stabilizing forces for children, but the COVID-19 pandemic has also disrupted them. There are so many other areas that could benefit from this funding and would not be subject to nearly as much speculation or uncertainty as provided in this bill. Now is the time to make sure our resources are going to practical solutions and ensuring that we are genuinely meeting the needs of all of Nebraska's students. We urge you to allocate these funds to proven solutions,

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and this bill unfortunately does not allow for that. Please consider the alternatives that I have discussed here with you today and I appreciate your time and commitment.

STINNER: Thank you. Senator Erdman.

ERDMAN: Thank you, Senator Stinner, and thank you, Ms. Lane, for coming. Do you realize that this \$60 million is not going to take one dime away from public schools?

JACQUELLE LANE: I understand that, Senator, but I do also acknowledge that there is a severe shortage in mental health supports within our public schools and that, unfortunately, we do need to allocate resources to assisting our already struggling-- our struggling public schools with the, with the shortage.

ERDMAN: Can you agree that not every student will do well in public school and would do better in another setting? Would that be possible?

JACQUELLE LANE: I agree with the fact that in encouraging and allocating resources towards our public schools, we will be able to provide alternative settings, much like the virtual school that we have at Omaha Public Schools.

ERDMAN: So did you answer the question? It's yes or no. Do you agree that a student may do better in another setting besides a public school? That's a yes-or-no question.

JACQUELLE LANE: I believe that with proper funding, every child can succeed in the public school system.

ERDMAN: So you've chosen not to answer yes or no, right?

JACQUELLE LANE: That's correct.

ERDMAN: OK. Do you also understand that there is 100 public schools need improvement in the state of Nebraska?

JACQUELLE LANE: I am aware of that.

ERDMAN: Do you understand that our educational system is subpar compared to other states? Do you understand that as well?

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JACQUELLE LANE: Well, I think that that's a discussion for another time, and I think with the proper supports and allocation of funding, like I've stated, that we could rise to the occasion.

ERDMAN: I don't-- I don't think it's a discussion for another time. It's a discussion today. The issue that we have is those people who came to testify today told their story, the Omaha Street School, and all those things. Are you saying those aren't important?

JACQUELLE LANE: Absolutely not. It was extraordinarily compelling testimony. My urgency and my ask to the committee is that with-- given the proper supports and financial funding, that we can do just as good of a job, if not better, in the public school system to address the needs that our children are facing day in and day out.

ERDMAN: Do you realize that improving public schools can happen when you have competition?

JACQUELLE LANE: Well, I disagree with that statement.

ERDMAN: OK. I didn't ask if you agree with it. I asked, did you realize it?

JACQUELLE LANE: I realize it, yes.

ERDMAN: OK. So we have public schools, right? All right. So my definition of a public school is I go to the school board, I'm a parent, and I say I would rather you not teach what you're teaching my child or teach this or whatever we suggest; that-- that way, the public would have input at the, at the school board, right?

JACQUELLE LANE: Um-hum.

ERDMAN: And so then the public school teaches whatever they want, which is generally the case here in Nebraska. So what we have is government schools. The parents go to a school board meeting and they share their concern about what's being taught and what's not being taught and the school does whatever they want to do. That's a government school. And then when a parent goes to a school board and testifies or suggests things that they want done and they don't do it, then they're called a terrorist. These are the problems with public education, and we're not going to fix this public education till we understand that we've got to start meeting the needs of all the kids and we have to have competition to make them do the things that are right so we don't have 100 public schools in need of improvement. Thank you.

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STINNER: Additional questions? Seeing none, thank you.

JACQUELE LANE: Thank you.

STINNER: Afternoon.

DANIEL RUSSELL: Afternoon. Thank you, Chairman Stinner and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Daniel Russell, D-a-n-i-e-l R-u-s-s-e-l-l. I'm the interim executive director of Stand for Schools, a nonprofit dedicated to advancing public education in Nebraska. Stand for Schools opposes the family-directed education recovery accounts as proposed in LB1240. Our state needs proven solutions to address pandemic-related interrupted learning that include the nine out of ten students who attend public schools in our state. That means students need to be able to receive support services in addition to their regular schooling. Similar to NSEA, we believe that discounts on private school tuition are not a strategy to address the learning loss because they are not providing those additional learning supports. We believe these accounts would be better utilized by investment elsewhere. LB1240, as written, would provide \$2,000 per student, who is (1) a Nebraska resident, (2) attends a K-12 school, whether public or private, and (3) has a family income that would qualify for the federal free lunch program. Only if there are insufficient funds to award all applicants is priority given to a student that can show a quote, demonstrated deficiency in mathematics, science, or language arts. There's no stated mechanism in the bill by which students would demonstrate such deficiency. There are currently 104,639 students in Nebraska who qualify for free lunch. Assuming that \$20 million of the pilot program is distributed annually, LB1240 would benefit roughly 9,000 students. Instead, we need statewide solutions that benefit all students, not tuition discounts to a few. Instead of private school tuition remission, those funds could be used for afterschool programming, childcare availability, summer school availability for all grade levels, retaining teachers and school counselors, and hiring more mental and behavioral health professionals. These options would better support the goal of addressing learning loss than the simple tuition discounts proposed in Section 1, sub (e); or those funds could go to one or more of the numerous bills in front of this committee addressing school employee retention. As such, we oppose LB1240 and ask that you do not advance this bill, and I would be happy to take any questions.

STINNER: Any questions? Senator Hilkemann.

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HILKEMANN: That's a-- let me re-- I know that that many of the students lost-- you know, I've heard a year or better.

DANIEL RUSSELL: Sure.

HILKEMANN: Is there any statistics yet that have been developed on how many students are going to have to repeat a grade of school?

DANIEL RUSSELL: I haven't seen those, but I will look and follow up with you, Senator.

HILKEMANN: Because it would seem to me that, that, that's going to be a hard-- that's going to be a hard choice that some families are going to have to make and that's certainly going to put a lot more testing on-- or challenge on our resources, am I correct?

DANIEL RUSSELL: Yeah, I would agree, and also a hard choice for, for schools to make, as well, of course.

HILKEMANN: Thank you.

STINNER: Additional questions? Senator Erdman.

ERDMAN: Thank you, Senator Stinner. Thank you, Mr. Russell. So what has your organization done to help improve those hundred schools that need improvement?

DANIEL RUSSELL: Yeah, so what we do is advocate for public schools generally, so whether that means going into public schools and helping them figure out, you know, what programs and courses they could be offering to improve student learning, and we would do that through evidence-based research, or whether it's coming to the, to the Legislature and testifying in front of you all to support bills that we believe would help improve those schools or whether it's, you know, talking to NDE, that all-- that sort of thing.

ERDMAN: Can you tell me of a school that you helped, that your organization helped, that was removed off of the needs improvement list?

DANIEL RUSSELL: No, I cannot.

ERDMAN: And what I've heard when I was on the Education Committee is the answer was more money, and we've continued to give more money to education and we don't get better results. You know--

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DANIEL RUSSELL: I didn't hear a question, so I don't want to-- I'm sorry.

ERDMAN: Thank you.

STINNER: Additional questions? Seeing none, thank you.

DANIEL RUSSELL: Thank you.

STINNER: Any additional opponents? Seeing none, anyone in the neutral capacity? Seeing none, would you like the close, Senator?

ALBRECHT: Just for the record, Senator Wishart, I've never been in front of Appropriations, so I thought this would be a great time to start. You know, first of all, I'd really like to thank everyone for listening. And I think more than anything, in the beginning, we thought, who in the world would possibly be able to use this money? There are many, many, many students and families, and it's the parents that know the impact that COVID has had on their families. I come from District 17, where we do have the largest Tyson food plant in the country, with English language learners and we expect, out of a, a law that we passed, for kids to be able to read before they leave third grade. Are they able to do that today? If they were already behind, any kind of money would be certainly appreciated by the families because, I mean, you, you're talking about people-- my daughter had to homeschool her-- our-- her firstborn for three years. She couldn't go to a school. So if she had this kind of money to be able to buy the books and, and get her caught up in the reading skills that she needed before she went to school-- some people, some families, both work. They don't have an opportunity to put their child in a preschool. They can't afford it. You know, sometimes they, they just don't have the ability to stay home during COVID with their kids. You know, people are struggling and this money, when you take a look at some figures here, over \$800 million is going to the schools. Are they using the \$800 million to educate or get extra help with mental issues with these families? Can they tell us that they are using those funds, the \$800 million, to put into the children, not to build a new school, not to build an auditorium, not to build-- to fix a roof-- because they can do whatever they want with the money. They don't have to do what we're asking in this bill to help educate the kids. They can do whatever they want, correct? I mean, there's not too many people that are going to ask too many questions on how that-- how they're going to spend the money. But we're talking about-- you know, I'm hearing from public schools that this is tuition. This isn't tuition. This is for kids who can't read, you

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know, they're behind in math, science, and this is a program that's going to be looked at every year. The Governor's going to find out, and so is the Legislature, how this is going and how we spent-- did we spend the money the correct way, the right way? And you know what? As parents, we know what our kids need. You know, they're going to be in a school room with 30 or-- 30 children or more, and that little-- quiet little Johnny in the corner that, you know, everybody might think he's doing just fine till he goes home and mom and dad find out that he can't read. My girls were in a very good public school system, and for the first three years they told me how wonderful they were. They're so good to be in class with them. They get along with everybody. But guess what? In third grade, they couldn't read. I had to spend a lot of money, and that was quite a number of years ago, in Sylvan Learning Center and we did it for about three months with both of them, caught them right up to speed. Every child doesn't learn the same as all the rest of them. So I hope you don't sit here and think, my goodness, what are we going to do in western Nebraska? There are kids throughout the, the whole state that need a program like this. It's not about going to, to a different school system. This is-- this could be something as simple as finding that college student that will come in during the summertime and you pay them. You know, they're going to have to audit these accounts, whether they give them a credit card and they can spend, you know, the \$2,000 however they wish. They might have seven kids, like the lady said; \$2,000 doesn't go very far. I hope it's per kid. I'm just saying that, that-- take a look at this. There's a reason that, that they get audited. There's a reason that it's 185 percent of poverty, poverty. My goodness, we, we feed kids morning, noon, and we give them backpacks to take home to eat. We're, we're taking care of that part of it. Let's take care of whatever we need for the kids in the state of Nebraska to continue their education. We owe that to them. Yeah, these are-- these might be federal funds that are coming in, but \$800 million to be used however you wish, but yet nonpublic school or federal relief or just relief to a parent is \$30 million? And, yeah, it'll, it'll be about 32,000 kids that will benefit for \$931. That's nothing. That's nothing. But I'm just saying this money is going to that child. It's not \$800 million to spend however you feel fit. It's the parents that need to have this money to be able to do what they need. If it needs a sunset instead of calling it a pilot program, if it needs-- you know, whatever to make certain, but those stories that we heard today were very compelling. I had no idea who these folks were and I just got to listen to it just like you did. And if your heart isn't open to spending this kind of money on children throughout our state-- they're everywhere. They're-- I mean, in the masses. They're right

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here in the big cities. You know, they're the ones that, that are probably going to be benefiting more than, than those out in the 3rd Congressional District, if you will, that we have different ways that we have to perform because we don't have the Sylvan Learning Centers or other programs. But we have colleges where young folks would be happy to-- I always had, had the volleyball girls come in and tutor my girls. I mean, they don't want to hear from mom and dad. They want to hear from somebody that they admire and look up to and respect, so-- not that they don't respect me or if-- that would be another story. But I'm just saying we-- please keep your mind open to this particular bill. I think it's going to benefit a lot of families and a lot of children throughout the state of Nebraska. So thanks for listening.

STINNER: Thank you, Senator. Any questions? Seeing none, thank you very much.

ALBRECHT: Thank you.

STINNER: We have seven letters in support of LB1240, one in opposition, and that concludes our hearing of LB1240. We'll now reopen on LB1217. Senator, I've got to go.

WISHART: Hi. Hi, Senator.

WALZ: Am I your last one?

WISHART: Yeah, you are--

McDONNELL: You're the last hearing, Senator Walz.

WISHART: --so think-- think strategically.

VARGAS: Be careful what you say.

WISHART: Welcome.

WALZ: OK. I can get going?

VARGAS: I'm sorry.

WISHART: Yes.

WALZ: You don't want me to hang out and just--

VARGAS: We're not the friendliest of committees.

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WALZ: Yeah. All right. Good afternoon, Senator Wishart and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Lynne Walz, L-y-n-n-e W-a-l-z, and I'm here to introduce LB1217, a bill to provide \$1,000 incentive payments to each eligible public and private school employee aside from administrators. As I'm sure you are all aware, we are facing a teacher shortage in the state; however, schools are also facing staffing shortages among bus drivers, food service handlers, librarians, para educators, and other support positions. Our school staff in every capacity, regardless of public or private, have undergone a strenuous past few years and continue to face challenges. These incentive payments are just one way that we can show our support and appreciation for all that they do. I don't think that we'll ever be able to show how much we truly appreciate when our school personnel have done for our state, but this is just one small way that we can. LB1217 would allocate \$1,000 to each school employee through the federal Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Fund. Each employee that works for approved or accredited public, private, denom-- denominational or parochial K-12 schools would receive these funds, as well as an affiliated early childhood education personnel. There is one change to the bill that I would like to recommend; however, it is certainly up to the committee to decide. I didn't expect the fiscal note to be so high from the Department of Administrative Services. We originally did that because we thought that, from a simplicity standpoint, going through DAS made sense since DAS already cuts the checks. However, I saw Senator Blood's bill, LB696, that goes through the Department of Education, and the fiscal note they suggest-- they suggested is under \$100,000. My recommendation would be to change that to the Department of Education. But as I said, it is certainly up to the committee to decide what is best on that. And with that, I'd be happy to answer any questions.

WISHART: Thank you. Any questions? Senator Erdman.

ERDMAN: Thank you, Senator Wishart. Thank you, Senator Walz. So it's \$88 million, right? The fiscal note says it's \$88 million and it's going to take \$8 million worth of administrative costs to distribute \$88 million?

WALZ: That is-- that comes from the Department of Administrative Services, correct, so that is why I would suggest that we go through the Department of Education, because it's less than \$100,000 to distribute.

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ERDMAN: OK, so when you make this distribution and those employees are going to get that, is there some kind of restriction or requirement that they work for a certain period of time before they get that or you're just going to give them the money and then they quit? How do you-- how do you-- how do you make sure that they stick around? The incentive is to keep people to stick around, right?

WALZ: Correct. Well, actually, it is-- it is, you know, we definitely want people to stick around. I think also, though, it's just a way to say thank you for everything that you've done over the past few years. We've had a flood in Fremont. I don't know where-- if you guys had a flood where you were a few years ago.

ERDMAN: We had a flood one time. It was-- rained 40 days and 40 nights. That's the last time.

WALZ: And we also had, you know, COVID, so they really have had to change the way that they teach, both public and private. They've had to do a lot of online classes as well as in-class teaching. And, you know, as a-- as a teacher, I-- I can empathize with the things that they've had to do over the past three years.

ERDMAN: Maybe I did a poor job of asking the question.

WALZ: I would say that-- so, no, in my bill, I do not say that they have to stay for a certain amount of period-- or a certain amount of time. I guess that if that's something that's really important to the committee, that's something that we can certainly have conversations about.

ERDMAN: So this is going to go to all employees, whether it's a bus driver or a janitor or whatever, right?

WALZ: Absolutely.

ERDMAN: OK. So if you give them a thousand dollars and they quit tomorrow, they have a thousand dollars, right?

WALZ: Yeah.

ERDMAN: Should-- shouldn't there be a provision that says you-- you work for this period of time or you stay for this long and then you get the thousand dollars or whatever. It just-- if you give them the thousand dollars, they could quit tomorrow, correct?

WALZ: Right. I just said that.

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ERDMAN: So then what-- what does that do? I mean--

WALZ: I just said that if that was something that the--

ERDMAN: --shouldn't there be a provision that they would stay a certain period of time?

WALZ: If that's something that the committee feels is important, that's something that we can certainly have discussions about.

ERDMAN: OK.

WISHART: Any additional questions? Senator McDonnell.

McDONNELL: Thank you for being here. So basically part of your-- your bill, though, is to say thank you for the work that's already been done.

_____: Right.

WALZ: Absolutely.

McDONNELL: And then in the fiscal note we have-- and I know what your intent is, to say, hey, everyone is getting this regardless of private or public. But I think we got a-- the fiscal note we do have, that it's talking about this does not include nonpublic schools. And then I know your intent's not that, so we'll-- we can work on that with you.

WALZ: Right.

McDONNELL: So I think that might be a difference a little bit, right--

WALZ: Yeah.

McDONNELL: ---what you're talking about, the fiscal note's--

WALZ: Yeah, the Department of Education, I don't think, included the private schools, and that's not the intent of the bill.

McDONNELL: Yeah, yeah. Thank you.

WISHART: Senator Hilkemann.

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HILKEMANN: So now-- now let me understand the intent of the bill. Your intent of the bill is to-- is to reward or compensate the people who worked during the corona pri-- crisis.

WALZ: Right. That is exactly why we have the money that we have available to us, is to be able to give because of that.

HILKEMANN: Right, right. So it would seem to me that, as long as they worked during the crisis, that-- that-- that's where it-- whether they continue on working is another story because the--

WALZ: Yeah, that actually makes more sense that they were--

HILKEMANN: Yeah, I think when you look at ways to do it, if they worked during the period of the crisis, that qualifies them, whether they continue on there. A lot of these people are not going to continue on. They're--

WALZ: Right.

HILKEMANN: They're retired.

WALZ: That makes way more sense, Senator Hilkemann.

HILKEMANN: I'd look at that idea.

WISHART: Senator Dorn.

DORN: Well, thank you. Thank you for being here. And I just was going to comment on Senator McDonnell's line there, too, and I see you were just explaining to him, that it was referring to the 56-- 56,000 school employees did not in-- public school employees, did not include private ones. When I first read it, too, I did the same thing you-- you did, that it didn't say it, went and read the bill and the bill definitely says it includes private--

WALZ: Yeah.

DORN: --all private.

McDONNELL: OK.

WALZ: Yeah.

McDONNELL: Also, would you be open just to capping the administrative costs at X percent, 5 percent, 7 percent, we just cap it? Would you be open to something like that for the administrative cost?

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WALZ: I-- as long as it can get done, you know.

McDONNELL: Well, there-- thank you.

WISHART: Any additional questions? Seeing none, thank you, Senator.

WALZ: Thank you. Enjoy the rest of your day, I guess.

DORN: It's 5:00. We're done.

WALZ: It's 5:00 somewhere.

WISHART: Well, I am going to call out for proponents. Do we have any proponents for LB1217? Any opponents? Anyone in the neutral? Seeing none, Senator, would you like to close? She waives closing. We do have seven letters of support for LB1240, one in opposition--

TAMARA HUNT: LB1217.

WISHART: Oh, sorry, OK. I-- I'm off here, excuse me-- four proponents for LB1217, one in opposition, and zero neutral. And that closes our hearing for LB1217 and that closes our hearing for the day.