

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Appropriations Committee January 31, 2024
Rough Draft

CLEMENTS: Right. We're ready to begin. Welcome to the Appropriations Committee. My name is Rob Clements, I'm from Elmwood and represent Legislative District 2, which is Cass County and eastern Lancaster. I serve as Chair of this committee. We'll start off by having the members do self-introduction, starting with my far right.

ERDMAN: Steve Erdman, District 47.

LIPPINCOTT: Loren Lippincott, District 34.

VARGAS: Tony Vargas, District 7.

WISHART: Anna Wishart, District 27.

McDONNELL: Mike McDonnell, District 5, south Omaha.

DORN: Myron Dorn, District 30.

CLEMENTS: Assisting the committee today is Cori Bierbaum, our committee clerk. On my left is our fiscal analyst today, Scott Danigole. And our page today is Ella Schmidt from Lincoln, a criminal justice and political science major. If you're planning on testifying today, please fill out a green testifier sheet located on the side of the room and hand it to the page when you come up to testify. If you will not be testifying, but want to go on record as having a position on a bill being heard today, there are yellow sign-in sheets on the side of the room, where you may leave your name and other pertinent information. These sign-in sheets will become exhibits in the permanent record after today's hearing. To better facilitate today's hearing, I ask that you abide by the following procedures. Please silence your cell phones. Move to the front chairs to testify when your bill or agency is up. Now, in this room, that's probably not possible. When hearing bills, the order of testimony will be introducer, proponents, opponents, neutral, and closing. When we hear testimony regarding agencies, we will first hear from the representative of the agency. Then we will hear testimony from anyone who wishes to speak on the agency's budget request. When you come to testify, please spell your first and last name for the record before you testify. Be concise. We request that you limit your testimony to five minutes or less. Written material may be distributed to the committee members as exhibits only while testimony is being offered. Hand them to the page for distribution when you come up to testify. If you have written testimony but do not have 12 copies, please raise

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your hand now so the page, page can make copies for you. With that, we will begin today's hearing with LB1077. Senator MacDonnell, welcome.

McDONNELL: Thank you, Chairman, Chairman Clements, 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. LB1077 would add \$2 million to the Department of Labor for grants for facilities expansion for programs in workforce training and career readiness. The purpose of this program is statewide. We cannot solve our workforce preparedness problem unless we are united as a state to solve it. LB1077 would divide three grants evenly among the congressional districts. Also, I don't think government can tackle this problem alone. That is why I require a one to one match of private funding for any grant funds. Business and industry have to demonstrate their commitment to workforce development, and that is why the state would be the last dollar in. I had a chance to visit a successful welding center at Westside High School in Omaha, and thought we could replicate this model to get more facilities and organizations on board, to have an infrastructure to prepare the next generation of-- for workforce. Having a chance to, to go through Westside's facility, looking at their, their fundraising and how industry, labor, and the private sector stepped up and the impact they're having on the students over there, that don't plan on going to college but are looking for a career path. And the need we have in the community right now and throughout the-- throughout our state, don't be too proud to steal a good idea. It's working. Now, we got a trades camp separate from Westside, and I mentioned this in a hearing yesterday. I got to see a letter from a grandmother that her granddaughter came home and had a chance to weld for the first time, and she said she had never seen her granddaughter that excited about doing anything in her life. That possibly could her-- be her path. So the idea of we need the people in the trades, but we also need to make sure that we're, we're giving these students a chance to try something they never, they've never done before. And also based on the idea of, of the need and then the opportunity, giving them some hope for the future and a goal outside of, of going to college. So the, the dollar amount, the idea of us being the last dollar in, evenly, throughout the three congressional districts, based on we know the need is statewide. I'm here to answer your questions.

CLEMENTS: Are there any questions? Senator Vargas?.

VARGAS: Thank you very much, Senator McDonnell. Can you elaborate a little bit on this? I support workforce development and the trades,

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but given the language-- You know, we've had some other funds that, that will go to workforce development, we've done that in the past. I mean, are you planning to bring an amendment language that would delineate who actually qualifies? Like what does and doesn't qualify under workforce development and career readiness? Like, can a community college apply for doing expansion? Is this a high school? Can it be a public or private entity? Or like, are you're just keeping it very, very open ended for a reason? So I just wanted to see if you had any, follow up on that.

McDONNELL: So looking at program 31 through Department of Labor Agency 23, the idea of it at that high school level, that's the experience that I saw this summer that was being successful. But that doesn't mean it can't be at a community college. The idea of is, is getting more of the opportunity out there. And as we know more in the, in the, throughout the state, we have more people that are currently in high school getting credits at community colleges while they're still in high school. So having that kind of partnership, which I know goes on in, in the Omaha area with the Omaha-- with, with Randy Schmailzl through Metro Community College, it's more of trying to say, hey, let's get that facility. Let's get those people the opportunity. Let's get that private dollar, either from business or, or the labor movement, and match that dollar, and give these people an opportunity to get this kind of training, this kind of exposure to it and develop the workforce for the future.

VARGAS: OK.

CLEMENTS: Senator Dorn?

DORN: Is, is there going to be a, I call it a limit on how much it can be to any entity, or, or haven't you had that thought?

McDONNELL: No, what we discussed was the idea of evenly-- the dollars throughout the three congressional districts, but not knowing if there would be two, three different--

DORN: One?

McDONNELL: One. The interest we don't know yet. Hopefully it's to the point where there's so much interest that in the future if this shows success like they have at Westside, and the, and the private sector is stepping up with that, that dollar match, then someone comes back and

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says, geez, this is really working. We need, we need to do it more, we have more interest. But I don't know what the interest would be.

CLEMENTS: Senator Armendariz?

ARMENDARIZ: Thank you. Thank you, thank you for bringing the bill. I as well did visit Westside this fall, I believe, and I'm 100% in support with expanding the trades in high school. I really want to focus on high school because I think we miss a lot of kids like that-- the woman's granddaughter, who would have never had, possibly, exposure to something that really lit her up. And I think there are a lot of kids like that, and we're not giving them a lot of opportunities to explore that while we have that captive audience in K through 12. So I, I am very supportive of expanding those in high school, also to fill our job needs here in Nebraska as well. And I love that they have raised millions on their own there at Westside. The only thing I told them when I left is, I think we have a lot of money laying around, and you being in appropriations, do you think, like I told them, we can find money we've already appropriated to direct toward this program, maybe from a program that isn't being fully utilized or isn't working as well as this might? And that's what I shared with them. What are your thoughts on that?

McDONNELL: We were having that discussion before we got started today, and that's definitely a possibility. And back to the idea of where the facility is, if it was in the community college, or it was in high school, the idea that having high school students be able to have that opportunity. Either they're going, for example, Westside, of course, they're right in the building, it's very convenient. They've-- and I was in the same lab you were, the welding lab. But also if it was for me, possibly in another part of the state where I had to leave my high school and go to the community college where I'm a junior, but I'm still getting that kind of opportunity. But the dollars, yes, that's-- this is the first step in the process of looking at where we are in the Department of Labor with agency 23 and program 31, how that's going to work. I'm open to any suggestions.

ARMENDARIZ: Thank you, I appreciate it.

CLEMENTS: Senator Erdmann?

ERDMAN: Thank you, Senator Clements. Senator McDonnell, what kind of certification do they come out of this high school program with?

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McDONNELL: Well, they are with with the idea of-- when I, when I say a certification and being part of the labor movement and going and saying, you know, you're an apprentice after four years and you've done this, this and through the Department of Labor, with the high school level, are they giving them, is there a graduation? Are they beco-- are they certif-- sure. To what level? This would be not to the level of being an apprentice to that and being a journeyman. But it sure would be a, a-- they would be certi-- It's like any other class. You have to, you have to pass the class. So they are taking it, they are being tested. They are being taught and tested at the end. So they are getting a grade in the class.

CLEMENTS: Senator Armendariz.

ARMENDARIZ: Thank you again. One caveat to the conversation I had with them. And, and I've been stressing to a lot of people in this conversation is that I believe that this is a great opportunity for high schoolers to get high paying jobs once they get these skills in high school. So I don't intend this to necessarily be a precursor to going on to more. There might-- they might get certification in system certification. And I expect that to be able to be done in, in high school. So that we have high schoolers getting out and being able to support themselves, a future family, without being, I guess, beholden to future education unless they decide to expand that on their own. I want them to get high paying jobs once they get out.

CLEMENTS: Other questions? I had one question. Does the matching-- do the matching funds have to come from each congressional district? What if somebody in one congressional district says, I want to fund the match everywhere.

McDONNELL: Oh, yeah. If there was someone that, that generous that said, I'd like to, you know, there's a dollar, dollar in all three congressional districts, I'm going to match that dollar. Yeah, I don't think that's a, that's a problem at all. The idea was to try to make sure that we were pursuing it equally amongst the three congressional districts, but if someone would be that generous, that would be wonderful.

CLEMENTS: All right. Just wanted to clarify that. Very good. Seeing no other questions.

McDONNELL: I will be here to close.

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CLEMENTS: All right. Do we have proponents?

TERRY HANNA: Good afternoon, Chairman Clements and Appropriations Committee members. My name is Terry Hanna, T-e-r-r-y H-a-n-n-a. And I'm here today in support of LB1077. And I'd like to thank Senator McDonnell for introducing this bill. I serve as the president of the Westside Community Schools Foundation, and the Westside Foundation is the fundraising arm of Westside Community Schools. My role is to support Westside Community Schools to-- by providing funds through private support to enhance student-teacher experiences, facility improvements, student scholarships, and career explorations. The Westside Community Foundation has embarked on a fundraising effort to support the students and staff at Westside High School, with the end goal of supporting Nebraska's workforce. In 2018, the Westside Foundation led an effort to expand the welding program from 1200 square feet to 2,500 square feet, to make the lab safer and provide more real world equipment for our students, and most importantly, grow the enrollment in our program. That effort has proven successful with 45 supporters toward the project, an increase in our welding class' enrollment in three years, from 145 students to more than 300 students per year. Through our partnership with Metro Community College, our students have the opportunity to take advanced welding classes and become certified upon graduation, and enter the workforce immediately. A few weeks ago, I gave a tour to some community members and we went to the welding and fabrication center, and there was about 25 students there, you know, performing different welds. And they all stopped and looked to the group. And one gentleman asked, you know, why are you taking this class? And about a handful said, I want to be an engineer, I thought this would be great experience. A few others said, I want to go into construction, I want to be electrician, two, two students said I'm interested in steel art. But there's about ten students that rose their hand and said, I'm not sure. I was told I, I'm good with my hands and I'm good with numbers, and I want to take this class and see where it goes. And I think that's why we're here today. It is our hope to replicate the welding expansion into other career areas at the high school. This campaign will feature a college and career readiness center that focus on-- focuses on career exploration and post-high school education paths for students. Westside School has always been to do everything we can to prepare our high school seniors to be career ready upon graduation. For many of our kids, this does not necessarily mean a traditional college. It can mean going into the workforce immediately. Our Career Readiness Center will have dedicated space for Metro Community College and Avenue Scholars and their

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representatives to assist in navigating our students to the best career path for them. This center will also have a technology rich innovation lab space for students and staff to expand student knowledge and experience. In most instances, employment in the technology space, a traditional four year degree is not necessary, and our students can be proficient to enter the technology workforce immediately. This innovation will include, but not be limited to, virtual reality, artificial intelligence, and hands on learning. Last, this project will also feature an emphasis on sports medicine, athletic training, and emergency management. This focus will enhance our current relationship with local health systems to prepare our students to go into the health sciences field. LB1077 would assist us and many other similar organizations to have the facilities for immediate workforce development. We want to do our part in stemming Nebraska's brain drain and fill vacant Nebraska jobs with our graduates. Thank you for your time, and I'm happy to take any questions.

CLEMENTS: Other questions from the committee? Senator Armendariz?

ARMENDARIZ: Thank you. Thank you for being here. Nice to see you. Can you tell me when those young people are done with, say, the welding portion? Does Westside then help them, help place them in job openings that are available across the state?

TERRY HANNA: Yes. And one thing that with this campaign that we did with welding and fabrication, we actually create an advisory committee with a lot of industry experts to kind of help guide students and ask and answer questions. And every student that wants to go into welding, they have a job. I mean if it fits into a construction company, a steel company, we're going to make sure we have connections. And I think with Westside and I think a lot of high schools, at least around the Omaha area, they're very big on building relationships with corporate Omaha. And I think the more we can expand it statewide, the better, because I think at the end of the day, that's why we're here. We want the entire state to succeed.

ARMENDARIZ: Just follow up. Yes. The traditional welding jobs. But can you also help the, the two that want to go into steel arts.

TERRY HANNA: Oh absolutely.

ARMENDARIZ: You help place them in--

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TERRY HANNA: You know and that's--

ARMENDARIZ: --their career path.

TERRY HANNA: Yes. And that's why we reach out to the experts in that industry. I mean there's artists, you know, that are part of Coneco. And you know, if there's an interest, we will find a connection with them or for them. And I think that's, you know, we all have great relationships in what we do. And I think the biggest advice that we can provide, an opportunity we can provide for students is connecting them. Because, I mean, if someone wants to get into what I do, I'm more than happy to talk to them about all the pros and, you know, and some of the cons too. You've got to-- everyone's got to know both sides.

ARMENDARIZ: Yeah, I appreciate that. We all know that the connections and the exposure for young people is, is really certainly key to their success as adults.

TERRY HANNA: And not just social media.

CLEMENTS: Are there any questions? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony. Are there additional proponents?

Unidentified: Standing room only today.

CLEMENTS: Welcome.

COURTNEY WITTSTRUCK: Thank you. All right. Good afternoon, Chairman Clements and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Courtney Wittstruck, that's C-o-u-r-t-n-e-y W-i-t-t-s-p-r-u-c-k. I'm the Executive Director of the Nebraska Community College Association, and a registered lobbyist. I am testifying today on behalf of the NCCA's five member colleges in support of LB1077. And I know that you have plenty of folks behind me. And it was said so well by Senator McDonnell and others before me, I'll make this very short and sweet, but I'll be available for questions, obviously. So although we weren't involved in the creation of this bill, we support this effort to increase the pipeline of skilled labor in Nebraska. And as you all know, community colleges, which are located in every corner of the state, play a key role in creating the skilled workforce that Nebraska so desperately needs. So to continue to provide skilled workers, our colleges rely significantly on private funds and philanthropic funds. So this bill would really help our colleges across the state get some of their

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critical projects across the finish line. Like I said, I'll be short and sweet. So thank you very much. And I'm happy to answer any questions that weren't answered before me.

CLEMENTS: Are there questions from the committee? Seeing none, thanks for coming--

COURTNEY WITTSTRUCK: All right. Thank you folks, I appreciate it.

CLEMENTS: --and for your testimony. Are there other proponents for LB1077. Seeing none are there any-- anyone here in opposition with LB1077? Seeing none, anyone here in the neutral capacity. Seeing none, that concludes the hearing for LB1077. Well, would you like to close?

McDONNELL: Just here to answer any of your questions, and if not I'll-- If you've got any questions, I'll-- You know the importance of it. We know the need throughout our state. So I'm here to answer any questions.

CLEMENTS: Any questions? Seeing none, now that concludes that hearing for LB1077. Except that we do have position comments for the hearing record. We have one proponent, no opponents, none in the neutral position. That concludes LB1077. We'll move to agency hearings. Agency 11, the Attorney General. Welcome.