

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office

Education Committee January 30, 2023

Rough Draft

**MURMAN:** My name is Dave Murman. I'm from Glenvil, Nebraska. I represent District 38, and that is seven counties or eight counties along the southern border with Kansas. I serve as Chair of this committee. The committee will take up the bills in the order posted outside of the hearing room. The list will be updated after each hearing to identify which bill is currently being heard. Our hearing today is your public part of the legislative process. This is your opportunity to express your position on the proposed legislation before us today. We do ask that you limit or eliminate handouts. This is important to note. If you are unable to attend a public hearing and would like your position stated for the record, you must submit your position and any comments using the Legislature's online database by 12 p.m. the day prior to the hearing. Letters emailed to a senator or staff member will not be part of the permanent record. You must use the online database in order to become part of the permanent record. To better facilitate today's proceeding, I ask that you abide by the following procedures. Please turn off cell phones and other electronic devices. The order of testimony is introducer, proponents and opponents, neutral and closing remarks. If you will be testifying, please complete the green form and hand it to the committee clerk when you come up to testify. If you have written materials that you would like distributed to the committee, please hand them to the page to distribute. We need 11 copies for all committee members and staff. If you need additional copies, please ask a page to make copies for you now. When you begin to testify, please state and spell your name. For the record. Please be concise. Is my request that you limit your testimony to four minutes. If necessary, we will use the light system. Green is three minutes, yellow when one minute is remaining and red, please wrap up your comments. If there are a lot of people wishing to testify, we will use a three-minute testimony limit. If your remarks were reflected in previous testimony or if you would like your position to be known but do not wish to testify, please sign the white form at the back of the room and it will be included in the official record. Please speak directly into the microphone so our transcribers are able to hear you test-- hear your testimony clearly. I'd like to introduce the committee staff. To my immediate right is research analyst, Jack Spray. To my right, at the end of the table, is committee clerk, Shelley Schwarz. The committee will testify-- the committee members will-- with us today will introduce themselves beginning at my far right.

**SANDERS:** Rita Sanders, District 45, the Bellevue-Offutt community.

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**LINEHAN:** Good morning. Lou Ann Linehan, Elkhorn, Legislative District 39.

**ALBRECHT:** Good morning, Joni Albrecht, District 17: Wayne, Thurston and Dakota and a portion of Dixon County in northeast Nebraska.

**WALZ:** Good morning. Lynne Walz. I represent Legislative District 15, which is Dodge County and Valley.

**BRIESE:** Good morning. Tom Briese, represent District 41.

**WAYNE:** Justin Wayne, represent District 13.

**CONRAD:** Good morning. I'm-- excuse me-- I'm Danielle Conrad. I represent north Lincoln.

**MURMAN:** And our pages are-- if we would like to stand-- Trent and Payton. Welcome. Please remember that senators may come and go during our hearings, as they may have bills to introduce in other committees. Refrain from applause or other indications of support or opposition. For our audience, the microphones in the room are not for amplification, but for recording purposes only. Lastly, we use electronic devices to distribute information. Therefore, me-- therefore, you may see committee members referencing information on their electronic devices. Be assured that your presence here today and your testimony are important to us and are critical to state government. And this time, we'll open the hearing on LB324, Senator Wishart. Good morning.

**WISHART:** Well, good morning, Chairman Murman and members of the Education Committee. My name is Anna Wishart, A-n-n-a W-i-s-h-a-r-t, and I represent the 27th District in west Lincoln and Lancaster County. I'm here today to reintroduce LB324, a bill that would increase the percentage of state reimbursement for special education over the next three biennium to 80 percent through a stepped-up increase. You can see in the legislation that for fiscal year '24-25 and '25-26, it would be 60 percent reimbursement, '26-27 and '27-28, 70 percent reimbursement, and finally '28-29 and beyond, 80 percent reimbursement. Colleagues, I have brought this bill pretty much every year that I have been in the-- serving in the Legislature. To me, this piece of legislation is effective in a number of ways. First and foremost, it allows for the state to support local school districts in terms of funding kids and their families who have special needs. It supports then those kids getting the resources that they need to

thrive. And finally, it offers a very good vehicle for providing property tax relief because it reduces the local investment needed for these essential services with kids with special needs. I'm not going to belabor the point because I've brought this bill every-- pretty much every single year and it's, it's pretty straightforward. I have seen that the governor's office and other senators are working on an education package that includes special education. I am obviously very willing to work with this committee and the full Legislature to utilize this piece of legislation in a way that would help meet those objectives as well. And with that, I will take any questions.

**MURMAN:** Are there any questions for Senator Wishart? Senator Albrecht.

**ALBRECHT:** Only because I'm new to this committee, I'd like a little bit of background on-- you've brought it every single year. And are you-- did you bring it because the federal government was not doing their part or that you just feel that the state should be doing more and not just relying on the federal government?

**WISHART:** So both. You know, special education is something that's-- funding is very-- something that's very important to me and very personal to me. I have members of my family who are paraeducators and so I see firsthand some of the struggles that kids and families experience when kids have special needs. And so I always knew I was going to introduce legislation to help support funding for kids with special needs. The more I looked into it and the more I talked with, with Senator Linehan, you know, this is a responsibility and a mandate on the federal level that has been around for a very long time. And the federal government has never really met their obligation on the federal level for funding states to be able to provide these essential services. And so what's happened is our state has put up some funding to support local school districts, but, but definitely not enough. And so the local burden then has continued to increase on funding special education. So I see this as sort of twofold; one is in the short term, meeting the local community investment with more state funds to sort of relieve some of that pressure on local communities for funding special education. I also think that once the state is more involved in funding the needs of special education, I would hope that we would become more vocal to our federal elected representatives that the federal government meet that obligation and then in turn, that would reduce the amount that the state would, would need to pay in the long run.

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**ALBRECHT:** Yeah, I would like to look into the years that we've been together because we came in in the same class. What was their obligation seven years ago and how much did they not contribute? Do you have any of that information?

**WISHART:** So the federal government's obligation started in 1975 under the Disabilities Act. I believe since the beginning, the federal government has never paid the promised 40 percent share of their mandate to support this. For many years, they paid less than 8 percent. And I believe that those testifying behind me can get you the amount in the past seven years, but it's gone as low as 8 percent.

**ALBRECHT:** I appreciate that. Thanks for bringing the bill.

**MURMAN:** Any further questions at this time? If not, we will take proponents of the bill.

**WISHART:** And I did notify Senator Linehan. I have an Appropriations meeting that I must get to so I will not be able to be here to answer questions at the end.

**MURMAN:** OK. Thank you. Good morning.

**JACK MOLES:** Good morning. Members of the Education Committee, my name is Jack Moles. That's J-a-c-k M-o-l-e-s. I'm the executive director of the Nebraska Rural Community Schools Association. On behalf of NRCSA, as well as on behalf of the Nebraska Council of School Administrators and the Greater Nebraska Schools Association, I would like to offer our support for LB324. We appreciate Senator Wishart for introducing this bill and for her efforts in the past on similar bills. Special education costs consistently climb at an astonishing rate in many of the schools. A report produced by the Nebraska Association of Special Education Supervisors showed that while SPED costs have continued to grow, both state and federal reimbursement rates did not keep pace. They found that local funding for SPED costs increased 54 percent from 2011 to 2017. In the meantime, state reimbursement grew by only 24 percent over that same time period and federal reimbursement had dropped by 47 percent over that time period, so. I've also worked on my own study and what I looked at was special education expenditures for all school-- public school districts in Nebraska. One of my findings is that from 2008-2009 to 2021-2022, 59 districts saw their SPED expenditures increased by over 100 percent. The high was Cedar Bluffs, which saw a 613.36 percent increase over that time frame. Other districts-- I, I listed several other districts for you, all

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over 200 percent increase in their expenditures. Additionally, 55 other school districts saw an increase between 70 and 100 percent over that time frame. Statewide, schools average-- saw an average increase in SPED expenditures of 63.2 percent. Amazingly to me, ten districts actually saw a reduction in their SPED expenditures over that time. All ten of those were Class C- or D-sized districts, most of them smaller Class D districts. My assumption-- and I'm probably pretty close on this-- is they had higher-needs students phase out. One hundred fifty-eight districts saw at least an increase of 50 percent in their SPED expenditures from the 2008-2009 school year through 2021-22. And all this took place when reimbursement rates for SPED ex-- SPED expenditures slowly continued to decline. Again, we support Senator Wishart and her work on this bill and we encourage you to move LB324 forward. Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Thank you. Are there any questions for Mr. Moles? Senator Conrad.

**CONRAD:** Thank you so much for coming and thanks for this helpful background information. We have a lot of new members on the committee this year, including myself. And I was hoping that maybe you could provide not a treatise per se, but maybe just kind of a top line-- just a little bit of general information about what exactly is provided in some of these special services for kids with special needs. Do you have a sense? Is it a paraeducator? Is it tutoring? Is it--

**JACK MOLES:** Paras--

**CONRAD:** Who's to-- yeah.

**JACK MOLES:** --any of that, yes. A course teacher--

**CONRAD:** Yes,

**JACK MOLES:** --a certified teacher. In many cases, especially in small schools, you have students need to be-- receive their services outside of the school. For example, they might go to the, the ESU for services. You know, there, there is a Nebraska school for the--

**CONRAD:** Yes.

**JACK MOLES:** --I'm going to say visually handicapped--

**CONRAD:** Right.

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**JACK MOLES:** --because that's what it was where I grew up in Nebraska City.

**CONRAD:** Yeah.

**JACK MOLES:** So we have students that might get services there. So yeah, it's a wide variety of things.

**CONRAD:** Right, just dependent upon the individual needs of the student. And then just one final question. I think I know the answer, but I just want to be clear about it, Director Moles. So public schools in Nebraska, they don't have the ability or the luxury to turn away students with special needs, is that right?

**JACK MOLES:** No.

**CONRAD:** OK.

**JACK MOLES:** You're responsible for your students.

**CONRAD:** Very good. Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Any further questions? If not, I have one.

**JACK MOLES:** OK.

**MURMAN:** Would there be-- you know, if the state and federal government did reimburse special ed at 80 percent, I assume there'd be somewhat of an incentive for schools to identify more special ed students, which, you know, is good if they're truly special ed. What-- do you-- how much risk is there in that?

**JACK MOLES:** You know, I don't see that as being an issue-- and I hear that quite a bit-- for various reasons. One is you have to follow the law, you know, and a student has to be identified. The other thing is that to increase their, their cost, it wouldn't be a good investment by the school district. You know, for example, if you're going to get 80 percent reimbursement, would you spend \$1 to get 80 cents back? I don't think you'd do that unless you, you know, you have to do that. And the other thing is to raise your, your cost to get more reimbursement, you're going to probably identify kids more on the high-level need. And, and we're already identifying those kids. You know, that's an easy identification.

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**MURMAN:** Yeah, I assume many of the special ed classes have several students in them. So, you know, identifying another student to be in that class wouldn't add as much cost as, you know, if it was a separate program just for that student.

**JACK MOLES:** Yeah, I totally agree with that, yeah. You know, you might have a few incidental things, you know, you know, materials and stuff like that, but they're really-- they're pretty much covered already.

**MURMAN:** OK. Any other questions for Mr. Moles? OK, thank you very much.

**JACK MOLES:** Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Good morning.

**MIKE LUCAS:** Good morning.

**LINEHAN:** Good morning.

**MURMAN:** Go ahead.

**MIKE LUCAS:** My name is Mike Lucas, M-i-k-e L-u-c-a-s, And I'm the superintendent of Westside Community Schools in Omaha. Thank you to all of you for your work as leaders in the great state of Nebraska. While we may not always see eye to eye on every issue, we appreciate your willingness to serve as elected officials. It's an honor to be here today in support of Senator Wishart's LB324. We appreciate her hard work on this. This is my 20th year as a superintendent in Nebraska. I was lucky to serve the communities of Franklin and York and West Point before coming to Omaha Westside. Westside is a diverse school district celebrating our 75th school year. We are proud of our demographics, which we've shared on your handout. We have 540 teachers and a very supportive community. We also list out some of our general fund budget and tax request info just so you get a sense of what Westside Community Schools is about. We definitely support the increase in special ed reimbursement proposed in LB324. This has been a factor that school districts have been asking for for many, many years. Increasing the SPED reimbursement rate helps all school districts and communities of all sizes. Like many other districts of all different sizes, we have seen an increase in the number of students we serve that need special services. Our budget for special services increases greatly from year to year. As Jack just spoke to, we've seen almost a \$7 million increase in just the last nine school years. In closing, I'd like to put Westside Community Schools

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officially on record as being supportive of proposals that increase special ed reimbursement to Nebraska school districts. Thank you and I'm happy to take any questions you may have.

**MIKE LUCAS:** Thank you. Any questions for Mr. Lucas? Senator Linehan.

**LINEHAN:** Welcome, Dr. Lucas. Thank you for being here. Appreciate it very much. Is STANCE going to be-- where's STANCE?

**MIKE LUCAS:** I'm, I'm-- I used to be STANCE.

**LINEHAN:** I know you used to be STANCE.

**MIKE LUCAS:** Yeah, yeah, I--

**LINEHAN:** I thought maybe you still talk for them.

**MIKE LUCAS:** I wish I was still to be honest, but no, I'm GNSA now and I don't know if they're going to be here or not.

**LINEHAN:** OK. All right. All right, thank you for providing that.

**MURMAN:** Any other questions.

**WAYNE:** You know, off hand, your breakdown of your high school as far as by race and special ed?

**MIKE LUCAS:** Not, not specifically the high school, no, sir. I know that about 18 percent of our students, K-12, qualify for special ed services so I would assume the high school is going to be similar.

**WAYNE:** Do you have a racial breakdown of your special ed students?

**MIKE LUCAS:** I do not. I can get that for you.

**WAYNE:** Do you, do you normally-- like, so on your board meetings, do you normally walk through every year, at least once a year, your breakdown of your special eds by race?

**MIKE LUCAS:** Yes, sir.

**WAYNE:** So that, that number is readily available?

**MIKE LUCAS:** Yes, sir.



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**WAYNE:** I would like to have that information as far as your special ed, particularly your high school breakdown by, by race.

**MIKE LUCAS:** You bet.

**WAYNE:** Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Any other questions for Mr. Lucas? If not, thank you very much.

**MIKE LUCAS:** Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Hello.

**COLBY COASH:** Good morning. It's kind of weird to say morning at a committee hearing. My name's Colby Coash, C-o-l-b-y C-o-a-s-h. I represent the Nebraska Association of School Boards. I'm also testifying on behalf of Stand for Schools. I won't belabor what the previous two testifiers have said other than to say that the cost of special ed is an increasingly larger part of every school district's budget, and it can simply be a factor of maybe one child, one student with high needs that moves into a district that can really increase that percentage of the budget. As many of you know, because you've heard these are-- these testimony before on this bill Senator Wishart has brought and others have brought versions of, it's very difficult to get consensus on things that relate to education from, from a statewide perspective. That, that's been-- that's always a challenge. But this is an issue where there is consensus and there's, there's consensus on this issue because when you increase this reimbursement, it goes to all, all kids, regardless of the equalization status of the district where they go. And so that is the reason that we here is-- from a statewide perspective, do support this bill. I would note that last year, this-- in addition to this bill that Senator Wishart introduced, there was a resolution encouraging our federal delegation to meet its full obligation, as it had said it would do when they put this in place many decades ago. And this-- that resolution was fully supported by this committee. I was able to personally take that resolution on an advocacy trip to D.C. and personally hand that to our federal delegates. And it was very-- it was-- of course, they didn't do anything with it, but it was a powerful thing to say that this Legislature has spoken. They've looked at this issue and they encouraged and they wanted to see the state-- this-- the federal government make its-- make do in its obligation, as it said it would do. And so that resolution didn't have a time frame on it and so it's

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still there. And we're going to continue, from our perspective, to push the federal government to meet its obligations.

**MURMAN:** Thank--

**COLBY COASH:** That's all I have for you. Oh--

**MURMAN:** Didn't mean to interrupt. Thank you. Mr. Coash. Any other-- any questions for Mr. Coash? If not, thank you very much.

**COLBY COASH:** Thank you.

**JENNY FUNDUS:** Hello. Chairman Murman and the members of the Education Committee, my name is Jenny Fundus, J-e-n-n-y F-u-n-d-u-s, and I'm the director of special education within Lincoln Public Schools and I've spent the last 24 years serving and advocating for students with disabilities. Lincoln Public Schools serves over 7,000 students with disabilities. I'd like to begin by thanking Senator Wishart for keeping the focus on the needs of the increase of special education reimbursement. She introduced LB876 in 2018, LB346 in 2019, LB135 in 2021, and LB324 this year. All the focus is finding a sustainable method of raising reimbursement for special education students. Her unfaltering fold-- focus on this issue has been inevitable this year. The more that-- there's been more than one bill has been introduced with the goal of achieving 80 percent of reimbursement for special education. As equalized schools, Lincoln Public Schools and other schools in the Greater Nebraska Schools Association do not receive any additional reimbursement from the state as an accountable receipt so these additional dollars would not increase our state aid. The extra reimbursement is considered a resource for the district and reduces equalization aid two years after it's paid to our district as a special education reimbursement. But we do want to echo all the comments made today. This is one step further in serving our students that have the greatest needs within our school districts. Serving students with special education needs is outside of our control as public schools. We take students as they come to us and make sure that they're successful. Finally, we want to thank Senator Wishart for her efforts and I'm happy to answer any questions on behalf of Lincoln Public Schools.

**MURMAN:** Thank you, Ms. Fundus. Any questions? Senator Linehan.

**JENNY FUNDUS:** Yeah.

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**LINEHAN:** Thank you, Chairman Murman. So Lincoln Public Schools supports Senator Wishart's bill.

**JENNY FUNDUS:** Yes.

**LINEHAN:** Thank you very much.

**JENNY FUNDUS:** Yeah.

**MURMAN:** Any other questions?

**JENNY FUNDUS:** OK.

**MURMAN:** If not, thank you very much. Good morning.

**EDISON McDONALD:** Good morning. Hello. My name is Edison McDonald, E-d-i-s-o-n M-c-D-o-n-a-l-d, representing the Arc of Nebraska. We advocate for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. I want to echo the comments of previous testifiers about the benefits of this bill, but I also want to talk about our members and what they're seeing. In particular this year, we are really seeing a special education crisis. We are seeing increased use of restraint, seclusion, school pushout, all because we don't have proper staffing levels. In OPS, 50.2 percent of special education positions are vacant. And we are seeing our families are suffering because we do not have adequate staff. While this is significantly at the special education teacher level, we're also seeing this with paras and we're seeing that with other support staff. I know that there are a number of bills this year to really look at targeting that. I think what we've really focused on is especially saying that we need short-term solutions like incentive bonuses like Senator Linehan's bill, and we need long-term tools like this to go and really work on that long-term reform. Otherwise, our families are going to continue to suffer. We need to make sure that they have adequate supports and they have adequate staffing, especially in those small rural communities. And there are few bills that I think are as effective in supporting those rural special education programs as this. With that, I'll close. And if anyone has any questions, I'll open with that.

**MURMAN:** Thank you. Mr. McDonald. Any questions? Senator Linehan.

**LINEHAN:** Thank you, Chairman Murman. I'm not familiar with pushout.

**EDISON McDONALD:** A school pushout is when you have a student who, who has some issues and isn't performing well. Maybe they're acting out

during the day. And then the school says, well, we want them to-- we want-- they'll call their parent and ask their parent to come and pick them up and say, well, we don't want to actually suspend you so we're not going to put it on paperwork. Why don't you just take them home for the day? And so effectively, there are practices like that that can create that learning loss even though there isn't really a quality trackable record.

**LINEHAN:** Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Any other questions? I've got one.

**EDISON McDONALD:** Yeah.

**MURMAN:** You mentioned the workforce shortage in special ed. Of course that's true all across the board in--

**EDISON McDONALD:** It is.

**MURMAN:** --education and pretty much everywhere. I assume the pay would be a part of that. Is that pretty much a district-to-district decision on what's paid for special ed instructors or what can, what can we do from the state level--

**EDISON McDONALD:** Yeah--

**MURMAN:** --in another question.

**EDISON McDONALD:** Well and I think there-- and when it comes to pay, I'm not as much of an expert as some of the folks in here. But, you know, I think really what, what I've heard is that that overall pay level is really important. But also, you know, looking at those tools that we can work on to, to add those extra bonuses like Senator Linehan's LB385 that we'll hear later today that will provide those \$5,000 incentive bonuses is really significant. And I think what we've seen here in Nebraska with developmental disability service provider rates is that last year, we put a whole bunch of extra money into the system. And while it hasn't solved the issue, it's really kind of decreased the number of more extreme cases. And I think that this will have that same impact. And I think when we look at other states that have provided those \$5,000 to up to \$15,000 incentive bonuses, they've been able to cut their special education staffing shortages in half within a year. So I think that's really kind of why we're, we're looking down these types of avenues.

**MURMAN:** OK. Thank you. Any other questions? Thank you very much. Good morning.

**JEREMY EKELER:** Good morning. My name is Jeremy Ekeler. I'm with the Nebraska Catholic Conference, Jeremy is-- Jeremy Ekeler is spelled J-e-r-e-m-y and Ekeler is E-k-e-l-e-r. Chairman Murman and members of the Education Committee, the Nebraska Catholic Conference advocates for the public policy interests of the Catholic Church and advances the gospel of life through engaging, educating and empowering public officials, Catholic laity, and the general public. We're in support of Senator Wishart's LB324. We appreciate her bringing this bill to more appropriately fund special education in Nebraska. We support this bill because of its moral importance, the work of the church in serving those with disabilities, and the engagement of Catholic schools in serving students with disabilities. The Catholic Church and our government rightly align in the belief that all children, in virtue of their dignity as human beings, have an inalienable right to education adapted to their ability. Nebraskans should rally around supporting children with disabilities and the educators who serve them. I'd like to give some context for how Catholic schools engage in this and why LB324 is so important. As early as 1870, Catholic schools emb-- Nebraskan Catholic schools embraced serving children with disabilities. Prior to and during the time public schools were building their programs, school districts contracted with Catholic schools to provide the best care possible for school-- for children with disabilities. As an important aside, this history continues today, as a handful of Nebraska public school districts contract or work with Catholic schools and Catholic entities to serve their children with special needs. When we fast forward to 1975 and President Gerald Ford with the pivotal passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, which in 1990 was renamed to what we know it today as IDEA. This act committed special education funding to public schools. This was done as a commitment by the government to serve all children with disabilities regardless of their educational settings. And in many ways, we've seen tremendous growth. Since 1975, the U.S. has progressed from excluding nearly 1.8 million children with disabilities from public schools, which was the space of Catholic and Christian entities worked in as well as others, to providing services for more than 7.5 million total children with disabilities. This is great news. But to summarize, Catholic schools have a long history of serving, serving children with disabilities. We continue to do so and it is typically in partnership with public schools. But Catholic schools, whose special education population is 12 percent,

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cannot receive direct funding from the government, not through IDEA, not through Title I and not through state funding. As a result, Catholic schools fund their own special education programs and work in conjunction with local public schools who are legally obligated to serve those children. This is what makes LB324 and LB583 vital. Reimbursing at an 80 percent rate has an immediate impact for public schools, which is a common good, and we should all rally around that. And it also helps kids in Nebraska's 112 Catholic schools receive services through their partnerships, which are so beneficial, between Catholic schools and public school districts. On a personal note, as a former principal of a Catholic school, I loved our partnership with public school educators. It was really great to see Dr. Fundus here today and these teachers love being a part of our school. It's a common refrain I hear from many of our schools when I visit. However, I also hear how the special educators employed in Catholic schools and school districts are stretched beyond reason. I know this personally. My wife is an early childhood special educator. She's running all over the city helping. And three of our children require special education services. I've been on that side of the table. The need is outpacing our resources and staffing. So the two consistent realities that I see is that we must commit to appropriate funding and we must serve these children together. Thank you to Senator Wishart for bringing the bill. Providing adequate reimbursement is a vital step to, to serving these incredible children. With that, I'll kind of close up and take any questions you might have.

**MURMAN:** Thank you very much. Mr. Ekeler. Any questions? Senator Briese.

**BRIESE:** Thank you, Chairman Murman. Thank you for your testimony here today. You talked about partnering with public schools or Catholic schools do relative to SPED services, but you also talked about incurring SPED cost-- or the Catholic schools having to incur SPED costs themselves. What type of costs do the Catholic schools incur typically--

**JEREMY EKELER:** Sure.

**BRIESE:** --and what do they partner with with the public schools that perhaps do not cost anything?

**JEREMY EKELER:** There's a broad spectrum of what this looks like across the state. We've seen rural areas that are very depleted with staffing. And so what we see there is we see children in Catholic

schools actually traveling to or bussing to a school for some services and then coming back. We see other places with a little bit more robust staffing. So we'll see maybe a public school teacher in our building and partnering with us and working with us, even if it's just check-ins throughout the week. But to answer your question directly, our schools are-- and we've made-- sort of made a commitment to this class in particular recently. Because our special needs are rising, we're incurring a lot of staffing costs. We're seeing-- so we're hiring more folks, more paras, more special education teachers now. We actually had a couple hearings on this last year as well, as well as a lot of professional development because best practices are constantly changing. So it's kind of the same refrain that you would hear from the public schools, Senator.

**BRIESE:** OK. Thank you for that.

**MURMAN:** Any other questions from Mr. Ekeler? If not, thank you very much.

**JEREMY EKELER:** Thank you.

**SPIKE EICKHOLT:** Good morning--

**MURMAN:** Good morning.

**SPIKE EICKHOLT:** --Chair Murman and members of the committee. My name is Spike Eickholt, S-p-i-k-e E-i-c-k-h-o-l-t. I'm appearing on behalf of the Education Rights Counsel in support of LB324. I wanted to follow Mr. Ekeler because I don't know if I'm going to testify on the same side as he does this year on very many things. The Education Rights Counsel provides education, resources and representation to family and children in the educational system. Our vision is educational equity for every child. Our mission is to amplify the voices, voices of our most vulnerable children by removing legal barriers so that all children can stay in school and succeed. The Education Rights Counsel regularly works with families who do not have the resources to navigate the school system and who experience significant inequities, including denial of services, removal from schools and unnecessary referrals to the juvenile justice system. A focus of Education Rights Counsel is on special education support. We regularly see the need for increased special education services and special education funding. And if you heard some of the testifiers earlier today, it seems like the needs for special education services is increasing throughout the state. And we thank Senator Wishart for

introducing the bill. We thank the cosponsors who are on this committee, Senators Conrad, Senator Linehan and Senator Walz, for introducing this bill. And we encourage the committee to advance it in some form and I'll answer any questions if you have any.

**MURMAN:** Thank you. Any questions for Mr. Eickholt? If not, thank you very much.

**SPIKE EICKHOLT:** OK.

**MURMAN:** Any other proponents for LB324? Any opponents for LB324? Anyone want to testify in the neutral position for LB324? Good morning.

**DAVE WELSCH:** Good morning. My name is Dave Welsch, D-a-v-e W-e-l-s-c-h. I serve as the Milford Public Schools Board of Education President. I've been on that board for 24 years. I do support LB324. I thank Senator Wishart for bringing it forward. I'm partly testifying in a neutral position because I didn't plan on testifying so I was buying myself some more time this morning to make some notes, so. The main thing I want to point out this morning, you know, we've got a lot of bills that are coming before this committee and other committees to help increase funding for schools. And there's a lot of interactions here and I wanted to point some of those out. I think all of us in education agree that we need to increase bed reimbursement up to 80 percent. As I looked at the fiscal note this morning, I appreciated some of the notes on there that the, the estimated cost of this bill would actually be about 26 percent because, as was mentioned earlier by the young lady from LPS, as we receive those reimbursements, they're counted as a resource. Therefore, if you're an equalized school, it lowers your equalization aid. So it's pretty much a dollar-for-dollar washout. But right now, we only have 86 equalized schools so it's-- those are the only schools that would have that dollar-for-dollar exchange there. Governor Pillen plans to invest substantially in education this year, which is greatly appreciated by the education community. Senator Sanders introduced one of those bills, LB583, which wants to add \$1,500 per student and also increase that to 80 percent, but that increases outside of the TEEOSA formula. What that does, it allows equalized schools basically to double-dip for their SPED reimbursement. We'll get paid twice, once within our equalization aid and once with that SPED reimbursement coming outside of the formula. So I wanted to make sure that you are aware of that. So how do we leverage the dollars the Governor wants to invest in, in our schools? Well, I think initially, we need to create more equalized



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schools. Under the LB583, about \$1,500 per student comes out of our equalization aid. So instead of-- it actually lowers the number of equalized schools. We'll have 22 fewer equalized schools. I think that's going in the wrong direction. There's another bill, LB320 introduced by Senator Brandt, which lowers valuations within the formula, creating 91 more equalized schools for a total of 177 out of 244. Just 15 years ago, we had over 200 equalized schools in this state. And so we need to make corrections in valuations to restore that equalization aid to our public schools. If that were to happen, if we created 177 equalized schools or somewhere in that ballpark, the cost of 80 percent SPED reimbursement would be, like, \$7 million. Now you think, well, how can that be? I mean, this fiscal note says in the second year, it's \$158 million. The reason is because most of that funding for SPED reimbursement is in equalization aid. So if you can increase the equalized schools in the state, then the cost to reach 80 percent SPED reimbursement is not much of a big-- not much more of a step. So I think the key to funding schools in our, our state is to increase the number of equalized schools. And that was the intent back in 1990 when TEEOSA was created. So I just wanted to kind of bring that to your forefront this morning. So I'd be happy to work with any of you to see if we can't combine some bills that are before you to create more equalized schools and to benefit stools-- schools, students and property owners across the state. Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Welsch. Any questions? Senator Linehan.

**LINEHAN:** Thank you, Chairman Murman. But you are in support of Senator Wishart's bill?

**DAVE WELSCH:** Yes.

**LINEHAN:** OK, thank you.

**MURMAN:** Any other questions? If not, thank you very much.

**DAVE WELSCH:** Thank you very much.

**MURMAN:** Any other neutral testifiers for LB324? If not, that will close the hearing on LB324 and we will open the hearing on-- or excuse me. We have four proponents on the hearing record, zero opponents and zero neutral. And proponents are Mark Adler, John Skretta, Rachel Siffring, Deborah Frison. And we will now close that hearing and open the hearing on LB413, Senator Blood. Good morning.

**BLOOD:** Good morning to you, Chairman Murman and the members of the Education Committee. My name is Senator Carol Blood. That is spelled C-a-r-o-l B-l-o-o-d and I currently represent District 3, which is the western half of Bellevue and southeastern Papillion, Nebraska. Thank you for the opportunity to bring forward LB413 regarding the Teacher Mobility Compact. So since we have some new senators, I'm going to walk through the history. The Council of State Governments, the CSG, continues to partner with the Department of Defense, the DOD, on interstate compacts and support of our military families. Needless to say, these compacts benefit all licensed professionals in each combat sector as well, and they are always met with great enthusiasm by members of the sector's community. Nebraska has successfully passed compacts for physical therapists, psychologists, nurses, occupational therapists, audiology and speech-language pathology, EMS, doctors and more. Not only do these compacts remove licensure hurdles, they expanded telehealth options as well. We have been a leader as part of our attempt to be a military-friendly state and one that continues to move hurdles to employment. As always, CSG has worked with organizations in education for this compact, such as the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification, to support the mobility of licensed teachers through the development of this interstate compact, as well as representatives who work in education across the United States, including Nebraska. This compact, as all interstate compacts, will create reciprocity among participant states and reduce the barriers to license portability and employment. Only ten states need to pass this legislation in order for it to take effect. As many of you know, military families frequently move every two to three years. This is especially burdensome for spouses whose careers involve some sort of licensing. The process can be long, costly and stressful. This is especially true when you consider that part of moving is a new home, new schools, new healthcare, healthcare providers, learning your way around a community and more. We need to continue to make it easier for these trained and educated workers to hit the ground running. Reciprocity always seems like the best solution, but it really doesn't help these individuals when they're moving from state to state with different rules. With interstate compacts, they can move between member states with ease. For the past decade, military spouses have experienced an unwavering unemployment rate of 22 percent, making it one of the highest unemployed demographics in the United States. According to new research, their spouse's military service is also negatively affecting their ability to maximize employer-sponsored retirement benefits, build their long-term financial futures, and find careers that offer competitive

salaries equivalent to their professional experiences and/or education levels. Teachers within this compact will not have to go through the arduous process of obtaining a new license if they move to a compact member state. The compacts allow teachers to a wider choice of districts and schools that fit the career and experience level, and thus allow schools a wider pool of talent to hire for their students. To be eligible, they need only to hold a license in a compact member state to be granted an equivalent license in another compact member state. A teacher with a valid unencumbered license is eligible to use the compact if they hold a bachelor's degree, have completed all requirements of the state-approved program for a teacher's license and are willing to undergo a criminal background check in the receiving state in accordance with the laws and regulations of that receiving state. Regulators within the ITMC also are unburdened with extra work of re-examinations and creating new licenses within the compact. Member states share data and profiles on teachers that can make qualification determination much easier. Also, public safety is benefited in granting licenses and vetting teachers for criminal wrongdoing between member states of the compact through this shared data. So all states benefit from belonging to the ITMC and states that have struggled attracting teachers in the past can benefit from an expanded pool of candidates. This is relevant for both urban and rural parts of Nebraska that have recently struggled to staff schools with qualified teachers. Teachers moving to Nebraska can also be fast-tracked into classrooms, not having to go through the process of obtaining a new license or examination and can make an impact on our students immediately. Just being a member of the compact can allow Nebraska to collaborate and coordinate with other member states on discipline and licensing requirements-- excuse me-- which can only improve in Nebraska with shared knowledge. It allows our border communities the ability to recruit for teachers across state lines with ease. Becoming a member of this compact is a no-brainer for Nebraska. It can only improve the quality of teaching and education within our state. Nebraska teachers who have to move often due to a family member's job or have spouses of the military who move often will have their lives made easier with this contact and allow them to move freely within the compact states to educate our children in a more immediate time frame. Interstate compacts continue to prove themselves beneficial across the United States, which is why licensed professionals continue to work with CSG on these compacts to benefit their members and expand the ease of licensure in a variety of careers. Which should give you a hint that there are several more coming down the pike next, next year. So I thank you for your time

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today and consideration for LB413. I think I have some testifiers behind me that might be able to answer some of your additional questions. Because I know you guys are very busy, you may want to wait for that testimony, but I am happy to answer any questions if you choose to ask me now.

**MURMAN:** Thank you, Senator Blood. Any questions at this time? Senator Albrecht.

**ALBRECHT:** Thank you, Chairman Murman, and thanks for bringing the bill, Senator Blood. Can you tell me, are there any other states at this moment that have signed onto something like this?

**BLOOD:** So the way interstate compacts work is CSG and the DOD work together and then once everybody's met together and there's been a lot of lawyers involved, they release the compacts. This compact was literally released a week before I dropped it. And so we will hopefully be one of the first ten that do it. Usually there's seven states, but because they anticipate that this compact is going to be one of the more popular compacts, for some reason, they decided ten states would be more beneficial. So I don't know. I know that a lot of states have brought this forward this year and a lot more will do it next year because interstate compacts have been proven to be very beneficial, especially for our military spouses.

**ALBRECHT:** Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Any other questions? Senator Linehan.

**LINEHAN:** Thank you. Chairman Murman. Didn't you get a bill passed that helped with military spouses?

**BLOOD:** I've had more interstate compacts pass than any policymaker in the whole United States, so lots of them.

**LINEHAN:** But wasn't there-- I remember-- I thought there was--

**BLOOD:** There was a reciprocity one that I believe was Mr.-- or Senator Murman's.

**SANDERS:** That was mine.

**BLOOD:** Is that the one you're thinking of?

**SANDERS:** Teachers reciprocity for military spouses.

**BLOOD:** So the difference between reciprocity and compacts is that with reciprocity, it's great. They can come and work in our state, but if they are a military spouse and they're moving every two to three years and they go to a state that does not have reciprocity, they're screwed.

**LINEHAN:** I see. OK All right, thank you. Thank you very much for bringing the bill.

**MURMAN:** Any other questions?

**BLOOD:** How weird is it that we have this memory of all these bills?

**MURMAN:** If not, thank you very much, Senator Blood. Any testifiers in the-- for propon-- proponents for LB413? Good morning.

**BEN WELSCH:** Good morning. Thank you, Chairman Murman, members of the Education Committee. My name is Ben Welsch, B-e-n W-e-l-s-c-h. Thank you, Senator Blood, for introducing LB413. As an educator and currently a practicing teaching fellow, I'm here to speak in support of LB413 on behalf of the Nebraska State Education Association. As written, the NSEA supports LB413, the Interstate Teacher Mobility Compact. In passing LB413, Nebraska would be able to submit compact-eligible teaching licenses. To be eligible, a license must require a bachelor's degree and completion of a state-approved program for teacher licensure. A license is also eligible under the compact if it is unencumbered, meaning not restricted, probationary, provisional substitute or temporary. It is important that Nebraska remains fully in control of our teacher licensure process, and the compact will not close any of the existing pathways that we currently use. Teachers holding a compact-eligible license in another member state can apply for our license in our state and receive the closest equivalent license without submitting additional materials, taking state-specific exams or completing additional coursework. The compact also takes into consideration our career and technical education teachers and their licenses, as often those do not require a bachelor's degree. This compact allows those CTE licenses to be considered transferable even without the bachelor's degree requirement. As the teacher shortage has created so many vacancies across our state, it is imperative that we find ways to add tools to our state licensing authority to more efficiently license out-of-state teachers and get them into the classroom. Passing LB413 would lower the existing barriers to certification and give compact member states teachers who move into our state a chance to continue their teaching careers immediately to

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support our Nebraska schools and students. We ask the Education Committee to advance this bill.

**MURMAN:** Thank you. Any questions for Mr. Welsch? Senator Briese.

**BRIESE:** Thank you, Chairman Murman. Thank you for your testimony here today. But a compact like this could also facilitate the outmigration of teachers as well, correct?

**BEN WELSCH:** I guess theoretical. Well again, because the compact is these teach-- you know, these states coming together. And so I guess the, the advantage is, is that we are bringing states together to be able to-- I mean, I guess you could say share, but in a case, it's-- it makes it very easy for us to get teachers in where maybe we haven't in the past. So I see it as a way in rather than a way out.

**BRIESE:** Sure. But, but if Colorado joins and Missouri joins, it would help enable folks in this state move there and--

**BEN WELSCH:** Yeah, so hopefully if people are moving to our Offutt Air Force base and they're bringing their spouse with them, then that should help us in, in our education field.

**BRIESE:** Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Any other questions for Mr. Welsch? Senator Conrad.

**CONRAD:** Thank you so much. I was just thinking about this at the tail end of your testimony and if you have any thoughts about it. But, you know, as we're in an increasing mobile society and some lessons carried forward from the pandemic showed that there can be some opportunities or benefits with remote instruction and things of that nature-- now, I don't think we can replicate what happens in a classroom online fully, particularly at the lower levels. But do you have any sense about how this might interplay with the ability of folks in Nebraska or in other states to just kind of help meet those workforce needs across state lines or with remote instruction? Or does it come into play with that at all or not so much? I might be missing the mark there, but I was just thinking about that.

**BEN WELSCH:** Well, again, the basis of this, this compact is to get people the certificate.

**CONRAD:** Yeah.

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**BEN WELSCH:** So depending on how these teachers are being used, it's all up to the, the districts, you know, that we have. And so I guess whether, you know, they're bringing somebody in to help with online learning, you know, it could be an advantage. But again, our goal is to just make sure that we have as many teachers in Nebraska as possible and this is--

**CONRAD:** Right.

**BEN WELSCH:** --a way that, that we can do that.

**CONRAD:** Appreciate that. Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Any other questions? Thank you very much. Any other proponents?

**JACK MOLES:** Good morning again.

**MURMAN:** Welcome back.

**JACK MOLES:** Again, my name is Jack Moles. That's J-a-c-k M-o-l-e-s, the executive director of the Nebraska Rural Community Schools Association. And on behalf of NRCSA, I'd like to voice our support for LB413. And we appreciate Senator Blood for looking at ways in which the teacher shortage issue can be addressed. Schools are finding it harder and harder to fill positions. Two examples of that, each year I do district meetings throughout the state with our members and one of the things I, I always ask is how many of you had a hard time or how many did not fill a position this year? And usually, I'll have several hands go up and then I'll say, how many did not fill, fill a position with a-- somebody certified in their area? And usually, it's three-fourths of the hands will go up. We're having a harder and harder time all the time. The other thing is we have a Nebraska-- or a rural teachers committee that we put together to try to work on this issue. And we actually split it up into three subcommittees because we have so many issues going on. But, but one of the comments I, I heard several times from some of the members of that committee was how hard it is to, to get a teacher from another state to meet certification. And, you know, I don't know the ins and outs of what they were dealing with, but they're having a hard time getting somebody across the border. And that's from superintendents who are closer to the borders, of course. Many times, this person is a veteran teacher with successful teacher experiences in their state where, where they would be coming from. But for some reason, they're having a hard time

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getting that certification for Nebraska. So I think this is a good idea, something to really look into. I don't see it as placing any undue restrictions on the state or the Department of Ed or individual school districts. So again, we do appreciate Senator Blood bringing this forward and helping-- trying to help with working on the teacher shortage that we're seeing. Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Moles. Any other-- any questions for, for him? If not, thank you very much.

**JACK MOLES:** Thank you.

**MURMAN:** And the other proponents for LB413? Hello.

**DUNIXI GUERECA:** Good morning. Thank you, Chair Murman, members of the Education Committee. My name is Dunixi Guereca. That's D-u-n-i-x-i G-u-e-r-e-c-a and I'm the executive director of Stand for Schools, a nonprofit dedicated to advancing public education here in Nebraska. Stand for School supports LB413. Research tells us that schools with consistent teacher shortages are more likely to have lower levels of student achievement and positive-- and less-positive student outcomes overall. As students, educators, administrators still work to make up in the delay of-- in learning caused by COVID-19, their jobs are not made any easier by a lack of adequate school staff. Between March and May of 2020, the number of people employed by public schools in the United States dropped from almost 8.1 million to 7.3 million. With the highly competitive market that schools seem to have seen since 2020, we know that getting teachers into the classrooms is still a struggle. As such, Stand for Schools supports the efforts of Senator Blood and LB413. Adopting the Interstate Teaching Mobility Compact will eliminate barriers in teaching licensure for mobile teachers and particularly military spouses continuing the teaching careers after a change of station. The compact will not alter Nebraska's ability to regulate the teaching profession or teacher licensures, ensuring teachers in Nebraska maintain the high quality we have come to expect. For those reasons, we urge you to move LB413 out of committee and I'm happy to take any questions.

**MURMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Guereca. Any questions for, for him? If not, thank you very much.

**DUNIXI GUERECA:** Thank you, Chair.



**MURMAN:** Any other proponents for LB413? Any opponents for LB413? Anyone want to testify in the neutral position for LB413? Senator Blood, you're welcome to close. And while she's coming up, we have three proponents, zero opponents and zero neutral. The proponents are James Shuey, Jason Buckingham and Deborah Frison.

**BLOOD:** Thank you, Chair. So in closing, I want to answer a few of the questions. So Senator Briese, based on the research that I've done and the many contacts that we've had passed here in Nebraska, there has not been any outmigration in any of the data that I've seen. What I have seen are things like-- I'll use the psychologist compact as a, as an example. It used to be that if you were a psychologist in Nebraska and your patient was on vacation in Florida, because you didn't have a license to practice in Florida, if that person were to have a mental health crisis and you were to counsel them on the for-- the, the phone, you were violating your licensure and you could get in trouble for that. Now, say Florida belongs, which I think they do now, to the interstate compact. If someone were to have a mental health crisis in one of those states where you don't hold a license, you can help that person with their mental health crisis as opposed to saying, you know, let me help you find somebody there to help you. So what it's done is made the professions stronger. It's also allowed people in the rural areas to seek employment, not outmigration, but they can't find jobs in their end of the state. Not-- and I'm talking about Nebraska, but some of the more rural areas-- unless they're willing to drive 200, 300 miles away. But they can find maybe in this case, a school in Council Bluffs, a school in Kansas, where they can get a job and then produce income and spend their tax dollars in Nebraska, which is kind of great. So we're not seeing outmigration. What we're seeing is people having more job opportunities and I think that that's good for all Nebraskans. And then again, Senator Crawford and I worked a couple of years ago on trying to eliminate certain hurdles for our military spouses when it came to the teaching profession. And we made a little inroads, but it just-- it didn't work as well as it could work. And so interstate compacts continue to serve our members well that belong to those compacts. And the shared database has proven to be very powerful because it protects our children, it protects consumers, it protects the people who hire these folks. Because if you're a ne'er-do-well and you do something that you are disciplined for in, in another state that shares the contact information with us, we'll know that when you come to Nebraska because-- and we know that there are professions that people tend to move from state to state when they do bad things in hopes that they can stay under the radar. And so that's one of the

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things I like about the compacts as well. And if you go online and you go to the CSG-- and I encourage you to do that, so-- and look at the map and the different compacts, you'll see that they're really, really popular for a reason. It's because they work. But mostly, do you really think the DOD would invest all that money and all that time and all those compacts if they didn't? I don't. So I strongly encourage you to please vote this out. It would be nice, Senator Albrecht, if we could actually be a leader as far as being first in line, second in line, as opposed to always being next to the last in line. Because it's not like this is something new and we have something that we have to figure out, like, how does this work? Will it work? We already know the answers to those things. And if we can get those ten states, we can get a compact. And it's going to take at least two years, if not three, because everybody is now rushing to bring these bills forward because it just-- they just happened. And next year, it'll be social workers and dentists and dental hygienists, just a heads-up.

**MURMAN:** Thank you, Senator Blood. Any questions? Senator Conrad.

**CONRAD:** Thank you so much, Chair. Senator Blood, thanks for your longstanding leadership on behalf of our military families and veterans. I know that's really important to your district and the state as a whole. And, you know, I really see this as one strategy within a broader toolbox.

**BLOOD:** Um-hum.

**CONRAD:** Senator Briese has some really smart legislation on occupational licensure. There's reciprocity kind of measures that have made their way through the body in the past and then there's compacts. And the neat thing is I think all of these pieces kind of work together to help address some of our state's top challenges, which, which is workforce, whether that's in the schools or, or much more broadly.

**BLOOD:** Right.

**CONRAD:** So thank you for presenting this as, as one option for us to consider. And I'd like to kind of think about it as it may relate to some of those other pieces as well, but just wanted to say thanks.

**BLOOD:** I, I appreciate that, Senator Conrad. And I think that's really important, especially since we do have some competitive senators. This isn't an either/or thing. We can all complement each other's

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legislation. And again, reciprocity deals are fantastic when people are going to be here in Nebraska, but it doesn't help them when they move to another state. And I think of our military spouses. So I don't know why we can't complement each other and work together. It's a big puzzle trying to get teachers here in Nebraska. It's huge and not one bill is going to fix it. So I think we have to be flexible enough to know that there has to be multiple options and we have to remember that our children come first and that, that we're safe about it.

**CONRAD:** Yes, right.

**BLOOD:** And that it's something that has a proven track record, which this does. I will also point out that I handed out an amendment that I do in all the compacts. I always think that liability is an important issue. We always get permission from the, the compact groups to do this. And we have done this on every single bill and it's just basically a one-line amendment that makes sure that we are protected from any liability, unnecessarily liability--

**MURMAN:** Any other questions?

**BLOOD:** --which is why we never have opponents come in on our bills.

**MURMAN:** Any other questions for Senator Blood? Senator Briese.

**BRIESE:** Thank you, Chairman Murman. Thank you again for bringing this, Senator Blood. But has anyone tried to assess the teaching environment in our neighboring states versus Nebraska in terms of salaries and classroom environment and job satisfaction, anything of that sort?

**BLOOD:** Not for the compacts because, again, there's not been any migration-- outmigration issues on any of the compacts--

**BRIESE:** OK.

**BLOOD:** --so.

**BRIESE:** It seems-- the question for me is does this generate a net gain in our potential pool of classroom teachers or does it have potential to generate a net loss, but you're confident it's going to--

**BLOOD:** I'm confident based on all the other compacts that we've done.

**BRIESE:** OK. Very good.

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**BLOOD:** It's been a net gain for us. And I think that if you talk to people within those industries, they'll tell you the exact same thing.

**BRIESE:** OK. Thank you.

**BLOOD:** But that's a good question and one I would be really concerned with, with our teacher shortage, so. But if I felt that there is any fear of that, I wouldn't touch them-- I wouldn't touch any interstate compact. There's been some interstate compacts, by the way, I've turned down, Senator Briese, because I knew they wouldn't be good for Nebraska.

**BRIESE:** Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Any other questions for Senator Blood? If not, thank you very much, Senator Blood.

**BLOOD:** Thank you, Chair.

**MURMAN:** And that will, that will close the hearing on LB413 and our hearings for this morning, but we will stay for an Executive Session.

**MURMAN:** [RECORDER MALFUNCTION] Education Committee public hearing. My name is Dave Murman. I'm from Glenvil, Nebraska. I represent 38th District and that is eight counties along the southern border in the middle part of the state. I serve as Chair of the committee. The committee will take up the bills in the order posted outside of the hearing room. This list will be updated after each hearing to identify which bill is currently being heard. Our hearing today is your public part of the legislative process. This is your opportunity to express your position on the proposed legislation before us today. We do ask that you limit or eliminate handouts. This is important to note. If you are unable to attend a public hearing and would like your position stated for the record, you must submit your position and any comments using the Legislature's online database by 12 p.m. the day prior to the hearing. Letters emailed to a senator or staff member will not be a part of the permanent record. You must use the online database in order to become part of the permanent record. To better facilitate today's hearing, I ask that you abide by the following procedures. Please turn off cell phones and other electronic devices. The order of testimony is introducer, proponents and opponents, neutral and closing remarks. If you will be testifying, please complete the green form and hand it to the committee clerk when you come up to testify. If you have written materials that you would like distributed to the

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committee, please hand them to the page to distribute. We need 11 copies for all committee members and staff. If you need additional copies, please ask the page to make copies for you now. When you begin to testify, please state and spell your name for the record. Please be concise. It is my request that you limit your testimony to four minutes. If necessary, we will use the light system. Green is three minutes, yellow will come on when one minute remains, and when it's red, please wrap up your comments. If there are a lot of people wishing to testify, we will use a three-minute testimony limit. If your remarks were reflected in previous testimony or if you would like your position to be known but do not wish to testify, please sign the white form at the back of the room and it will be included in the official record. Please speak directly into the microphone so our transcribers are able to hear your testimony clearly. I'd like to introduce the committee staff. To my immediate right is research analyst, Jack Spray. To my right at the end of the table is--

**KENNEDY RITTSCHER:** Kennedy.

**MURMAN:** Oh. Kennedy. Sorry, we've got, Kennedy is filling in. We appreciate that. Now, I'd like to introduce the committee members with us today. I'll have them introduce themselves beginning at my far right.

**SANDERS:** Rita Sanders, represent District 45, which is the Bellevue/Offutt community.

**ALBRECHT:** Senator Joni Albrecht, District 17, Wayne, Thurston, Dakota, and a portion of Dixon County.

**WALZ:** Lynne Walz, Legislative District 15, which is Dodge County and Valley.

**WAYNE:** Justin Wayne, District 13. I'm here.

**CONRAD:** Good afternoon, Danielle Conrad, north Lincoln.

**MURMAN:** And our pages with us today. I'll have them stand up and introduce themselves and tell us where they're going in school and what they're studying. First, we have Payton Coulter and then, Trent Kadavy.

**PAYTON COULTER:** I'm currently a INAUDIBLE) at UNL. My major is business and law.

**TRENT KADAVY:** I'm studying political science over at UNL.

**MURMAN:** Thank you. Please remember that senators may come and go during our hearing as they may have bills to introduce in other committees. Refrain from applause or other indications of support or opposition. For our audience, the microphones in the room are not for amplification, but for recording purposes only. Lastly, we use electronic devices to distribute information. Therefore, you may see committee members referencing information on their electronic devices. Be assured that your presence here today and your testimony are important to us and are critical to our state government. And first of all, today we will open with LB519, Senator Walz.

**WALZ:** Thank you. Good afternoon, Chairman Murman and committee members. My name is Lynne Walz, L-y-n-n-e W-a-l-z, and I represent Legislative District 15, which is Dodge County and Valley. I'm here to introduce LB519, which is a bill that aims to help address the teacher shortage, teacher workforce shortage in Nebraska. As we're all aware, the pandemic has put a strain on teachers, causing many positions to become vacant throughout our state. In December of 2022, the Nebraska Department of Education released the Teacher Vacancy Survey report. The survey was open to all 436 school districts and systems across the state, and 402 of those school districts completed the survey. Of the 402 districts and systems, 196 reported unfilled positions with an overall 768 positions unfilled. That includes 117 positions in the elementary education, 143 in special education, and 143 in special education. When asked why these positions remain unfilled, nearly half responded that there were no applicants. The survey received comments from 156 different districts and systems with over half referencing that the pool of applicants continues to get smaller with less qualified candidates. LB519 is a continuation of the work that the Education Committee did last year with LB1218. I like to call this bill barriers to entry in teaching because many of the factors the bill addresses can cause individuals to not enter the profession or continue working in it. The bill has four major sections which are covering certification fees, providing retention payments, increasing the Attracting Excellence to Teaching Program and creating the Student Teaching Assistance Act. So to start, LB519 requires the Department of Education to pay for certification fees in order to tackle one of the financial barriers to becoming a teacher. The certificates would be covered in-- the certificate-- certificates being covered include the initial teaching certificate, standing teaching certificate-- standard teaching certificate-- You can tell I don't have my glasses on right now-- professional certificate and military certificate. The cost of

these certificates can be a financial burden on teachers that impacts their personal budgets. It is my understanding that we're also waiving the cost for recertification as well. These fees could be a factor in individuals deciding if they want to continue in the teaching profession. LB519 also increases the Attracting Excellence to Teaching Program. The intention of this program is to retain students and graduates as teachers in the Nebraska schools and to help more, help guide more teachers to low-income or rural areas. This is intended to help future, future teachers make their education more affordable. However, with the increased cost of living, it seems appropriate to increase the loan amount, especially since the last time this was increased was 14 years ago. Under this program, there is a higher loan forgiveness for teachers in school districts classified as very sparse. In a community eligibility provision school, in a school building in which has 40 percent of the formula, in which 40 percent of the formula students are poverty students or teachers in an accredited or approved private school in which at least 40 percent of the enrolled students are qualified for free lunches. The old payments would be forgiven at \$10,000 per year, as opposed to the \$6,000. For teachers in districts that are not considered any of the above, we're increasing the forgiveness from \$3,000 to \$5,000 per year. The bill also provides retention payments to all public and nonpublic school staff. The staff included in this would be teachers, custodial and food service staff, bus drivers, etcetera, and does not include administration. These payments are a way to ensure that the staff who keep our education system running continue to serve our students and feel as though their efforts are being recognized. The Nebraska Department of Education will provide public school districts with appropriate dollars for the level of staff employed. Nonpublic school staff may apply to the Department of Education in order to receive the retention payment because state dollars can't be directly given to private schools. The bill appropriates \$35 million to evenly distribute dollars throughout the state. I also want to note in this section, that in this section, this is constitutional. Oh, sorry, read that part, sorry. Finally, LB519 creates a Student Teaching Assistance Act which administers loans of up to \$8,500 per year for student teachers. The loan will be fully forgiven for teachers that teach in the state of Nebraska over the course of four years. If the borrower teaches full time in a school district that is defined as very sparse or with a student population of at least 40 percent of students in poverty, the loan will be forgiven over two years. Oftentimes, student teachers are not paid for their time and may be working a second job. That second job takes a lot of energy and time away from this valuable

part of learning how to become a teacher. This is where students receive hands-on experience and prepare for what it's like to actually run a classroom. This loan helps them focus on their future career while encouraging them to continue working in the state of Nebraska. I also handed out an amendment that does a number of things. First, for the retention payment portion of the bill we're using Senator Blood's LB696 from last year, which is why there's a portion in there based, basing retention payments off of a census data. With the amendment we're moving, we are removing that piece because I believe that every teacher, regardless of population density, should receive the same amount of dollars. Two, on page 12, Section 12(2), we're adding the word "public" so that it reads: Eligible institution means public and nonpro, not-for-profit college or university. It was not our intention to leave out the university. This was just an oversight that happened during the drafting process. And on page 14, we are removing the word "public" with reference to committing to teach in an approved or credit, or accredited school. Again, this was just a mistake during the drafting process. This amendment also cleans up references to five consecutive years in regards to student teaching and makes it clear that this is based on semesters, not years. Finally, there's one more change in Section 14(1)(b). When the bill is listing out the different requirements for the borrower, there was a concern, there was a concern that the word "and" on line 20 might imply that the student has to be in graduate school. So we're changing that word to from, we're changing the word "and" to the word "or". These all, these are all changes that my office has been working on with Omaha Public Schools, the Nebraska state colleges, and the Catholic Conference. Again, these were just technical issues with writing the legislation, but does not really change the substance of the bill. I understand that there are some other bills that are being introduced this year that address the teacher recruitment and retention. LB519 is intended to be a piece in the puzzle for solving our state's teacher shortage issue, and all the factors this bill addresses could help a person decide if they will pursue a career in teaching. We have many smart, skilled and prepared students in the state of Nebraska who want to be a part of the solution. We just need them to get it, we just need to give them the tools to succeed. And with that, I would be happy to answer any questions.

**MURMAN:** Thank you, Senator Walz. Do we have any questions for Senator Walz, this time? OK. If not, we'll move on to proponents for LB519. Good afternoon.



**TIM ROYERS:** Good afternoon. Yeah, good afternoon, members of the Education Committee. My name is Tim, T-i-m, Royers, R-o-y-e-r-s. I'm the president of the Millard Education Association, and I'm here today speaking on behalf of the Nebraska State Education Association in support of LB519. There are four particular elements of this bill that we strongly support and want to highlight to the members of this committee today. First, we applaud Senator Walz for including provisions that will eliminate the fees associated with certification. This is an unnecessary cost burden that is placed on a profession that is widely recognized to be underpaid. While the amounts may seem insignificant to some, for others they could absolutely be difference makers. For the past several years, my local association has partnered with the Millard Public Schools Foundation to provide crisis funding for staff members that are in emergency financial need. And I can tell you from reviewing dozens and dozens of applications from staff members who are in dire financial straits, that a one-time expense of \$75 can absolutely be a difference maker for families. Second, we very much welcome efforts to provide for retention funding for educators. We are especially supportive of the bill's language recognizing that the workforce shortage issue is not limited exclusively to teachers, but includes other school district employees as well, particularly paraprofessionals. Third, we are excited about the recognition that we need to compensate our student teachers and that it should be a state obligation to support student teachers, not a school district obligation. Most people do not realize the significant financial burden student teaching places on those individuals. Not only are student teachers generally not paid for their semester of full-time work, they are actually paying thousands of dollars in quote unquote, tuition, to the university at the same time. When I student taught, for example, I had to move back home to cut down on expenses. And even without having to pay for any rent, I was working an average of 16 hours a day during my student teaching because I'd be at school at 7:30 to teach, and then after school I'd go take tickets, run the scoreboard, that kind of stuff at school, and then I'd drive down the road to go work my third job, which was a night shift at Hollywood Video, which I'm kind of aging myself with the Hollywood Video reference, but here we are. Providing student teachers with \$8,500 will allow them to focus exclusively on their student teaching experience so they can learn and grow as much as possible to set themselves and their students up for a successful student teaching experience and to make sure that their first year as a certified teacher in the classroom is also successful. Fourth and finally, the other critical component of the Student Teaching Assistance Act

portion of LB519 is that it provides that \$8,500 is a forgivable loan that's contingent on them staying and working in Nebraska for a number of years, which is already referenced is variable depending on the school that they're at. This provision is a huge win, not just for our students and our schools, but also for our entire state, because it will serve as a critical workforce retention component. This bill lays out several programs that have the potential to be fundamental game changers for education here in Nebraska. I strongly encourage you to support LB519 and I thank you for your time and consideration.

**MURMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Royers. Do we have any questions for Mr. Royers? If not, thank you very much.

**TIM ROYERS:** Thank you very much.

**MURMAN:** Other proponents.

**CHERYL LOGAN:** Good afternoon, Chairman Murman and members of the Education Committee. My name is Dr. Cheryl Logan, C-h-e-r-y-l, Logan, L-o-g-a-n, and I'm here on behalf of Omaha Public Schools in support of LB519. We would like to thank Senator Walz for introducing this bill and for her continued support of teachers in Nebraska. The shortage of prospective teachers has become increasingly, increasingly challenging, not only for school districts like the Omaha Public Schools, but for school districts statewide, rural and urban. LB519 would support, would provide support for young men and women entering the teacher, teaching profession by removing financial barriers, which make it difficult for some students enrolled in teacher education programs as well, by eliminating fees for teaching certificates. The Student Teaching Assistant Act would create a loan forgiveness program for students during their student teaching semester. Many students struggle to balance their full-time student teaching responsibilities while also having a job to pay their bills, and this loan program could enable students to finish their education and enter the teaching workforce. I would be remiss if I didn't note that recognizing the time and financial pressures of student teaching, Omaha Public Schools was the first in our state to offer student teacher stipends in spring of 2022. The investment in emerging educators doubled interest in our school district among student teachers last fall, 40 of whom joined our school district full-time in January after graduating college. We appreciate the continued efforts of the Legislature to remove barriers and incentivize qualified individuals to enter the teaching profession, and we view LB519 as an additional important tool to encourage individuals to enter the teaching profession. Thank you

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again to Senator Walz and Education Committee for your efforts to address the teacher workforce shortage. I, too, returned home to live with my parents. I loved it. My father made dinner for me every night and I got to talk to my mom about my day. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

**MURMAN:** Thank you, Dr. Logan. Senator Joni Albrecht.

**ALBRECHT:** Thank you for being here. What type of an incentive did you give to the 40 students that, or the teachers that decided to come on board with you in January? What was the number?

**CHERYL LOGAN:** Well, the, the, so the, the student teaching stipend is \$9,000. That number was determined by what we pay a paraprofessional. And so as student, student teachers do the full-time work as they transition from, I would say to, from student to master and master to student, in terms of looking at, viewing, observing their cooperating teacher, and so they provide not just the support while they are teaching the whole class, but also they can pull small groups. And so we look at the paying student teachers as long overdue that they do the work of any intern, an engineering intern, or an architectural student who may be an intern, similarly, who is also in college.

**ALBRECHT:** And are they there for the whole year?

**CHERYL LOGAN:** So, yeah, they're here. So we, depending on how long they have. So some are only there for eight weeks and so they receive half the remuneration and then some are there a semester. And then we have some year-long student teachers who may be getting certificates in two areas. So we have, maybe have a student teacher who's going to get an elementary certificate and they're going to get a special education certificate and they do two semesters of student teaching. We don't have that many of those. We have 11 right now who are full-time. We currently have seven speech language pathologists right now who are doing their clinicals, student teaching in our, in our school district.

**ALBRECHT:** And I know we're trying to bring new teachers into the, to the system. Any pushback from those who have been there a while?

**CHERYL LOGAN:** Well, you know, there's always, I wish it had been available when I was in school. And so you do hear some of that and on the flips and, and at the same time, they also are very grateful that the student, the current student teachers have, have that opportunity.

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One thing I could tell you is that we have a lot of student teachers from Iowa right now. I have a friend who is a superintendent, interim superintendent in a large school district in Iowa, Irwin, and they called me to tell me about why they don't have student teachers, because they've all come to Nebraska.

**ALBRECHT:** Not all bad.

**CHERYL LOGAN:** Yeah. Yeah. No, it's not all bad. We'll take it.

**ALBRECHT:** Well, thank you for being here.

**CHERYL LOGAN:** You bet. Thank you so much for having me.

**MURMAN:** Senator Wayne.

**WAYNE:** Thank you. Talking about teaching and, there he is, inside OPS, do you have the ability to move teachers kind of where they need to go to fill?

**CHERYL LOGAN:** We, first of all, thank you for asking. The, we have the ability to, obviously, we can place teachers where we can place them, but we also have a negotiated agreement which provides teachers with an opportunity to transfer and/or to not be transferred. So we do have, we do have the opportunity that within the-- within our negotiated agreement.

**WAYNE:** Within OPS right now, how many teacher positions, roughly, I don't expect you to know the exact number if one was filled today or not, but like how many roughly--

**CHERYL LOGAN:** What I'll say to, how many teaching positions are open, I would probably say, so we did some creative things with our, to move some things around. We're probably, I would be comfortable saying 300.

**WAYNE:** And of those 300, are they--

**CHERYL LOGAN:** A lion's share, a lion's share in special education.

**WAYNE:** Special education. I don't know how else to describe it unless you're in Omaha, are they more west Omaha schools that are missed, or filling, do you have a hard time filling position or east Omaha schools?

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**CHERYL LOGAN:** Oh, I knew where you were going. I was going to go there myself so I appreciate it. There are, I mean, it is more difficult to fill positions in schools that have higher needs which, you know, the students present more, more challenges that they bring mostly from home. But we, that is a, that is a perennial issue.

**WAYNE:** So out of the 300, like how many, who want to go, we'll do 90th Street as the breakdown of east and west. Like where are most of your positions at? Are they mostly east?

**CHERYL LOGAN:** Well, I would, no, I wouldn't say that. I would say that, you know, one of the things that we have, one of the things that we have done is to move people around to make sure we don't have as much as that. But one of the things that I think is important is that people be teaching where, where they want to teach, you know, and so teaching in an area where there may be more challenges or students, you know, it is better to have smaller classes and those kinds of things because of some of the, some of the support that our young people need. We, that is an area of grave concern, I will say, to meet as a superintendent, I know I've said that every time that you and I have spoken that the, it has now hit everybody. So there's a lot of concern about it, but that, we are moving to a point where it won't matter how we move things around, there will be children that do, don't have a teacher.

**WAYNE:** Well, that's scary. When I was on the school board, there was this, just so everybody knows I represent the security in for OPS, so we're not having negotiations right now, but we will be soon, clarify that right now. But we'll, have to disclose that every time we talk now here going forward. There used to be a program where we took paras and helped them to become, I don't remember the name.

**CHERYL LOGAN:** Yeah. Para to Teacher Program.

**WAYNE:** Simple of a name. (LAUGHTER)

**CHERYL LOGAN:** You were already there. Yeah.

**WAYNE:** How's that going? Is it still going?

**CHERYL LOGAN:** We still, we still have that program going. That program was and is sponsored by a grant. We are looking at how we can, perhaps, move some of that into our General Fund on how we think about that program, because the grant is sun, is sunsetting. And we do, we do yield some, some teachers from that but the lion's share of our

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teachers come the traditional path through the university, through student teaching.

**WAYNE:** For 30 seconds, can you describe what that program is if you--

**CHERYL LOGAN:** Para to teacher. Para to educator to teacher. Well, folks who are working as paraeducators have the opportunity to get their teaching certificate, and it's paid for. They do, at the end of that time, there is an expectation, I believe it's three years of service to, quote unquote, I don't want to say pay back, but to acknowledge that it's been paid for. So that's, that's, that's what it is. And we, we don't just have paraeducators. We have several custodians as well who are in that program, who are custodians and become teachers.

**WAYNE:** Thank you. And also I'll let you know right now, but can you give me that information as far as how much that costs in budget wise?

**CHERYL LOGAN:** Sure, yeah, absolutely.

**WAYNE:** We're having a school funding formula debate. I want to make sure we talk about some of those things, too, that we could possibly fund.

**CHERYL LOGAN:** Yes. Yes, sir.

**WAYNE:** Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Senator Conrad.

**CONRAD:** Thank you so much, Chairman Murman, and thank you so much, Dr. Logan. It's always good to see you--

**CHERYL LOGAN:** Likewise.

**CONRAD:** --and thank you for your leadership. And I was sad to see that you're going to be leaving your position in the future. But I also wanted to wish you the best in the next steps of your journey. As I was preparing for this hearing and looking at this legislation, I was thinking about this more broadly in terms of our state, our community, our society's approach to improving our diversity, equity and inclusion endeavors and strategies. And I know that in the private sector, in the public sector and now in the educational context, there's been an increasing openness, I think, to paying student interns, student teachers, because we're recognizing we shouldn't

exploit people's altruism and we shouldn't reserve these opportunities for people who can't afford to work for free, basically. And I know you've been a real leader, a real thought leader on diversity, equity and inclusion in our state and in your community and I was, just wanted to give you an opportunity maybe to weigh in on it from, from that lens or that perspective as well.

**CHERYL LOGAN:** I will look at it as my, my colleague, Mr. Royers, talked about. I was privileged to have parents that I could go, they were college educated that understood, you know. I was going to live at home and to do that. And to, although I had to pay tuition, which was a really a small amount at the University of Maryland when I was there. So I'm not going to talk about that amount because people would not feel that bad for me. But the, but when you talk about students who are first generation and I use first generation because that is going to be inclusive of students--

**CONRAD:** Yes.

**CHERYL LOGAN:** --from everywhere, rural students who may be white. It doesn't. You know what I mean? There's, there, there are, there are many profiles in our state that have of folks who need assistance, right?

**CONRAD:** Yeah.

**CHERYL LOGAN:** They're, they are first generation. And we try to look at it that way. And that was one of the things when we announced it. So I was there with my board chair, with Dr. Holman at the time, and we both student taught. She's also a former teacher and we talked about, we raised our hands to say this would have been great if I, and some of them cried, right, because they really needed the assistance and they were not expecting it. It was a complete surprise. And later we talked to them about what they were able to, how they were able to move forward. And I, you know, we have a lot of interest from young people all over the region now, other states who are interested in coming. And I think, you know, and obviously they want to get paid. That's not, it's not a crime to want to get paid when you're, when you're doing work. And that's something that they have just kind of generally talked about the hardship that they have. Some are, although they're following a traditional path, we might consider them to be nontraditional students. They didn't just go, you know, from high school to college and, and whatever. They have families as well and are trying to to get this work done. And I try to distill it all the

way down to we have to have, this is a great state. We have to have really good teachers to continue the fine traditions of the public schools here in Nebraska and the fire alarm is ringing and, you know, it really, and if we look at not just the opportunities for young people to do all kinds of things and they are taking advantage of all of that, we also are in a perfect storm of the baby boomers all, I'm one of them, turning 60. Right? And so they are cycling out and moving on to different endeavors or that kind of thing. And there's a very large amount of these folks. If you look at any school districts data, even pre, pre-crisis time, we had been looking at that and said, oh my gosh, if at any time, you know, something happens and we could have a huge issue with the number of people who are eligible to retire. And so I think that's also could be a data point that would be helpful maybe to the committee to kind of see. That number is frightening and to look at the opportunity for us to do some things that are, could really be groundbreaking in our state to make sure we have the teachers that, that we need everywhere, everywhere. Senator Dorn, Senator Dorn, from Gage County, Gage County, and I spoke about this and he had, we had an opportunity to meet a few months ago and we talked about the, the huge need that they have there for teachers in a rural, in a rural setting. And it was no different. We had, we were talking the same language, you know, obviously not the same, same numbers, you know, 52,000, a lot of little people. And but still the issue of having to do distance learning and all of those kinds of things because you don't have a teacher is, to me, devastating and will have a long-term impact as we think about getting our children ready for postsecondary.

**CONRAD:** Very good. Thank you so much, Dr. Logan.

**ALBRECHT:** Thank you, Senator Conrad. Any other questions? I just have two quick ones.

**CHERYL LOGAN:** Oh, yes, sure.

**ALBRECHT:** OK. So you invested \$9,000 in 40 teachers?

**CHERYL LOGAN:** Mm-hmm.

**ALBRECHT:** Number one, where did the money come from?

**CHERYL LOGAN:** Mm-hmm.

**ALBRECHT:** And how long are you asking them to stay in your district?



**CHERYL LOGAN:** So when we, so the first-- it was actually a little bit more than that, but so the first semester that we did this was this time last year. And first we had to work through there were perceptions that this was, we couldn't do this because of statutes and regulations from NDE. We were able to dispel that, so we were able to move it forward. We did it with ESSER Funds, right? And so what we have done is look at it long term for sustainability, our, our chief financial officer to make sure that we can sustain this. But we went from, we had a little bit more than I want to say was like 48 or something last. And then we had like 110 student teachers in the fall and they came from other states. And we did not, we do not have-- the bill has an op-- what I've-- what I've read if I-- I think I'm reading it correctly, requires that folks pay back their time with their, their loans, which is great. We did not add that and not because we didn't think about it, but because we were working with university systems that were not prepared for that next level of, I would say, a kind of an administrative function for them to be assigned, as they assign student teachers. Student teachers are assigned all over the-- over the state and other states. And so that would have required the university to also weigh in on where, on where people were going to commit at that, at that time in their journey as they are still their student. So we, we, we did not do that. There's been lots of talk about it. So please note because we you know, we have a good return on that. And we also, too, had thought about it just in terms of we want teachers who want to teach with our, teach our students not necessarily as compelled. And the paraeducators a little different. Those people are already working for us. They're committed. We, we thought about it in a couple of ways. And so, you know, it'll be, if this, if this goes forward, that'll be the next level because it's not just the university, hopefully, here. What we saw, we really needed to go regionally to get the numbers that we currently have. We wouldn't have gotten those if we just were just within our university systems here.

**ALBRECHT:** Right. I appreciate your time, Dr. Logan.

**CHERYL LOGAN:** You're welcome. Thank you very much.

**ALBRECHT:** Other questions? OK. Next testifier.

**CHERYL LOGAN:** OK. Thank you.

**ALBRECHT:** Opponent. You bet.

**JEREMY EKELER:** Good afternoon. My name is Jeremy Ekeler, J-e-r-e-m-y, Ekeler is spelled E-k-e-l-e-r. Members of the Education Committee, we are here to support LB519. The Nebraska Catholic Conference advocates for the public policy interests of the Catholic Church and advances the Gospel by through engaging, educating and empowering public officials, Catholic laity, and the general public. On behalf of our 112 schools and over 2,500 certificated, certificated teachers, the Catholic Conference is here to support Senator Walz's LB519. And we also thank her office for being eager partners as we work through the bill's language to create consistency for Nebraska's teachers and potential teachers. This is going to sound pretty familiar to some of the other testifiers, but as you know, LB519 does some helpful things for educators. First, eliminate, elimination of certification fees is a boost for teacher morale and pocketbooks. I've paid the certification fees numerous times myself, as is my wife who is an early childhood special educator. Also, as a principal, I always heard the grumbling in the teacher work rooms, and I can say this measure would be celebrated by teachers and is a big difference maker as a previous testifier noted. Furthermore, as we exit the pandemic, we know that tens of thousands of teachers hung in there during COVID for the kids and for all of our kids, and waiving certification fees seems timely and appropriate. The next item I'd like to bring up is the \$8,500 per student teaching semester forgivable loan, as long as the teacher meets the qualifications laid out in the bill. I was a student teacher. I can share some of the same stories. I basically slept at the desk and ate at my mom's and it's an exhilarating but exhausting time. As one nears graduation, struggles to make ends meet financially and is entering the job market, things are just converging on your life in an incredible way. As a little bit of a side story, this weekend I ran into a former student who is in his last year. He's about to enter student teaching. I told him about this bill. He gave me a huge hug. So I said, it hasn't passed, but he's excited about the possibility. So, so I can empathize with these, with these student teachers and understand how important this measure is. In regard to the call, qualifications for loan forgiveness, we did point out the concern about Section 14(b). We appreciate the change. The initial language regarding enrollment, a graduate, graduate program within six months of obtaining one's undergraduate degree was unclear at best. And so we had concerns about a potential scenario in which you get \$8,500 in loan forgiveness but have to take on graduate tuition of \$15,000 to \$20,000. So we appreciate the change. Finally, the NCC supports the inclusion of nonpublic educators in the one-time allocation of grants to all Nebraska school teachers. The conference

is happy to hear about a simplified formula because all teachers work very hard during this time. So we thank Senator Walz for introducing LB519 and her collaboration. Thank you for your time and consideration. I'm open to any questions.

**ALBRECHT:** Thank you, Mr. Ekeler. Any questions from the committee? Seeing none, thanks for being here.

**JEREMY EKELER:** Thanks.

**ALBRECHT:** Next proponent.

**COLBY COASH:** Thank you, Senator Albrecht. Members of the Education Committee, my name is Colby Coash, C-o-l-b-y C-o-a-s-h. I represent the Nebraska Association of School Boards. My testimony today also reflects the support from the Council of School Administrators, STANCE and NRCSA. There's a shortage of educators out there. I think that's undisputed, but what I can tell you from a statewide perspective is that while this, while shortages might have been viewed at one point as a problem in the rural areas, they're a problem in urban districts as much as they are a problem in rural areas. And as we looked at LB519, we understand it's a tool, it's a solution. It's not the only one. It certainly is part of a broader effort, but we certainly applaud what LB519 does in removing barriers to teachers. One of the things and, that is happening with more frequency across the state is kind of grow your own programs, right? Where districts are starting to identify students in their high schools who, who have a, a talent for teaching and see themselves on that path. And those districts are working hard to cultivate those relationships and getting those students into the teaching field. And the provision in this bill that relates to student teaching really does complement that and allows those districts to kind of keep their, keep those relationships with their own students and carry those relationships on with those students as they go into their teacher's colleges and then maybe come back for their student teaching. So we're, we're very much appreciative of that. And finally, we're very appreciative of the recognition in LB519 that it's not just teachers that districts are struggling with. Paraeducators, bus drivers, food service workers and custodians are also big challenges for districts and so we see some momentum here with this. We understand it's part of a larger solution, but we certainly appreciate what LB519 is trying to do and we wanted to put our names in support of that.

**ALBRECHT:** Very good. Thank you for being here. Any questions from the committee? Seeing none, thank you.

**SARA SKRETTA:** Good afternoon. I should just say mike drop because everyone's said everything that everyone is agreeing with. Good afternoon, distinguished members of the Education Committee. My name is Dr. Sara Skretta. S-a-r-a S-k-r-e-t-t-a, and I've been a teacher and a coach in the public schools as well as a secondary administrator in three different districts. I'm now the senior director of accreditation placement and licensure and the educator certification officer at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I'm here today on behalf of the Nebraska Association of Colleges for Teacher Education in support of LB519. Just so you know who NACTE is, NACTE is the state chapter for the National Organization of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. And its membership includes all Nebraska teacher education institutions that have been approved by the Nebraska State Board of Education. Those include Bellevue University, Chadron State College, College of Saint Mary, Concordia University, Creighton University, Doane University, Hastings College, Midland University, Nebraska Wesleyan University, Peru State College, Union College, the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, Kearney, and Omaha, Wayne State College and York College. NACTE is committed to producing quality educators. We have a positive working relationship with the Department of Education, and we collaborate often with our P-12 partners. We support this bill. We are really grateful for all of the legislation that's out there in terms of recruitment and retention, because we need people to be interested in the profession and then we need to help them get to our classrooms. We support this bill's intent to remove barriers and provide incentives to attract people to the teaching profession. And we especially are supportive of the acknowledgment and the provisions included related to student teachers. Student teaching is a final experiential piece for an educator preparation student to become eligible and often is 14 to 18 weeks or multiple semesters of full-time teaching, depending upon their endorsement. The student teaching semester is challenging because in addition to paying the university or college tuition and fees, they have all of their other just living expenses. And having a full-time job is often very difficult because they are in all, for all intents and purposes, the teacher. So 40-plus hours plus the night activities that are required makes it very difficult to have a job and do both of those things well. While we leave the specific details to others, we appreciate the support that this bill provides in terms of that recruitment and retention and to student teachers, which

reinforces their value early on as a part of the Nebraska workforce. Again, thank you for all you're doing for education, and I'm happy to answer any questions.

**ALBRECHT:** Thank you for being here. Do we have any questions from the committee? Senator Conrad.

**CONRAD:** Hi, Dr. Skretta, is it?

**SARA SKRETTA:** Yes, Yes.

**CONRAD:** We're having a smile because Dr. Skretta was my high school English teacher. So this is a very exciting full circle moment. But--

**SARA SKRETTA:** I prepared you well.

**CONRAD:** Yes, very well. I'd put my education at Seward High up against anybody's in the world. Absolutely. Thank you for your contribution there too. But I was just wondering if you could share a little bit more about the experience that your students have when they're student teaching, because, of course, there's the time in the classroom and they bring so much energy and enthusiasm. I've seen this in our children's school. I've seen this at our preschool where the student teachers are, you know, really just at their best in terms of finally having an opportunity to apply their skills and their passion in the classroom. But much like our teachers who are employed in a full-time basis, how long does it take to plan lessons outside of school? How much time and energy are they spending, putting together the bulletin boards and all of those kind of other perhaps unaccounted for hours in their day to, to make that experience really successful, generally speaking?

**SARA SKRETTA:** Yes. No, thank you. I'd love to be able to give you a number, but I think if you can think of any teacher that your children, your grandchildren have had and the amount of hours that they put in, student teachers put in more. In addition to doing all of those things, bulletin boards, going to curriculum nights, attending parent-teacher conferences, preparing lessons, they also have additional, in most cases, university requirements, a seminar, or they have to come back to campus for some additional coursework as they finish their official training. So being a student teacher is really more than a full-time job and they're doing it for free and I'm going to join the parade. I also, as a teacher also, you know, student taught for free. And at that point, I'm old and I don't know if the

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dollar was worth more or not, but you sort of did it. And now we are experiencing at the higher ed level, students with extreme stress regarding finances. And so if we're talking about a profession that requires undertake a full semester to pay and make it really difficult to then earn a living to live, to move into that paying job, anything helps. So we're very appreciative for the efforts.

**CONRAD:** Thank you so much.

**ALBRECHT:** Thank you, Senator Conrad. Any other questions? I have a quick one.

**SARA SKRETTA:** Yes.

**ALBRECHT:** OK. So all these universities and college and state and local learning institutions, how would you say in the last 3 to 5 years, not only do we have it at the local level that we need teachers, but when you take a look at the broad picture, are there less people wanting to teach today than there was a year ago, three years ago, five years ago?

**SARA SKRETTA:** And I don't have the specific citations, but yes, these are all of the state educator preparation programs. And nationally there's a decline in higher ed enrollment due. It's called the enrollment cliff. And there's, it's out there because there's a decline in high school graduates. So if you already have a program like educator preparation, getting teachers ready to teach, that is seeing an enrollment decline or at least barely holding steady in some institutions, but you're seeing less students come in. You do end up having less candidates. So you're right, it is a, it's a cyclical problem.

**ALBRECHT:** And then we, then we leave Nebraska, as it sounds like Westside OPS did, and look for people outside of our state, right? I mean, it would be nice to somehow figure out how to encourage the children at a very young age to be considering something like this rather than try to find them later on.

**SARA SKRETTA:** I would agree.

**ALBRECHT:** Yeah.

**SARA SKRETTA:** I would agree and I think there are a lot of initiatives. A previous speaker referenced some of that work of grow your own working to identify and invite those students to be a part of

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the education profession earlier. But it's difficult when you're competing against almost every industry who's also got a workforce shortage and potentially some who have different resources than education does.

**ALBRECHT:** Very good. I appreciate your time today. Thank you.

**SARA SKRETTA:** Thank you.

**ALBRECHT:** Do we have any other proponents wishing to speak? Any other proponents? Seeing none, any opponents wishing to speak? Anyone in a neutral capacity who would like to speak? Seeing none, that will close. Do we have any letters?

**JACK SPRAY:** Sure. This wasn't close.

**ALBRECHT:** I'm sorry. Yes, I'll let you do that. Senator Walz, please come up to close.

**WALZ:** I looked at Senator Briese, it's like, I don't know. Well, first of all, I want to thank the committee members for taking the time to listen today and certainly want to thank all those who came to testify. I want to remind you that this, all of these programs are available to public and nonpublic schools. And I know that it's really a pretty significant piece of legislation, but I think it's going to take a pretty significant piece of legislation to help us get the results that we need when it comes to our teacher shortage. There's not one silver bullet. There's a lot of good legislation coming our way. And I hope that we can all work together and put together a great package that's going to help us recruit and retain our teachers. We do, need to do all that we can to show our teachers and our school staff how much we appreciate their work and dedication to the future of our state. And this is, again, it says, one small step, but I think it's a pretty significant piece of legislation I think, if we can combine it with all the other pieces that are coming our way that we'll be able to make a difference, so.

**ALBRECHT:** Great. Thanks. Okay. That con-- oh, I'm sorry. A question.

**BRIESE:** Thank you, Vice Chairman. Thank you, for your bill here today, Senator, but question regarding the teacher retention bonuses, how many employees would we be talking about? Any guess?

**WALZ:** 80,000.

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**BRIESE:** 80,000. And would that end up being distributed proportionately across each employee for \$35 million, whatever that would amount to?

**WALZ:** Yeah.

**BRIESE:** And would you anticipate or are you envisioning a one-time deal here on that \$35 million?

**WALZ:** Yes.

**BRIESE:** OK, not an ongoing program.

**WALZ:** No.

**BRIESE:** OK. OK, thank you.

**ALBRECHT:** Any other questions from the committee?

**WALZ:** I'd like to make it ongoing.

**ALBRECHT:** Senator Linehan.

**LINEHAN:** Thank you, Chair Albrecht. I don't understand the fiscal note, and I wasn't here for the opening because I was in another committee, but the one from the Department of Ed is completely different from the one from the Fiscal Office. Am I missing something?

**WALZ:** I can't read this fiscal note. I'm sorry.

**LINEHAN:** That's OK, OK. It's just, you don't have to answer now, but it's-- I think before we probably look at, we need some explanation of why--

**WALZ:** There's such a big difference.

**LINEHAN:** Yeah.

**WALZ:** I can see the Department of Education's a little bit better than I can see the Fiscal Office.

**LINEHAN:** The Fiscal Office is just, you know, less than a million dollars. I mean, you turnover, Education Department says \$65 million and you just said 35.

**WALZ:** Uh-hum. 35 for one of the programs.



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**LINEHAN:** OK. OK.

**WAYNE:** The third bullet point, third bullet point says the bill creates \$35 million retention fund.

**LINEHAN:** Third bullet point on the Fiscal Office one?

**WAYNE:** Underneath the, no, agency. Says third bullet point says creates a \$35 million. Fourth bullet point says appropriates \$30 million to NDE for the teachers assist program. So I think they just took both of them and came up with 65.

**LINEHAN:** OK. Well, I think if I, I'd asked the Fiscal Office, Senator Walz, to give a little cleaner, more understandable fiscal note.

**WALZ:** I will find out about that. Thanks, Senator Linehan.

**LINEHAN:** You're welcome.

**ALBRECHT:** Any other questions? Seeing none, thank you, Senator Walz. And we did have four letters for the record. Four proponents, 0 opponents and 0 neutral. So next up, we will have Senator Linehan with LB603.

**LINEHAN:** Good afternoon, Chairperson Albrecht, and members of the Education Committee. I'm Lou Ann Linehan, L-o-u A-n-n L-i-n-e-h-a-n, and I'm from Legislative District 39, which includes Elkhorn and Waterloo. Today, I am introducing LB603. Is that right?

**WAYNE:** Yes.

**LINEHAN:** Thank you much. Members of the committee, our state needs teachers. We, as you've already heard, we are in dire need to fill teaching positions. Last year, Nebraska had 768 unfilled positions and 208 vacant positions. According to Nebraska Department of Education, an unfilled position refers to a job that was filled by someone other than a qualified teacher. That means 768 positions were being taken by people who did not have the proper certifications. The positions that were in the most need for qualified teachers were those relating to special education, elementary education and STEM. We are also losing more teachers than we are hiring. From 2022 to 2023, about 1,516 teachers retired. In that same year, the Department of Education reports that 1,322 teachers were hired in the first year of employment. That's a loss of 194 teachers. With LB603, I believe we can give another opportunity for hiring teachers to be certified. Let

me be clear. This bill is not lowering the standards for teacher certification. It's not a way to shove more people into teaching positions without qualifying them. LB603 provides an alternative route for teaching certification. The aspiring teacher must have a bachelor's degree, successfully complete an alternative certification program and pass a subject matter exam. Under our current requirements, a teacher who has the academic background but has not completed our teacher [INAUDIBLE] program would not be eligible for teaching certification. With LB603, a person who completes an alternative teaching certification course would be able to receive a teaching certification. However, they would only be certified to teach the subject and educational level that they have successfully been certified for. An aspiring teacher would also be subject to a criminal history and background check. A person would not be able to attend whatever, a person would not be able to attend whatever alternative certification course they want. The organization would have to meet the qualifications specified under Section 3 of this bill. Thank you and I am happy to answer any questions.

**ALBRECHT:** Thank you, Senator Linehan. Any questions from the committee at this time? Are you staying to close?

**LINEHAN:** Yep.

**ALBRECHT:** Great. OK, we're going to start with our first proponent for LB603. Hi.

**MELANIE OLMSTEAD:** Good afternoon, committee members. My name is Melanie Olmstead. That is M-e-l-a-n-i-e O-l-m-s-t-e-a-d, and I want to thank you for allowing me to speak here today. It's a privilege to be able to take a few minutes and share some information with you about American Board Teacher Certification. Under LB603, American Board is an example of a certification program that would then be able to operate in Nebraska to help prepare more teachers for the classroom. A little bit of background information. American Board, formally known as American Board for the Certification of Teachers of Excellence, was founded by the United States Department of Education under President George W. Bush. That very long name is the most telling sign that it was a D.C. founded organization. And we have been around for the last 20 years, alternatively certifying teachers across the country. We currently operate in 14 states and we've got 15,000 teacher graduates to our name in those states. What does an alternatively certified teacher look like? What does that mean? Well, it's somebody who already holds a bachelor's degree, but in a subject other than

education, frankly, sometimes it's someone who has a bachelor's degree in education but never completed the student teaching component and therefore was never able to certify. People who use American Board's program fit into four general categories. The first is your career changers, your accountant who decides to teach math later in life. You're a pharmacist who's ready to retire but has a few years left and wants to teach physics. Second, we have a lot of teachers we certify who have been in the military. Those are your veterans who completed their service and want to utilize like the troops to teachers program, which is now known as SkillBridge. We work with them and help them earn their certification. We also work with their spouses through a similar program. Thirdly, we've got people who are currently working in schools as substitute teachers or paraprofessionals. Those people know your school. They know those students. And they are a perfect example of someone who could step into that teaching role if they were able to fully certify quickly and affordably. And lastly, we've got stay-at-home parents who earned their degree and maybe worked for a few years and then took time to raise their children, but they're ready to reenter the workforce. Alternative certification is a quick and affordable way for those people to become teachers. I think a pushback that we often hear about alternative certification is that it's, it's putting warm bodies in the classroom. But studies show that's just not the case. In fact, someone could argue that right now we're putting warm bodies in the classroom and we have nearly 800 classrooms without a certified licensed teacher. And that's where American Board wants to help. The vast majority of Nebraska's teachers will always be traditionally trained. You have a fantastic university system here. You've got eight, or you've got great education programs in the state. But those programs are not currently meeting the needs of open positions in schools. And that's where American Board wants to step in and just be able to provide a little bit of assistance. We're one more tool in someone's tool belt trying to fix the teacher shortage. I want to give a quick example of two of our teachers who are currently working in classrooms, just so you can get a feel for this. We've got Jenae [PHONETIC]. She is a North Dakota certified teacher and American Board has only been in that state for a few years. But when she became a teacher through our program, she said the university-based certification programs all required specifically timed online evening courses. That would not have worked for me. I needed my evenings free to be around my kids, especially while they're young and actually want to hang out with me. American Boards' program is flexible and I loved that. I was able to download the materials and study on my own time over work breaks, when my kids were at school and

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at sport practice. Overall, it was a great experience for me. I feel grateful because truly it has changed our lives. It's been such a blessing. I'm older, I've got kids now. I need to think about their financial needs and being able to start a new career without debt was the biggest blessing. That's the kind of person who uses American Board's program. And when you're wondering whether or not American--

**ALBRECHT:** I'm sorry, you've got a red light--

**MELANIE OLMSTEAD:** Oh, sorry. I'm done.

**ALBRECHT:** --I'm going to--

**MELANIE OLMSTEAD:** No, I'm good.

**ALBRECHT:** We may very well have some questions. Anyone have any questions? Senator Sanders.

**SANDERS:** I was going to ask you, what is the typical person that is, that wants to be involved in the course? So you were given, given me, given us one example. Are there others that, I mean, do you see majority of mothers, parents that need to finish up their program to get back to work? Is that typically what you see?

**MELANIE OLMSTEAD:** Thank you for your question. The average person to go through our program is about 40 years old. So, yes, most of them are parents. They already hold a bachelor's degree and they are career changers, so they have completed their degree in whatever field it is that they went to work in for the last 15 years. But whether it was through helping their own children with their homework or perhaps being a coach at the local school in their off-time, something has made them realize, you know, what I really want to do is teach, and that's why they transitioned to a career in education.

**SANDERS:** Thank you.

**MELANIE OLMSTEAD:** You're welcome. Thank you.

**ALBRECHT:** Thank you, Senator Sanders. Any other questions? Senator Briese.

**BRIESE:** Thank you, Vice Chairwoman Albrecht. Thanks for your testimony here today. There are other companies that have the same business model as American Board, is that correct?

**MELANIE OLMSTEAD:** Thank you for your question.

**BRIESE:** Very similar to it.

**MELANIE OLMSTEAD:** Similar to it, yes. I would say that there are other organizations who also provide alternative certification.

**BRIESE:** Would they fit within the parameters of this bill?

**MELANIE OLMSTEAD:** Some--

**BRIESE:** Five states, ten years of experience.

**MELANIE OLMSTEAD:** Thank you. Some would and some would not. Because the shortage has recently become the front page in every state, teacher certification is now big business. So I believe that those parameters were put in there to kind of ensure the longevity of an organization that would come in the state. But American Board is one of the organizations that would come in. I believe that there are others that fit the current parameters. And in time, as some of the newer organizations age, they would also fit those parameters.

**BRIESE:** How many other companies would fit within this at this point?

**MELANIE OLMSTEAD:** I believe two others at this point.

**BRIESE:** Two others. OK. Thank you.

**MELANIE OLMSTEAD:** Possibly three. Thank you.

**ALBRECHT:** Any other questions? Senator Conrad.

**CONRAD:** Thank you so much. Thank you so much for your enthusiastic testimony. I really appreciate it. Can you, I'm just going to kind of cut to the heart of it. So your company makes money with each application or what's your business model exactly?

**MELANIE OLMSTEAD:** Yeah. Thank you for your question. We are a self-funded nonprofit.

**CONRAD:** OK.

**MELANIE OLMSTEAD:** So the way we were founded is, look, 20 years ago, the Department of Education, the United States Department of Education gave us a \$45 million grant to found this particular program. That money was spent to develop the program, the study materials, the

online tutorials, the certification exams. Once that money was gone, we became a self-funded program. So now in order to enroll in the program, you pay a one-time fee. Today it's \$1,500 and that's your full certification fee through our program. So there won't be any additional university textbooks you have to buy or exams you have to pay to take, it's just a \$1,500 fee. And that is where all of our money comes from.

**CONRAD:** OK.

**MELANIE OLMSTEAD:** And just like you, if you, if we're not bringing people in, then we would not operate anymore. But the program has been successful and enough people have used it to certify that we've been able to continue.

**CONRAD:** OK, that's very good. So then as an organized nonprofit, like you have like a 990 available or something, if people want to dig into the finances.

**MELANIE OLMSTEAD:** Absolutely. Thank you. Yeah, we're a 501(c)(3).

**CONRAD:** Thank you so much.

**MELANIE OLMSTEAD:** Mm hmm.

**ALBRECHT:** Any other questions? Senator Sanders.

**SANDERS:** Thank you, Chair. Do you lower the standards at all or is this, the testing for this certification? How is it different in the practice?

**MELANIE OLMSTEAD:** Thank you so much for that question. I think it's such an important issue. No, we're not lowering the bar or lowering standards for certification at all. So the Praxis is one brand of teacher licensure test. American Board has another brand of teacher licensure test. It has been vetted by third parties, including Drexel University School of Education. We currently work with national leaders in standardized licensure testing to ensure that the test is up to snuff. Third parties have deemed that it is equal to, and depending on the specific subject area, more rigorous than the Praxis. And so I think that the question about standards is a really important one. And, and we absolutely do not support the, the lowering of standards. We just think this is another way for people to hitch those competencies. And if I may say one more thing, employing principals have found that American Board teachers are well prepared, that they

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have not seen a standard lowering by hiring American Board teachers. In fact, employing principals say that American Board teachers are equal to and sometimes better than traditionally trained teachers on 19 out of 20 new teacher indicators.

**SANDERS:** Thank you.

**MELANIE OLMSTEAD:** Thank you.

**ALBRECHT:** Thank you, Senator Sanders. Any other questions? I have just a couple of quick ones.

**MELANIE OLMSTEAD:** Oh, please.

**ALBRECHT:** Do you do background checks on these folks and do you actually place them in different areas of the country?

**MELANIE OLMSTEAD:** Thank you for your question. We do perform background checks. It's the same background check that states and locals run, absolutely. No certificate is issued without that. We do not do placement. And that's a really important aspect of our program. It is our belief that often placement programs put new teachers in a community where they're not going to stay. They might serve one or two years and then they're gone. And local schools spend so much money constantly trying to bring in new teachers that it doesn't break even. So what American Board does is focus on helping local individuals who already live in those small towns that might need teachers become certified and licensed and stay there. They're already community members, and so they're more willing to stay long term.

**ALBRECHT:** But how do you find these people that come to see you?

**MELANIE OLMSTEAD:** Yeah, that's a great question. So we use a lot of Internet outreach for people who've never heard of us. That's how you would find out about us when you Google how to become a teacher in North Dakota where we currently operate. American Board comes up as a state approved option for teacher licensure in North Dakota. Another way that we help recruit teachers is work with school districts. So if American Board were to enter Nebraska, we would spend a lot of time reaching out to school districts and letting know that if they have substitute teachers and paraprofessionals on staff who they wish were licensed so they could work full-time, we can work with those districts and help them get certified.

**ALBRECHT:** OK, one last thing.

**MELANIE OLMSTEAD:** Please.

**ALBRECHT:** I do know that we've had other committee hearings about hiring teachers and are concerned if they really don't have that time in the classroom, how would that, how would they be able to manage those classrooms if they haven't been a teacher that gets to go in and practice first before they just show up?

**MELANIE OLMSTEAD:** Yeah, thank you for that question. I think it's a very big conversation, particularly when we're considering alternative routes to certification, which often don't include a student teaching experience or an unpaid teaching experience, whatever you want to call that. So it's twofold. One, as I noted earlier, American Board teachers average about 40 years in age. So they bring with them some different life experiences. And what employing principals have noted is that when it comes to classroom management and those really important issues now, American Board teachers, even without student teaching on day one are equal to traditionally trained teachers who have that student teaching experience. They've been rated the same. Of course, we don't have data on why they've been rated the same. How is it that American Board teacher without student teaching can be as good as someone who did? We can only suspect and it comes to that age difference that, you know, if you've raised your own kids, you might know how to talk to kids a little bit more confidently than you did previously. It's just, it's just a guess, but.

**ALBRECHT:** Just curious.

**MELANIE OLMSTEAD:** Yeah.

**ALBRECHT:** Thank you.

**MELANIE OLMSTEAD:** Thank you.

**ALBRECHT:** Any other questions? Thank you for-- another one.

**BRIESE:** Thank you, Vice Chair. Thank you, again. We're not talking about flooding Nebraska with potential teacher candidates, correct, but, but you're talking about a small number--

**MELANIE OLMSTEAD:** Thank you for your question.

**BRIESE:** --or a reasonable number?



**MELANIE OLMSTEAD:** You know, we would like to make sure that every Nebraska student had a licensed teacher. That would be our first focus. But no, I mean, I think it's important to note that this isn't a requirement. So this is just one more option. If there's a local school that's got ten substitute teachers that want to get licensed, we're happy to help them. But ultimately, no school district has to hire anyone who's taken an alternative program. It's just, you know, it's trying to give principals five or six applications for one position as opposed to zero application.

**BRIESE:** OK, thank, thank you.

**MELANIE OLMSTEAD:** Thank you.

**ALBRECHT:** Any other questions? Seeing none, thank you for being here today.

**MELANIE OLMSTEAD:** Thank you all for your time.

**ALBRECHT:** Any other proponents? How are you doing?

**ANDY SCHMIDT:** Not too bad. How about yourself?

**ALBRECHT:** Thank you.

**ANDY SCHMIDT:** Chairman Murman and senators of the Education Committee, my name is Andy, A-n-d-y, Schmidt, S-c-h-m-i-d-t. I'm an agricultural producer from Deshler, Nebraska. I serve as a board member on Deshler Public School, and I'm vice president of Thayer County Farm Bureau. I'm here today to support LB603 on behalf of Nebraska Farm Bureau. I want to thank Senator Linehan for bringing this important bill that we hope will have a real impact throughout the state. At Nebraska Farm Bureau's annual meeting in December, debate was had regarding teacher testing requirements. The reason for this is because rural Nebraska is severely impacted by teacher shortages. I see this firsthand as Deshler struggles to find quality teachers. As our kids continue to crawl out of the academic hole left by the pandemic, our teachers continue to leave in droves. I think we've heard that, you know, from every area of the state. Oftentimes, those that would be gifted teachers are turned away due to stringent requirements. Applicable education and work experience should not only count towards the teacher's resume, but be of paramount importance. Many times teachers can speak from experience and exemplify the reality of the workforce to our kids. These challenges that we are facing during this teacher shortage deserve unique fixes, and I believe this bill provides a

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unique fix that will help school districts like mine. Thank you for your time and I'd be happy to answer any questions.

**ALBRECHT:** Thank you, Mr. Schmidt. Any questions from the committee? How many teachers are you short in your district?

**ANDY SCHMIDT:** Well, we are a very small district right now. I believe we are short one and it's an elementary position that just came open. But as an example of shortage, it used to be elementary teachers were fairly easy to find. And to my knowledge, I talked to our superintendent Friday evening, we've had one applicant and that's it. And we've had that other, other years with other positions where we normally have five or six applicants, we may have one or two.

**ALBRECHT:** Right.

**ANDY SCHMIDT:** And we've, I take that back. We have two openings. We've been without a music teacher for six months now. We've been filling that with long-term subs because they just aren't out there.

**ALBRECHT:** Thanks for sharing that.

**ANDY SCHMIDT:** OK.

**ALBRECHT:** Thanks for being here. Looks like we're good with the questions.

**ANDY SCHMIDT:** Thank you very much.

**ALBRECHT:** Do we have any other proponents wishing to speak?

**JEREMY EKELER:** Good afternoon, again. My name is Jeremy Ekeler, J-e-r-e-m-y, Ekeler is E-k-e-l-e-r. I'm with the Nebraska Catholic Conference. I'm the associate director of education policy. Real quickly on LB603 with the 112 schools, nearly 27,000 students and over 2,500 certificated teachers, Catholic schools in Nebraska educate over 60 percent. That's a typo. It should be 60 percent of nonpublic students in the state. And like our colleagues in other nonpublic and public schools, we face teacher recruitment and retention issues. The teacher shortage is, issue is universal and we thank Senator Linehan for presenting LB603 for discussion. Like all Nebraska schools, Catholic schools demand high-quality individuals. We believe the key to addressing the teacher shortage involves a process that maintains a high bar while creating a wide path to certification. We've been consistently coming in to support such measures. Teaching in Nebraska

should be about excellence, is about excellence, but access should not be cumbersome. We support legislation that strengthens these concepts and precepts. With that in mind, we do offer a suggestion for LB603 at the conclusion. So LB603 creates an alternative pathway to teacher certification for those who possess a bachelor's degree and successfully complete an alternative teacher certification program. The program must have been in existence for at least ten years and operate in at least five states. The prospective teacher must take a subject area exam and pedagogy exam. The applicant must meet background check requirements. Virtually every state has some form of alternative certification as such approaches have grown in response to teacher shortages. An argument against LB603 will be that teachers who take this alternative route are not qualified in the same way as those who take a more traditional route. That's a reasonable concern. I'd note that this bill incentivizes folks with bachelor's degrees to enter teaching, and in my experience, these are often second career professionals. I've hired quite a few of them, and they've helped our buildings and with their professionalism and with their various life experiences. Also, note that while LB603 could provide diversity in depth in the hiring pool, there's no mandate to hire an alternatives teacher. Administrative teams at the local level can judge who is the best fit for their school. So the suggestion from the Catholic Conference is related to teacher mentorship. There's some discussion about field experience or student teaching. The Catholic Conference would advocate for explicit language requiring a teacher mentor. I think we saw something similar to that in LB188. We asked for that to be for at least two years. In closing, the teacher shortage is a real issue that will take dynamic ideas from multiple angles. LB603 is a good step in this regard and alternative certification is a good discussion to have. Thank you for your time. I'll take any questions.

**ALBRECHT:** Thank you, Mr. Ekeler. Any questions from the committee? Seeing none.

**JEREMY EKELER:** Thank you.

**ALBRECHT:** Thank you for being here. OK. Our next proponent. Hello.

**NICOLE FOX:** Vice Chair Albrecht and members of the Education Committee, I'm Nicole Fox, N-i-c-o-l-e F-o-x, director of government relations for the Platte Institute, here supporting LB603. LB603 pretty much is in line with several other bills that we have testified in support of in front of this committee over the years to address teacher, teacher shortages, and some of these bills actually date back

even prior to the pandemic. We feel it's designed to expand our workforce and allow individuals to explore their career callings. And as the first testifier mentioned, not everybody, you know, goes to college with the intent of teaching. And so we think that this is a good bill for those that maybe have discovered that teaching is something they want to do later in life. This bill would give those who already have a bachelor's degree and have completed an alternative teacher certification program as approved, approved and recognized in other states, the opportunity to teach in Nebraska. This bill would add to the existing pathways for alternative means available to obtain teaching, teaching certificates. While alternative certificates might not completely solve the teacher shortage problem, they may chip away at the problem to some extent. We believe it's important to remember that no state certification or licensure guarantees competence. It just assures that a hoop has been jumped through. Those licensed or certified will still need to prove that they can teach and convince those hiring them that their work and experience are adequate. And so I know that that's in line with what a couple of other testifiers said is that it just helps to increase the applicant pool, get better depth so that they can find the best fit. And an occupational licenses, license does not guarantee a job or that a person will be good if they get the job, just as a driver's license doesn't ensure that a person is a safe driver or will never be in an accident. And just real quickly, I'd like to share a story. There was an individual that reached out to us over the interim. He was a gentleman that had a bachelor's degree in psychology. He had a master's degree in education administration. He was born and raised in Nebraska, moved to Texas for a variety of reasons. While he was there, he decided to take an alternative teaching course, was able to get an alternative certificate, taught special ed for three years in Texas. And like a lot of people do when they are starting a family, he and his wife, when they had their first baby, decided to move back to Nebraska to be close to the grandparents. And he attempted to get a certificate here in Nebraska after being offered a job in a public school here, but was, was denied because he did not have a bachelors degree in education. Instead, it was in psychology. So we feel that this bill would definitely be helpful to him. In fact, he, so this was over the interim, he enrolled in coursework this fall because he was told he would be granted a certificate if he within three years completed 30 to 36 hours of training. So if this bill goes through, he may not have to complete all that coursework. So with that, I conclude my testimony. I'm happy to take any questions.

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**ALBRECHT:** Thank you, Ms. Fox. Any questions? Seeing none, thanks for being here today.

**NICOLE FOX:** All right.

**ALBRECHT:** Any other proponents wishing to speak? Any other proponents? Nope. How about opponents? Welcome back.

**SARA SKRETTA:** Thank you. I'll spare you the long litany of organizations that are part of NACTE. They're still the same. So, good afternoon, Education Committee. My name is Dr. Sara Skretta, S-a-r-a S-k-r-e-t-t-a, and I'm here on behalf of the Nebraska Association of Colleges for Teacher Education in opposition to LB603. NACTE, like I said before, is representative of all 16 educator preparation programs in the state. NACTE opposes LB603 because it is redundant to existing alternative certification pathways currently offered by the Nebraska Department of Education. A candidate as described in LB603, who has completed a state approved alternative program, has taught for one year, has a bachelor's degree, meets the basic skills competency requirement and passes the content exam, would be eligible for an alternative permit through the existing alternative pathways. Number two. If the alternative program was not state approved or the candidate did not have a year of teaching, but the other elements remained, the candidate would qualify for an alternative permit through the existing alternative pathway, three. Because LB603 is very narrow in scope and candidates described in the bill would already qualify for existing alternative certification, there is no need to adopt this legislation as it is duplicative and does not serve to advance educator certification nor address shortage issues. NACTE is also opposed to LB603 because, as written, it appears to be very specific to certain types of programs that offer education preparation with standards that are less than those required of Nebraska institutions by Rule 20. In an Internet search of an alternative program that would meet LB603's requirements, NACTE discovered, for example, that one program required less hours in practicum in student teaching than Nebraska institutions must offer. NACTE is disappointed that in essence, LB603's intent is seemingly to open the door to specific programs outside of the state for a license that is already available to candidates. This bill puts Nebraska educator preparation programs at a disadvantage and NACTE believes that no state senator should support that sentiment. While we appreciate the efforts to expand certification pathways, LB603 as introduced does not assist with increasing the number of qualified certified teachers in Nebraska, but rather provides a path for specific outside entities to

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do so without meeting Rule 20 standards. More alternative certification pathways do not equate to more people wanting to be teachers. It should be noted that NACTE counted 11 alternative permits, and those are in the areas that were mentioned earlier, [INAUDIBLE] military, returning to the workforce, transition to teaching, and those delivery medals are, models are traditional hybrid online and delivery. NACTE is opposed to LB603 and urges the Education Committee not to advance it to avoid duplication of already existing alternative licensure, as well as to maintain the standards and integrity of educator preparation in Nebraska. I'm happy to answer any questions that you might have.

**ALBRECHT:** Thanks for being here. Any questions from the committee? OK. I'm just going to ask one.

**SARA SKRETTA:** Absolutely.

**ALBRECHT:** And again, it's just because I probably don't follow exactly what it takes to become a teacher, but I certainly will be, because that's all we're talking about. So what, what happens if you have a 40-year-old that comes on to the university or any of these other schools that you listed here?

**SARA SKRETTA:** Mm hmm.

**ALBRECHT:** Tell me what you would do with that person based on the education they already have and that they might want to decide to go back and teach?

**SARA SKRETTA:** You bet. The Nebraska Department of Education rules dictate the type of teaching certificate and endorsement and requirements someone has to meet. So even someone coming in on a, on an alternative certificate will still have to meet all of those requirements to move to a full license. So the first question is, what do you want to teach? And sometimes they have a very definitive idea, and sometimes they say, well, what can get me to the classroom faster? The second question then is, well, let's take a look at your transcripts and see what you have. So, for example, if they are a, had a bachelor's degree in business perhaps, they may already be qualified for one of the 11 alternative certificates available, say the transition to teaching, which means you can start day one. You've got a job and you concurrently are finishing your education while you're already in the classroom or one of these other alternative pathways that are on the NDE website completing, you know, percentages of

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coursework, having a year of employment. There are a lot of variations and quite a lot of flexibility in what we already have. And I know that our institutions in state offer alternative certificate programs right now. So I guess we just want to make sure that we're using what we have versus creating additional pathways because again, I'm going to go back to, if there are no people to take advantage of those, more pathways don't really make any difference.

**ALBRECHT:** Mm hmm. And would you say that you have older individuals when I say that not--

**SARA SKRETTA:** Nontraditional.

**ALBRECHT:** Nontraditional. Thank you. I don't know all verbiage of all these things just yet.

**SARA SKRETTA:** Life experience.

**ALBRECHT:** So the life experience. So, so say, I mean, could you really speak to that like-- coming back?

**SARA SKRETTA:** I don't have numbers to provide you.

**ALBRECHT:** If you can get some from these--

**SARA SKRETTA:** Yep. Absolutely.

**ALBRECHT:** Because I'd like to know because if they're not getting them or they're not seeking them out or they're not trying to bring them in to say, hey, you know, there's a lot of people after seven years, they might want a new path and maybe they would consider something like this.

**SARA SKRETTA:** No, and I can absolutely get those numbers. I would say right now we have parent to teacher programs that are offered out of these institutions. We have graduate programs that either lead to a master's degree or just a, just, only a certification without a terminal degree so that those nontraditional or second career people can enter the classroom. Those folks, because they already have a bachelor's degree, will enter the classroom much sooner than their, than they finish their program on one of these alternative certificates that currently exists.

**ALBRECHT:** Very good. Thanks for your time. Any other questions real quick? Senator Briese.

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**BRIESE:** Thank you, Vice Chair Albrecht. Thanks for your testimony.

**SARA SKRETTA:** You bet.

**BRIESE:** But you're saying that this program we're talking about here is not more conducive to putting people in the teacher workforce--

**SARA SKRETTA:** I don't know anything about this program, per se.

**BRIESE:** --than your existing alternative.

**SARA SKRETTA:** But the candidates' qualifications as outlined in the bill would already qualify for an alternative certificate that's on the books with the Nebraska Department of Education right now. So there is no need to do anything different. If a candidate completes a program, whether it's the one that, that testified or something different and comes to Nebraska, we've got an alternative permit without needing to approve someone with, that doesn't meet Rule 20 that Nebraska institutions are held to, to prepare teachers, whether they're doing an alternative certificate pathway or a traditional pathway.

**BRIESE:** OK. And what you're describing that's already in place, does it pose any additional obstacles to entry into this profession?

**SARA SKRETTA:** You know, the same obstacles as any licensed profession, there is some preparation is required because you do have to have a license to be able to do this. But I would say no more barriers than, you know, I guess I'm not really sure what your question is in terms of.

**BRIESE:** No more barriers in what we're talking about here with this.

**SARA SKRETTA:** No, you complete a program and that isn't, doesn't fully meet Nebraska certification requirements. So you're issued an alternative certificate and then you have a certain period of time to complete that while you're on the job so that you can get that full license. That would be the same as I'm reading this bill in terms of what current Nebraska rule dictates in terms of licensure.

**BRIESE:** OK. Thank you.

**ALBRECHT:** Any other questions? Senator Conrad.



**CONRAD:** All right. And thank you, Vice Chair Albrecht. And maybe I should have asked this of the company's representative, I'm sorry, I'm just not quite sure I understand how this company works or this nonprofit organization works. So they basically act as like a concierge service to help individuals who might qualify for alternative certificates navigate that process. Is that, and-- what could be the point is?

**SARA SKRETTA:** I don't know.

**CONRAD:** OK.

**SARA SKRETTA:** So I'm not the one to answer that.

**CONRAD:** Sure.

**SARA SKRETTA:** I do know if the candidate would come to us having completed, and this is any of our schools, having completed an alternative certificate somewhere, we as, as higher ed have to just make sure some things are in place because we're required to by rule, but then would quite honestly recommend them most likely for an alternative certificate that's on the books while they met the rest of the requirements leading to full licensure.

**CONRAD:** OK. OK. That's helpful. Thank you.

**SARA SKRETTA:** I'm sorry.

**CONRAD:** No, that's okay. I probably should have directed it to another testifier. It just popped into my brain now while you were in the chair. Thank you.

**ALBRECHT:** Other questions? OK. I want to just ask one real quick one.

**SARA SKRETTA:** Yeah.

**ALBRECHT:** So if that person came to, to continue their education, would it be \$1,500 or would it be significantly more depending on the area of expertise they have?

**SARA SKRETTA:** I think when you look at preparation, I mean, we all sit here in Nebraska and we know that we have a state college system, a private college system, and a, there are fees that, you know, there's tuition costs. So it isn't a flat fee. You walk in and you take your coursework or modules or whatever, and now you're eligible to be a

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teacher. And so I'm not sure that dollars spent equates prepared for certification. But in terms of this bill as it's presented, it doesn't necessarily talk about costs. It talks about a specific alternative certificate that's already available on the books for the people that would be listed in this as being qualified. And it also talks about an institution potentially, that would meet the criteria that would get a pass on having to meet Rule 20.

**ALBRECHT:** I'll spend some time looking at Rule 20.

**SARA SKRETTA:** Because Nebraska institutions don't have a choice. And so then there's a, then we're being penalized for being in the state trying to prepare teachers for our classrooms and our students, which.

**ALBRECHT:** Thank you. Any other questions?

**SARA SKRETTA:** Thank you.

**ALBRECHT:** Thank you for your testimony. Appreciate it. Any other opponents wishing to speak?

**TIM ROYERS:** Hello, again.

**ALBRECHT:** Hello.

**TIM ROYERS:** Thank you, again, members of the Education Committee. Again, for the record, my name is Tim, T-i-m, Royers, R-o-y-e-r-s. I'm the president of the Millard Education Association and I am again speaking on behalf of the Nebraska State Education Association, this time in opposition to LB603. We know that maintaining a strong teacher workforce in the state is critical and we know that providing quality alternate pathways to coming into the profession absolutely should be included in our efforts. Unfortunately, we feel that LB603 falls short of the mark in providing any kind of solid footing for alternative certification. The foundation for this bill is to provide, is to provide a pathway for people who already possess a bachelor's degree to gain their certification to teach as we've already heard from a number of people. Presumably then, these people would have relevant content knowledge but are lacking in pedagogy and field experience. Those two components are the most fundamental elements to this profession and yet LB603 in no way specifies any kind of course or field experience requirements. The only specific program requirement in the bill is that they complete a standardized test, which is the least important component of a teacher preparation program. More concerning than what the bill does not require is what the bill does

require. In order for a program to be recognized again, as we've heard from several individuals, you need to be, it needs to come from a company that operates in at least five states and has been operational for at least ten years, meaning this bill is intended to allow already identified companies to profit off of our teacher shortage. This component of the bill also prevents school districts, educational service units or other entities within the state of Nebraska from developing viable grassroots alternative certification programs that will take on the challenge of providing a robust alternative pathway. For example, in my own district, we've already established a program that helps selected paraprofessionals become teachers in partnership with Midland University. Innovative programs like this would be ineligible for consideration under this bill because they don't meet the multistate or multiyear operation criteria. Finally, any certification decisions, decision should be made by the State Board of Education to make sure that we are consistent across all of our certification pathways and guaranteeing that every teacher candidate has high-quality experience and ready to work with kids on day one. Ceding that ability to establish the criteria for certification and putting it into statute prevents the Department of Education from having the flexibility it needs to adjust or react to new innovation or ideas. And I'll just use a really simple example for what I mean by this. What if we were to find a program that operates in four states? By this statute, we couldn't use them simply because they were one state short from what was listed in the text. We welcome finding new paths for people to come into the education profession, but those paths must focus on producing high-quality candidates who are well-trained and have sufficient field experience so they can deliver the quality education our kids deserve. Unfortunately, LB603 fails to establish robust requirements, takes agency away from the State Board of Education and is written in a way to allow existing out-of-state programs to profit rather than encouraging our local partners to innovate and develop strong programs, I strongly urge you to oppose advancing LB603 to General File. Thank you.

**ALBRECHT:** Thank you for your testimony. That was quick. Anyone have any questions? Oh, yes, Senator Wayne.

**CONRAD:** He was first, please.

**ALBRECHT:** We haven't heard.

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**WAYNE:** What ways do you, what ways do you envision to create some new pathways or alternatives, like what do you have? What does the association talk about?

**TIM ROYERS:** We have some existing ones on the books that we could certainly strengthen. I think in Omaha, the TAC program is one that a number of my colleagues have come through that fit a lot of the criteria that's in this bill. They had a bachelor's degree, just not in education. So they go to UNO for a year and then they're placed into a partnering district like Millard or OPS or another district in the Metro. I know you referred to the cost of that. It's obviously more expensive than \$1,500. However, those hours count as grad hours. And the two primary consideration for a teacher's placement on a salary schedule is years of service and the amount of graduate hours they complete. So although there is an increased cost element to that, it also leads to an improvement in their salary when they're hired by that district. So that's one example. The other main thing I think we need to focus on is just we need legislation that's going to help us in our grow our own efforts that were discussed on the preceding bill. You know, in Millard, for example, we started to build clubs that are helping encourage kids to become teachers as early as first or second grade if they've got that love of working with other kids and then encouraging districts to take on the responsibility of a mentor, of mentoring and training individuals that want to become educators. For me, the bottom line is like I grew up in Millard, I graduated from Millard West in 2003 and I went, I went back to Millard West because that was home for me. And I think that's a sentiment that a lot of educators share, is they want to go back to their community and teach. So for me, the better kind of pieces that we need to be working on are what are alternative pathways that focus on recruiting people from within the community and giving them the space to learn and grow as educators so that way they can come and work in our schools. Those are the kinds of programs that I want to see us develop.

**WAYNE:** That sounded like a ten-year plan. What are we going to do in the next four years if we don't have teachers that are, we have, we don't have students without teachers, what are we going to do in the next four years?

**TIM ROYERS:** Yeah, no. Certainly a big element of what I just said is very long term. If we're talking about encouraging second graders to become teachers. The second part of that, though, is, is much more short term, which is, we can, within a year get somebody ready to teach. But rather than having that year of time be dedicated to cram

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for a standardized test to see if you can figure out if you're a good test taker, why don't we give districts the space to say, let us take on the liability of that individual, train them, mentor them, give them that placement experience, and then move them into a teaching role.

**WAYNE:** But aren't they essentially doing that now? If they go work for a school, isn't that school doing the exact same thing? I mean, I mean, OPS isn't going to hire this person from an alternative--

**TIM ROYERS:** Sure.

**WAYNE:** --not have any supervisors, not have any principal, not have any. And if they're a bad teacher aren't they going to get rid of them within that year? So, so the thing you just described--

**TIM ROYERS:** Right.

**WAYNE:** --doesn't start here, it starts when they get hired.

**TIM ROYERS:** We're saying for people that don't have that education background, like pedagogy background, they're going to need that additional field experience to help get them out to the speed. Right now, there's no ability for us to do that without any changes in Rule 20.

**WAYNE:** But that burden is on the school district, if they hire them, right? [INAUDIBLE]

**TIM ROYERS:** That school, that burden is on the school district for any employee that they hire. We're saying that a viable alternative would be to give them additional time before we hire them. That's the piece that we feel is missing right now that would really help fill that gap.

**WAYNE:** And so walk me through that. How do you get additional time before you hire them? Aren't they still interactive? Isn't the additional time actually interacting with students as a student teacher?

**TIM ROYERS:** Sure it is, but it's a difference between being, you know, hired under contract as a first-year educator versus, think of it as a student teaching or practicum experience.

**WAYNE:** Practice, could talk, but now we're not talking philosophy. We're talking about practice. What is that practice? What is the difference practically in the classroom?

**TIM ROYERS:** So when I'm talking about a practicum to student teaching. So like, like for me, even a traditional program, right? My initial practicum experiences where I was going, like I went into North Nodaway High School and northwest Nodaway High School, I think were the two high schools that I went into and then Maryville High School were my three. You know, your first round, you're just doing observations, right? So you're watching an existing teacher and then you work with them afterwards. You talk with them kind of, hey, what were the methods? You know, why did you choose to approach it this way? Why did you provide those accommodations for that student?

**WAYNE:** And who are you having that conversation with, teachers?

**TIM ROYERS:** Yeah, the teachers that you're assigned to.

**WAYNE:** Do you think the teachers right now in Omaha Public Schools and in Millard have time to do all that?

**TIM ROYERS:** They are currently doing it.

**WAYNE:** With, with certain students who have been there, right. But I'm saying overall, what is the problem with bringing people who have real-life experience and shorten it up to help solve this teacher crisis?

**TIM ROYERS:** I think that for a vast majority of students, I think it probably would go smoothly, full disclosure. But if you have and I'm going to speak to something I know Senator Linehan is very passionate about, if you have a student who's, who has dyslexia and I have no training to work with that student with dyslexia, how does my real-world experience prepare me for that?

**WAYNE:** That's the wrong example because we know, we know even the most educated teachers right now in school districts aren't doing that. That's why we have a bill to collect data to figure out why they're not doing it. So that's not a good example because we're not doing that right now. We have a huge problem when it comes to that. So I understand what you're trying to say, but that wasn't a good analogy.

**TIM ROYERS:** With respect, I've worked with several students with dyslexia, and I feel that my training has adequately prepared me to work with them.

**WAYNE:** And so what I will tell you, though, that's not being discovered and being, and being processed and doing and doing proper interventions, so we wouldn't be still dealing with that issue.

**TIM ROYERS:** Sure. But I think we're conflating two different issues, Senator Wayne. I'm all for accountability and making sure our existing teacher force is serving our kids where they are, but you're not answering my question, which is how does someone's life experience help prepare them for, for someone that has special needs and has an individual education plan?

**WAYNE:** Well, normally, I don't answer questions as sitting on this side of the room. But let me, let me explain to you, because nobody can have the same experiences of growing up in north Omaha. I don't care how many degrees you get, where you go through to sit down and interact with somebody and connect with that kid one on one. And that's what the students need in my district. I don't need somebody, no offense to rural Nebraska, come in fresh off the streets, teaching the kids there who have no interaction, no ability to connect with them. So I will take an alternative from somebody from my district who grew up the same way these kids did to make sure they can connect with them. Because one thing I learned is programs don't change people. People change people. So I'm trying to figure out how I can get the best student and the best teacher to connect as an individual relationship, to connect one on one. I don't care where they go to school. I don't care about any of that. I'm looking for people that can relate to students.

**TIM ROYERS:** I think you and I are fully in agreement. That's why I said I think long, that's why I think you will at least, hopefully, we can find common ground on my argument that long-term--

**WAYNE:** I'm all for that.

**TIM ROYERS:** --the best. But I think also to your short-term concern, our contention is for an alternate pathway, if we're choosing between this, which is if you pass a test, you can suddenly be in a classroom, that's a less desirable alternative than we want to work with you and mentor you for an extended period of time so that way you can step in and be successful in the classroom.

**WAYNE:** So here's why this is personal to me, and I'll get off my soapbox. There are about ten people out of my graduating class of Northwest who went to other colleges and went to other school districts outside of the state of Nebraska. And they wanted to come back and teach in OPS when I was on the school board and they didn't meet the state requirements. In order to do so, it was going to cost them a s\*\*\* ton of money. Excuse my language, but they just didn't do it, so they never came back. And so OPS missed out on an opportunity for people to come back home, like you said, but they had a different experience and didn't meet Nebraska requirements. So this may not be the answer, but understand where my passion is coming from is that those are ten, one was a counselor, those were nine individuals, ten individuals that didn't ever come back because there was no alternative pathway. I don't know what the alternative pathway is. I'm just saying if you're willing to work with Senator Linehan to figure something out, I'm willing to help out however I can, but we got to do something to make sure that we can.

**TIM ROYERS:** No, I want to make it crystal clear, we, I fundamental, not just as an NSEA position, but personally because I've had similar experience to try to get people to come back to Nebraska and it's been unsuccessful. I, 100 percent agree with you that we need some viable alternatives. My only position is I don't think this is the right one and I'll work with you. I'll work with Senator Linehan. Absolutely. So I want to make that crystal clear.

**WAYNE:** Fair enough. Appreciate it.

**TIM ROYERS:** I appreciate the dialogue.

**WAYNE:** You're the only one that can get me to answer a question, just want you to know that. (LAUGHTER)

**ALBRECHT:** Thank you, Senator Wayne. Senator Conrad, you have a question?

**CONRAD:** Thank you so much, Vice Chair. Thank you, Tim. Good to see you. I guess I had one question that and Senator Albrecht touched upon this earlier. I'm a new member of the committee, so trying to get up to speed on things. And the last testifier mentioned this as well, but is part of your testimony that this is really an administrative matter that should be dealt with through the Department of Education and Rule 20? Is, is that part of it?



**TIM ROYERS:** That, that is a part of it, absolutely.

**CONRAD:** OK. I just wanted to make sure--

**TIM ROYERS:** Yep.

**CONRAD:** --I was understanding that and just kind of thinking through what the, the right remedy is--

**TIM ROYERS:** Yep.

**CONRAD:** --or the right venue kind of court thing. The other question that I wanted to bring up, and you don't necessarily have to answer, you, you don't know the answer off the top of your head, but I didn't want to catch Senator Linehan off guard in her closing and wanted to give her a chance to start percolating about things. But, you know, one thing I was thinking about as I was reading the legislation and kind of reviewing it again, and it strikes me that this is special legislation or, and/or a closed class or both. Like this seems to be written to assist a specific company with a specific activity, which is not necessarily the goal, the activity, right, to facilitate our shared values, our shared goal of addressing the teacher shortage. We have to get creative. We have to think outside of the box. We have to use all the tools available, right? And I commend Senator Linehan for, for her leadership and thinking creatively in that. But I'm just concerned with the technical drafting of it, that it may, it may not be permissible under our, our broader legal framework. So I just kind of want to think about that. You don't have to answer that.

**TIM ROYERS:** Yeah.

**CONRAD:** I didn't want to catch her off guard in her closing.

**TIM ROYERS:** I don't think it'd be appropriate for me to answer that beyond just say I think your thought process that you just shared would, would mirror a lot of our own thought process when we decided what stance we were going to take on this bill.

**CONRAD:** OK, thanks so much.

**TIM ROYERS:** Yeah.

**ALBRECHT:** Any other questions? Thank you, Senator Conrad. I do have a quick question--

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**TIM ROYERS:** Yeah.

**ALBRECHT:** --for you. You keep referencing the number of states that this program would be in, how, how long somebody should have been in a particular field. But, I mean, with the information that we have and knowing that this was a federal program that we're talking about that started back in 2001, it's been offered in 13 states. There's a 97 percent retention rate over the three-year mark and the national average of 80 percent, 15,000 teachers, we're searching, we're trying to help. And that's where I think we have to look at all the alternatives.

**TIM ROYERS:** Sure.

**ALBRECHT:** I will certainly look into the rule, our last Rule 20. I'll look at the standards. But anything that we can do to help figure out what we can do in the state of Nebraska, maybe it's not for, you know, the big three, but maybe it's for the rural folks.

**TIM ROYERS:** Absolutely.

**ALBRECHT:** I mean, we've got to offer some alternatives. And I appreciate everything that you have brought to us so that we have something to think about. And if we have no other questions, I thank you for coming.

**TIM ROYERS:** Thank you very much.

**ALBRECHT:** Any other opponents?

**WAYNE:** Madam Chair, I do apologize for cussing. It's just, it's been a long summer and I haven't got back into the professional mood. I'm going to start today. You have my promise.

**ALBRECHT:** We will look to bleep [INAUDIBLE]

**WAYNE:** I can do better.

**ALBRECHT:** Hello, sir. How are you?

**JIM WALTER:** Oh, I'm Jim Walter, J-i-m W-a-l-t-e-r. I'm a retired UNL Teachers College and College of Education professor. I've been part of the educational establishment in Nebraska for nearly 50 years. In terms of approval of teacher education programs and approval of programs in schools, I've been extensively involved for 38 years. I'm

an opponent of this particular bill, but I'm a proponent of alternative certification because, as has been expressed here, there is a tremendous need for that. And there's probably a lot of teaching talent that doesn't come through traditional undergraduate teacher education programs. My problem with LB603 is that I don't think it solves any real problems without creating some others. I think that two of the criteria that are irrelevant to me are that the program exists for five years and is found in at least a, for ten years and is found in five states. That doesn't speak to quality at all. And if you want to put into legislation what the qualities of an alternative teacher education program ought to be, that's going to be an exhaustive process. So what I would point to is Rule 20, which has already been mentioned, in Rule 20, which is a 19-page document and a document that I cursed when I was actively working in teacher ed, because it does specify in great detail what the qualities ought to be. But in that particular rule on page five, there is a good description of how the Commissioner of Education can provide alternative-- approval for alternative teacher education programs subject to the review of the State Board. It seems to me that the issue being discussed here belongs either in Rule 20 or in some other rule by the Department of Education. I want to reiterate something that was mentioned earlier, and that is the involvement of teacher candidates in field experiences in the schools. Having alternative experiences or life experiences that prepare you to teach are one thing, but to sit down with children in a real school and go through the rigors of what the classrooms provide is a whole different thing. So whatever the alternative certification program might be, it should involve supervised field experiences as they're going through the program. The other thing is a teacher education program isn't just a series of courses taken in whatever fashion fits somebody's lifestyle. It should be sequenced so that one course builds on another and that practicum experiences are built into that too. So if alternative certification needs to be clarified better, I think it resides in the State Board of Education and not in law.

**ALBRECHT:** Thank you very much. Appreciate it. Any questions for Mr. Walter? Seeing none, thanks for testifying. Any other opponents?

**DE TONACK:** Good afternoon. I don't know if I can talk as quickly as Tim, but I'll give it a good try.

**ALBRECHT:** I can't [INAUDIBLE]

**DE TONACK:** I'm De, D-e, Tonack, T-o-n-a-c-k, from Lincoln. Good afternoon, Vice Chair Senator Albrecht and Education Committee. I am a retired educator and certainly know the importance of this committee and your work. When I signed up to testify on LB603, I really didn't know what category to pick because you don't have a category called caution. I have many questions. There are many bills and efforts that you are working on that are attempting to address the teacher shortage, certification in particular. Thank you. But as already been said, the Department of Education in our state has alternative ways to get a certificate. Tom Wandzilak had to leave. He also worked with UNL but he had the same comment. You're going to go look at Rule 20 and Rule 21 also to see all the details that are in this. This bill mentions a certification organization, already been mentioned, five states, ten years. Somebody must have looked into this to see what groups could already do this. So what are the costs? You've asked that. I hope we do not get caught in that costly web, which the Praxis test has put many of those having to pay. You've heard me, haven't you, Senator Walz, against the Praxis. I've helped tutor on that. It is a bad test and it's a costly test. A pedagogy test mentioned in the bill without accompanying practicums and supervised teaching experiences would not properly evaluate a person's readiness in the classroom. Now, when I read LB188, I think that was last week, that had some good pieces in it about certification, mentions mentoring services. NSEA and many school districts have been supporting that for a long time. Maybe look at some of your other bills, as you often do, and try to find a good blend. Long ago I received an additional certification in physics to add to my certification in mathematics and English, but that was after several classes and some good pedagogy workshops. By the way, Dr. Walter was part of my path to teacher education, and you can tell, he was very good at it. I have to add a piece. I don't have the yellow light yet. Senator Wayne, this isn't in this bill. How can we get teachers? Well, we can pay them a heck a lot more. That's a start. And I'm sure you've heard from other people the challenges, all the things that they're trying to do now. And there is an angry mode, a discipline problem. Help us with that. That's not part of this bill, but please keep looking at that. Thank you for all of your work. Stay with it, please. Any questions?

**ALBRECHT:** Well, thank you for your comments. Appreciate it. Any questions from the committee? Thank you for being here.

**DE TONACK:** Thank you.

**ALBRECHT:** Any other opponents? No opponents. Any proponents, or excuse me. Neutral in the room. Anybody in a neutral? I guess Mr. Walter could have been. Seeing no one in the neutral position, Senator Linehan, would you like to close? We do have two proponents that had sent in and one opponent. We have our close with Senator Linehan.

**LINEHAN:** Thank you. I'm not an expert in this. This was brought to me. And one of the reasons I was swayed by it was it was started by the U.S. Department of Education under Bush. And I'm also swayed because I've known young people around in their late thirties, early forties, who are leaving a career, want to go to another career. The way I understand it now, it's improved from when I first got on the committee. I do think there's more alternate ways to get into education now than there were three or four years ago. But the big difference here is you get somebody who's 40 years old, they got four, three or four kids, maybe two kids, and they've got to pay the bills. And then you're going to ask them to go back to school all the time they're not teaching, they have to be in school because I think it's another, and this I will figure out and we need to figure out in committee. But this is several more hours of college, which college credits are a lot more expensive than they used to be, plus fees. They mentioned it. So it's going to cost you a lot more than \$1,500. I mean, that's the kind of the bottom line here. And I think more broadly, what we're seeing here, there's a tug of war going on, not just in education, but in all kinds of higher education institutions. Are we really still going to have, in today's world, are we going to have people go to classes at a campus, pay the fees when maybe they could take those online classes and cost the students a lot less? There's a, this is a national kind of debate going on. What is the future of higher education? And as the proponents, thank you, opponents, thank you. It's just another thing for us to look at and I do think and again, we see the difference between rural and urban. Is it a crisis or not a crisis? If it's a crisis and you have nobody in the front of the room, seems like this is better than nobody, or a sub and a different teacher every four or five days or a distance teacher. You would know, Senator Walz, the child doesn't like to have a different teacher every two or three weeks. It's not the best situation, so.

**ALBRECHT:** Thank you for your comments. Any questions from the committee? Seeing none, thank you for LB603.

**MURMAN:** So that'll close the hearing on LB603, and we'll open the hearing on LB385. And welcome back, Senator Linehan.

**LINEHAN:** Good afternoon, Chairperson Murman and members of the Education Committee. I am Lou Ann Linehan, L-o-u A-n-n, and I am from Legislative District 39, Elkhorn and Waterloo. Today, I am introducing LB385 and also passing out, are you passing this out, an article that was in the, Joe DeJka had in this morning's Omaha World-Herald: Teacher shortage worsening across the state, state reports. Nebraska's lacking teachers: Compared to other states, our teachers are feeling more stressed and overworked. A survey by the Nebraska State Education Association reported that 63 percent of the teachers felt more stress than previous years. Seventy percent of those teachers also reported they covered classes for college. According to the Department of Education, last year there were 768 unfilled positions in Nebraska; 46 percent of school districts reported that those positions were unfilled because there were no applicants. The lack of teachers in Nebraska is an issue that must be addressed immediately. There is no future for Nebraska if we do not have teachers to instruct the next generation of Nebraskans. What I am proposing with LB385 is a way to incentivize teachers to stay in Nebraska and to stay in teaching. If a first-year teacher completes one year of teaching and signs a contract for a second year, they will see a retention bonus of \$5,000. The bonus will also be available between their second and third year and a third and fourth year. And that comes from talking to administrators. I was at a meeting where both the Skrettas were at and when this came up over a year ago, they lose teachers between the first, second year, second and third year and third and fourth year. It's tough being a new teacher and they're getting other jobs and you're at the lowest part of the scale when you start. So this is an idea and as Senator Walz know, we worked on it last year. The difference with this and last year is we had to pay, it had to go to student debt. Teachers, if they're working for a public institution or a nonprofit, they don't have to pay their student loans. So we're not doing anything for them, if they don't have to pay their student loans. So this would enable basically three years teaching, you get \$15,000. And to address other shortages, because I've been told by community colleges that we have, I will say hundreds, but I felt more like thousands of juniors and seniors who could be taking college credit courses but we don't have dual credit teachers. And we are short of special education teachers and we're short of math teachers and we're short of science teachers. So if you are a teacher now and you go back and you get special ed certificate, math, science, a dual credit certificate, you get \$5,000. To accomplish this separate high end retention grant can be obtained by teachers who meet the full qualifications. It's my intention that this bill is not the only way that school districts incentivize

teachers to stay in their districts. It's my hope that school districts will adopt more policies that will incentivize teachers' recruiting and retention. I did note, I think it was Papillion La Vista just passed a resolution that they're going to pay all their employees a \$3,000 retention bonus this year. Bus drivers, kitchen help, paras, everybody. And it is what, is what seems to work. That's what you see private companies doing. If you want people to stay, you have got to pay. And this money, these funds would be my intention, they would come out of the General Fund and not go through the school system. So the schools don't have to worry about them. It doesn't affect their needs or their resources, it's outside the formula. It's outside of the school's budget. It's between the state of Nebraska. You'd have to run it through the Department of Ed, but it would just be from us, Department of Ed to the teachers, not bookwork or bookkeeping for the school and not to mess up their needs.

**MURMAN:** Thank you, Senator Linehan. Anybody have any questions at this time? Senator Sanders.

**SANDERS:** Senator Linehan, retention cost is always supposed to be lower than recruitment costs. Do you know approximately what we spend on recruitment [INAUDIBLE]?

**LINEHAN:** I do not know. I, I would, it sounds like great. I mean, I see the ads in the papers. We all do for teachers. I assume there's websites. I assume they do other kind of, you know, if you have any cousins want to teach, you a little brother or sister, those kinds of things. I don't know how much the schools spend. I do know I, I went to a program at Westside. I don't know if Dr. Lucas is still here, but they are doing the high school trying to get students interested in teaching. And another thing that I do, and Dr. Logan mentioned this, and I think actually Dr. Blomstedt mentioned this too. This first generation thing is a real deal because historically and this is both more, I think, from Dr. Blomstedt, but I think maybe Dr. Lee mentioned this too at UNO, teachers have historically come from first generation college students because who did they know that went to college? Their teacher. So when they think about going to college, they think about being teachers. So the programs that we're working on, especially I know UNO and other colleges are working on to keep first student, first year, the first generation students in college is very important if we're going to fill this teacher gap. But going back to the last bill, even doing that, that's still four years from now. But the last bill, and I'm not saying it's perfect, I'm willing to work with anybody to make it better. But we got a crisis right now, so we can't

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just do one thing. If it is a crisis, which I believe it is, we're going to have to do several things.

**SANDERS:** Thank you.

**LINEHAN:** You're welcome.

**MURMAN:** Any other questions? If not, thank you. Any proponents for LB385? Afternoon.

**MIKE LUCAS:** Good afternoon. My name is Mike Lucas, M-i-k-e L-u-c-a-s. I'm the superintendent of Westside Community Schools in Omaha. Thank you to all of you for your work as leaders in the great state of Nebraska. As the committee knows, our nation and state have an educator shortage problem. LB385 is definitely a step in the right direction to incentivize teachers to enter and remain in the educational workforce. Several school districts, including Westside, have offered retention stipends in the past year or two, and it has gone over very well. We wish we could do more. We're actually working with our foundation and working to do more as we speak. Our district has not yet seen the damaging effects of the shortage just yet. We don't have any unfilled positions. We've been able to hire all the vacancies that we have, even as we plan for next year. But we want to definitely stay proactive as this is a, is a large concern. LB385 could help pave the way to a more sustainable approach across the state and from district to district. Several high needs areas are targeted, as you know, to include special ed, math, science and technology. That can help in all areas of the state to include rural Nebraska. I often think about my first six years as a superintendent in beautiful Franklin, Nebraska, part of Senator Murman's legislative district, and back in 2003 to 2009, when I was lucky to be a Flyer, we struggled to get applicants. We made some really good math and science hires, but we took them from Wilcox, Hildreth and Minden. And so this would be something that would help all of Nebraska to include Omaha. And Senator Linehan just made a very great point in her opening, while we don't have any unfilled positions at Westside, we're lucky, we are not able to offer all the dual credits that we could, curriculum-wise, because we don't have the certification of teachers in some key spots and we're working on that as well. So again, thank you for all you do and I'd be happy to answer any questions you might have.

**MURMAN:** Thank you. Any questions for Mr. Lucas? If not, thank you very much.



**MIKE LUCAS:** Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Any other proponents for LB385? Hello.

**EDISON McDONALD:** Hello. My name is Edison McDonald, E-d-i-s-o-n M-c-D-o-n-a-l-d. I'm here representing the Arc of Nebraska. We are Nebraska's largest membership organization, representing people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families. We focus on community inclusion because it results in the best treatment outcomes that are the most cost effective. Therefore, we strongly support LB385. Special education advocates have been calling for serious system reform in Nebraska, whether through learning loss, increased use of restraint, increased use of seclusion, school push out, or lack of proper educa-- lack of proper supports for special education staffing is hurting students. When we don't have adequate staffing, this is what happens. Overloaded and under-supported staff are unable to properly support students. Then, when adverse interactions happen, they have a harder time focusing on de-escalation and end up with more dangerous incidents. Policymakers, including Governor Pillen, have responded with a number of potential remedies. These bills could be a historic investment in special education finally fulfilling the promises made when special education was created. The significant shortage of teachers and support staff means that students and teachers are being placed into unsafe conditions and students are suffering from learning loss. This is not a new problem, nor is it solely a Nebraska problem. On the next page you'll see a graph of shortages by departments over the last 20 years. As you can see, the only department area to have shortages every year is special education, followed by STEM at 90 percent. This is not a short-term problem. You can also see in another graph that's included that we have a map of which states have had the worst issues with special education staffing, and Nebraska is in the group of states with the worst issues consistently. While this is not new, COVID has really exploded the impact. Pre-COVID between the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 school years, special educators were 11 percent more likely to leave the classroom and 72 percent more likely to change schools than general education teachers. Now it's clear those numbers are even higher. This issue will continue to be problematic unless we act. So we looked at what other states and districts have done to address this. In Georgia, Maryland, Hawaii and Michigan, they've offered incentive bonuses ranging between \$5,000 and \$15,000 and have seen staffing shortages cut by half or more. This helps in several ways. It ensures the retention of current special education teachers, encourages teachers not currently using their special education

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certification to switch, helps to recruit new teachers and helps to build and encourage a long-term pipeline. While this is only part of the solution, it is key especially as a tool to provide more immediate, immediate fixes to the crisis. Then we can leverage more long-term solutions like increasing state special education funding to 80 percent. Our only concern with this bill is that we believe it would be important to also include paraeducators but at a lower level. The support staff is absolutely critical to ensuring the experience of students with disabilities. Thank you for this opportunity to testify and we urge your support of LB385. Any questions?

**MURMAN:** Any questions for Mr. McDonald? If not, thank you very much. Any other proponents? Hello.

**COLBY COASH:** Thank you, Chairman Murman, members of the committee. My name's Colby Coash, C-o-l-b-y C-o-a-s-h. I represent the Association of School Boards. I'm also testifying on behalf of the Council of School Administrators and for NRCSA. Similar to the first bill I testified on, this is, this is not a new problem. This is just a new one-more tool. A couple of things that I would like to point out that was really appealing about this approach that Senator Linehan did mention. First of all, it is outside the formula and the mechanism goes directly from NDE to the educator. That, that's a clean line, that is helpful. We were very much appreciative of that approach to this bill. And then finally, I would, I would add that as our members looked at this, they were very interested in the certification specializations that Senator Linehan had mentioned, special ed, mathematics, science, technology, and they wanted me to humbly request that the committee add, add agriculture education. As our members looked at this, they saw that as a difficult position to fill as well and wanted to see if that could be part of, of this package to expand it just a little bit. That is my testimony.

**MURMAN:** Thank you. Any questions for Mr. Coash? Senator Briese.

**BRIESE:** Thank you, Chairman. Thank you for your testimony here today. Do you or your organizations consider a program like this a long-term fix if we make it ongoing for years and years?

**COLBY COASH:** I would say a long-term fix is, is changing the perception of education and helping younger students see the education field, teaching field as a career path and not a job. And that's, that's, that takes more than money. That takes culture change. It takes leadership from all levels. And so there's short-term needs and

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long-term fixes. Long term, we have to look at the culture. Short term, these kinds of things are what's needed, particularly in these areas that Senator Linehan has outlined.

**BRIESE:** A program like this is going to serve to bump up salaries for those in years four and beyond, correct?

**COLBY COASH:** Well, I think, if it's a grant, it's, it's, it's one-time. And so being outside of the formula means you're not obligated.

**BRIESE:** Sure. But when the grant dries up, those in years four and beyond are going to expect to be maintained at a similar level, one would think.

**COLBY COASH:** I would see that as a, as an expectation, but.

**BRIESE:** An expectation.

**COLBY COASH:** But not a, not a guarantee.

**BRIESE:** OK. Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Any other questions? If not, thank you very much. Good afternoon.

**COURTNEY WITTSTRUCK:** Good afternoon, Chairman Murman and members of the Education Committee. My name is Courtney Wittstruck. That's C-o-u-r-t-n-e-y W-i-t-t-s-t-r-u-c-k, and I am here representing all six Nebraska community colleges today. So I'm here to provide testimony in support of LB385, which would create recruitment and retention grants for Nebraska teachers. According to a 2022 survey administered by the Nebraska Department of Education, the subject areas that are currently in short supply include the following, many of which Senator Linehan already mentioned, so I won't go through the whole list. But one of the things you mentioned, dual credit, special education and several other things on my list, over, over 12 actually subject areas that are in need, which basically represents almost every area, almost every school district and every type of teacher is in short supply, as you all know. In fact, also, as Senator Linehan mentioned, an article in today's Omaha World-Herald outlined just how critical the teaching shortage in Nebraska is. So at the beginning of the 2022-2023 school year, I think actually Senator Walz mentioned this earlier, there were 768 reported unfilled teaching jobs in Nebraska. And that number, the thing that really stuck out to me was

that it's up nearly 60 percent over last year. So not over a decade, but over last year. And then that represents 2.75 percent of all teaching openings in Nebraska. So it's clear that the teaching shortage in Nebraska needs to be addressed and soon, as everyone, I think, has already testified. And accordingly, Nebraska's community colleges support LB385 in its efforts to do so. Thank you very much for your time.

**MURMAN:** Thank you, Ms. Wittstruck. Any questions? If not, thank you very much.

**COURTNEY WITTSTRUCK:** Thanks so much.

**MURMAN:** Good afternoon.

**LUIS SOTELO:** Good afternoon. Chairperson Murman and members of the Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity. I lead government relations at Doane University. My name is Luis Sotelo, L-u-i-s S-o-t-e-l-o. I value the opportunity to share in this conversation with you to support LB385 on behalf of Doane University. I join this conversation today as a former middle and high school teacher and coach and someone who has spent my entire professional life dedicated to advancing education opportunities for all students because it's through providing quality teachers for our students that all other professions and critical functions of a vibrant democratic society are possible. LB385 moves us in that direction by establishing the Nebraska Teacher Recruitment and Retention Act, which would provide a \$5,000 grant per certified teacher who completes their first year of full-time employment in Nebraska. The act would also offer additional retention and high-need area grants. At Doane University, we are one of Nebraska's top five largest preparers of educators with our College of Education, serving more than 1,050 undergraduate and graduate degree seeking students and more than 500 nondegree seeking students. About 160 of those students are undergraduate students currently preparing to enter the teaching profession. We have front row seats to the tension our students feel as they enter the field that they were genuinely called to do while processing how to make their career financially viable, many with student loans to worry about as well. This scenario is not unique to Doane students and can likely be shared by Nebraska students attending other colleges and universities entering the teaching field. While solving the teacher shortage is truly complex and will take a more holistic approach than the grants included in this bill, I can confirm that students and families are engaging in cost-benefit analyses to decide if teaching is right for

them. Knowing that grants are available may be beneficial to the students making these decisions. Research also informs us that members of Generation Z, the generation that succeeds millennials, the generation that makes me feel old, are even more price conscious. They are pragmatic and will be more hesitant to pay for a college education to enter a field that they may perceive will not pay off. Within this context, Doane University would be supportive of expanding the types of grants offered by the proposed Nebraska Teacher Recruitment and Retention Act. In fact, we see a clear recruiting opportunity into the teaching field if Nebraskans had, Nebraskans had access to \$5,000 grants per college student per year that they are studying to become teachers. This removes some financial barriers to study education. Simply put, we are incentivizing future teachers earlier in the recruitment funnel instead of waiting to see if they are called to teach. I should mention that Senator Walz's Student Teaching Assistance Act found in LB519 also helps with front-end recruiting. On behalf of Doane University, we want to thank you for your hard work and your willingness to collaborate with colleges and universities to reduce the teachers' shortage. We are ready to play our part and help because we know that if Nebraska is to compete economically and compete in fostering strong communities in rural and urban areas, we must work together for the future of all of Nebraska students. Thank you and I'll be happy to answer any questions.

**MURMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Sotelo. Any questions for Mr. Sotelo? OK, thank you very much.

**LUIS SOTELO:** Thank you.

**JEREMY EKELER:** Good afternoon. One more time, my name is Jeremy Ekeler, J-e-r-e-m-y, last name is E-k-e-l-e-r. I'm the associate director of education policy at the Nebraska Catholic Conference. We're here in support of LB385 and have some suggestions for it as well. We are in support of the general approach of addressing teacher recruitment and retention issues. The Catholic Conference was here consistently in past years to support bills related to educator workforce issues in Nebraska schools, including our support of Teaching Nebraska Today Act that passed last year and Senator Sanders military spouses bill as well. First, a look at how we got here. During the pandemic, we discovered that 54 percent of teachers considered leaving the profession within two years. We saw this coming. And now, as we exit the pandemic, we're feeling the fallout. Many public school districts have openings. I think Senator Linehan sent out the story about today. Nebraska Catholic schools are not

immune, especially those in rural communities are reporting that applicants are dwindling, hires are happening later, and new teachers in the profession are few and far between. The Omaha World-Herald reported today that 75 positions remain open in nonpublic schools. My math has it closer to 100. Not all the schools reported back, but this empirical, regardless, this empirical is matching the anecdotal and is being felt in classrooms and school buildings across the state. There are a lot of reasons for this. Research says one is financial. One of them. LB385 helps address this issue by providing financial assistance to first, second and third year teachers, as well as those completing certification in special education, math, science, technology or dual credit. We appreciate the approach of targeting these funds strategically. Every year of teaching is trying, but the first years are the most difficult. I can tell you firsthand, as a former teacher, that it's like drinking from a fire hose as you build curriculum, form your teaching style, mature into professional, and learn to navigate the system. I can also tell you this scenario is just, is all too common. Just as teachers come into their own, professionally, they're still carrying a load of debt. Many of these teachers are considering marriage. They're starting a family and that compels them to find more profitable but less fulfilling careers. So financial assistance goes a long way to support not just the professional but the person launching into the next phase of life. With this in mind, we do have a recommendation, and Senator Briese, your question was one that was on our mind as well about cliff effect, perhaps, with these grants. So one idea rather than \$5,000 may be to go with a lower amount. Right now I think the bill would serve about 2,000 teachers, but we have over 26,000 statewide. So it's safe to assume the bill's reach is short. Lowering the amount would mean we could reach more people. Also, I'm sensitive to this because as a former principal, this would come up providing \$5,000 to newer teachers, boost their overall take-home pay in some cases significantly above their peers, which is, you know, a difficult situation to navigate. Nonetheless, we need to keep new teachers in. So how can we reconcile these things? Maybe talking about the allocation and the allocation amount would be helpful and reduce the cliff effect. The other thing, listening to the discussion here that's not in the notes, we focus this on areas of need in terms of content area. We could also focus on some immediate needs in terms of neighborhoods and areas, sparse, sparse areas, community eligibility provision neighborhoods, basically giving preference to the poorer, the vulnerable and where the need is most necessary right now. So in closing, we're excited to see the creative

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and collaborative approaches like LB385. Just wanted to offer some suggestions, and I'm here for any questions.

**MURMAN:** Thank you. Any questions for Mr. Ekeler? If not, thank you very much.

**JEREMY EKELER:** Thanks.

**MURMAN:** Any other proponents? Thanks for coming up.

**ANDY SCHMIDT:** Thank you very much. I'm probably the noisiest one coming up today. Chairman Murman and senators of the Education Committee, my name is Andy, A-n-d-y, Schmidt, S-c-h-m-i-d-t. I'm an agricultural producer from Deshler, Nebraska, and I serve as a member of the Deshler Public School Board, and I'm vice president of Thayer County Farm Bureau. I'm here today to testify in support of LB385 on behalf of Nebraska Farm Bureau. I want to thank Senator Linehan for bringing this bill to, that will address what I consider to be a crisis retention of education professionals. And I also want to thank Senator Brandt for co-sponsoring this bill. For many of us, it's obvious that there is an issue in Nebraska keeping quality teachers. I think that's been well brought out today. This problem has been brewing for long before the pandemic. Our former superintendent told me five years ago he never believed there would be a teacher shortage, but he believes it now. Since that time, the pandemic has resulted in working conditions that teachers have never encountered, and it's just exacerbated the shortage. Combined with the plethora of other job opportunities to be had in our state, which has the nation's lowest unemployment rate, we are losing teachers at an alarming pace. This effort to provide new teachers with retention grants is just another arrow in the quiver that schools may use to get good teachers to stay. The bill also encourages school districts to incent teachers, and those efforts would be very timely. Thank you for your consideration and I encourage your support. Do you have any questions?

**MURMAN:** Questions for Mr. Schmidt?

**WALZ:** Going to ask a question because he came a long way and he's on crutches and everything so I'm going to ask you a question, gosh. Can you tell us a little bit about the teacher shortage in your area?

**ANDY SCHMIDT:** We, as I said when I testified for the last bill, we are short two teachers right now. We've been short a music teacher this entire school year. We've been filling it with long-term subs. We have

a first grade position open now that normally, elementary positions we have a number of applicants for. We only have one at this time. And in past years, other positions we've filled, normally you'd have several applicants. We're lucky to have one. So it's, it's real. It's out there and in visiting with our superintendent, I asked him about this particular bill and he said anything to help.

**WALZ:** Well, thank you for coming up today.

**ANDY SCHMIDT:** You bet. Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Any other questions from Mr. Schmidt? If not, thanks a lot.

**ANDY SCHMIDT:** Thank you for your time.

**MURMAN:** Any other proponents? Are there any opponents for LB385? Anyone want to testify in the neutral position?

**TIM ROYERS:** I just want to do all three. I did support and opponent and I figured I'd do neutral on the third, no, I'm just kidding. All right. Well, for the final time, good afternoon, members of the Ed Committee. For the record, my name is Tim, T-i-m, Royers, R-o-y-e-r-s. I'm the president of the Millard Education Association, again, speaking on behalf of the Nebraska State Education Association in a neutral capacity on LB385. First, I want, kind of weird that Senator Linehan is back here, but I get why. I want to thank you, Senator Linehan, sincerely for proposing this, because as everyone else has said, this is a growing problem. It's not a new problem. It's a problem that the pandemic has simply exacerbated. And so we appreciate you sincerely putting a spotlight on this and we look forward to continuing to work with you and others on this issue. That being said, while we are supportive of the general effort to provide state level grant programs to tackle retention recruitment for the reasons that all the supporters said, the reason I'm testifying in a neutral capacity today is because, as written, we feel there are several specific components of the bill that we would like to see modified to maximize the potential impact for educators in Nebraska. First and foremost, the bill, as written, primarily provides payments to those in the first three years of their teaching career. And again, I want to acknowledge a \$5,000 per teacher amount is a significant and needed investment. But we have concerns that those retention efforts stop after a teacher's third year, and we have those concerns for two reasons. First is one of the ones that Senator Briese alluded to, you know, for, for teachers moving from their third to fourth year, this



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will create a steep drop off in take home pay because most starting teacher salaries are in the high thirties or low forties. So losing \$5,000 of additional income would be a significant percentage. The second reason we're concerned about the limited window of eligibility is we believe that all teachers deserve retention compensation for the work they've done regardless of their years of service, especially given everything that they've done these past few years. From a retention standpoint, and I'd love to discuss this more with you, we are actually more concerned about losing our mid and late career educators currently than we are our early career educators. Additionally, the high need grant also has what we feel is a too limited degree of availability. As written, it says that eligible teachers must both teach and complete the certification in one of the areas of need between 2024 and 2027. So if I already teach special education right now, for example, I am not eligible to receive the grant for an area of high need. And again, as someone who taught in one of those areas of identified need as a dual enrollment instructor, I want to emphasize the appreciation I have for the focus being brought to these areas, but by limiting the eligibility to only those who are newly certified, we're concerned that it would have a negative consequence and make, and actually make our veterans in those areas more likely to leave after the bill, not less. Finally, we want to highlight the funding for this bill. The recommended allocation of \$10 million in the General Fund would mean that at a maximum the state could disburse at most 2,000 grants. We feel that's far below the number of potentially eligible educators and we believe the bill must be adequately funded to help provide retention payments for all educators. And again, as you all work on this bill, I would be cognizant of the Governor, what the Governor is attempting to do with the separate education fund. I feel like there's some great synergy that could happen there with those pieces. I want to reiterate that there are incredibly strong concepts in this bill that we support, but that there are also big enough question marks surrounding the specifics of the bill that we believe need to be addressed before we can take a stance in support. I ask the committee to seriously consider our feedback and make the necessary modifications to this bill so it will help Nebraska retain our high-quality educators. My thanks to Senator Linehan again for bringing this forward, and I thank the committee for its time and consideration.

**MURMAN:** Any questions for Mr. Royers? If not, thank you very much.

**TIM ROYERS:** Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Any other testifiers in neutral position? Good afternoon.

**BEN WELSCH:** Well, afternoon. Thank you, Chairman Murman, members of the Education Committee. My name is Ben Welsch, B-e-n W-e-l-s-c-h. I'm here today to speak as a local teacher and negotiator from Hastings as neutral with concerns for LB385. First, I want to thank Senator Linehan for introducing LB385. This bill would add much needed money to help educators continue the great work of teaching students in our schools. These dollars would help recruit new teachers into the profession and help fill vacancies across the state. Keeping teachers in the profession during a teaching shortage is vital to keep schools running and students learning. However, LB385 falls short when it comes to teacher retention and potential cliff effect after this grant runs out. As a local negotiator who works with our school board to support teachers through collective bargaining, I know the top priority of our districts is to compensate our educators equitably and fairly. We are always looking for ways to help recruit and retain our teachers in our district during those discussions. We weigh the needs of our new educators as well as our veteran educators. It's important that LB385 do the same. We need to find the right balance of using these funds to not only recruit teachers, but also to retain the teachers who have worked tirelessly for our students for many years. I believe some changes to the bill would be more equitably and fairly help our teachers no matter where they are in their teaching careers. Others have already talked about the specifics of who is eligible, sorry. Others have already talked about the specifics of the LB385 dollars. I want to focus how these teacher grants and incentives would stack up inequitably for educators across the state. Let me highlight a few possible scenarios of that, those disparities for teachers that who could face with these grants based on how LB385 is currently written to skew dollars towards recruitment. Take a first-year math teacher who's already getting a \$1,000 signing bonus at their local school district. That teacher could also get a \$2,500 Department of Labor grant as a math teacher. That's a total of \$3,500 in incentives that were granted before the possibility of this LB385, which would add 5,000 more dollars. Now, while \$8,500 is great for teacher recruitment, it's not quite as fair to our veteran teachers who have already been teaching for many years. Some teachers could get three or more incentives in one year at the expense of others. Another example is a third-year career and technical ed teacher who receives the \$2,500 Department of Labor grant. Again, you add the \$5,000 to the LB385 dollars and they would get another \$7,500. Again, great for retaining our younger teachers, but what we are doing or what could we

do for the fifth-year art teacher? Well, they don't get a signing bonus. There's no Department of Labor grant. There's no LB385 money. That fifth-year art teacher doesn't qualify. Our 10, 20, 30-year teachers in social studies, music, English and elementary would be, would be eligible for zero dollars under LB385 as written. There are no retainment dollars available to any of these other veteran teachers throughout the state. I'm asking the committee to consider making LB385 equitable and fair by providing our veteran teachers with the opportunity to receive those incentive dollars as well. Our goal must be to support and help all our Nebraska teachers as we work to combat our teacher shortage. Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Any questions for Mr. Welsch? If not, thank you very much.

**BEN WELSCH:** Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Any other testifiers in a neutral position? If not, Senator Linehan, you're welcome to close. And while she's coming up, we have 12 proponents for the bill, zero opponents and zero neutral.

**LINEHAN:** I'd like to thank you, the committee, for sitting here all afternoon and listening to all this. And I would like to thank the proponents and opponents and neutral testifiers. I will go on the cliff effect. Here is my understanding. I know, I'm not surprised that NSEA is not supportive of this bill as written. The way we pay teachers is different than most other professions, young people going to [INAUDIBLE] college. Most professions, if you're a nurse, you don't make twice as much because you just get out. You make, you make whatever a nurse who's been a nurse for 20 years makes because they need nurses and they pay nurses. In teaching, we start them at a lower wage and they gradually go up. They get a master's degree. I think it's a \$10,000 bump. I should have and didn't, but will when we talk about this in committee, I will bring a, examples of how teachers pay scales work. Like you get so much more for every year you're there. You get more for degrees you have and you get more for [INAUDIBLE]. My idea was this. You get out of college, you're broke, you want it, you get a job, you're going to need a car. So you got to buy a car. If you're going to commit to that community, you might want a down payment on a house. These kinds of funds would help you keep that student in Beatrice or Lewiston. But if they're out there starving to death with no family and they, a car that breaks down every two months, you're not going to keep them. They're going to go home where they can live with mom and dad. We've got, I mean, the point is getting young people to stay in teaching. Do we pay teachers enough?

It's a whole different subject. The other problem, it's not, problem is the wrong word, challenge, is the benefit packages are very generous. So a teacher who's got to pay their dues and their retirement, which is 10 percent of their salary, so let's say they're making \$40,000; \$10,000 of that, excuse me, \$4,000 of that goes to retirement and dues. They also have to pay Social Security. Another 7.5 percent, throw on a few taxes, it's 20 percent. So they're, they're taking home like not enough money, guys. So there's a lot of things we need to fix here but my idea on this was how do you keep them teaching? How do you help them get through those years when they have basically nothing, not even a wardrobe. I mean, they've been going to college. I did try to address the more senior teachers by saying, as Dr. Lucas said, we have way too many high school kids that should be getting college credits, which would save them money because they have to pay less when they go to college. It makes better use of our facilities that are hundreds of millions of dollars, and what we're short is of teachers. So we need more dual credit teachers. I'm happy to add on the ag, but I think when we, I'll be quiet now, but we come back, we need to look at how the pay is structured now. And I think that will better explain how I wrote the bill.

**MURMAN:** Thank you. Any further questions for Senator Linehan? Senator Conrad.

**CONRAD:** Thank you, Senator Linehan. I think this is a really informative and powerful hearing today, I really appreciate it. As you go back and talk with different stakeholders and I'm sure the committee would perhaps be interested in helping, I'm just wondering if there's some maybe creative financing that we could explore with, say, for example, unused ARPA dollars that might go for like some short-term re-- recruitment or retention bonuses to kind of address pandemic-related issues. That would take some pressure off the General Fund fiscal note and then perhaps think about our General Fund finances moving forward. Just wanted to throw that in creatively, if there was a possibility.

**LINEHAN:** In the Governor's talking points when we, when Senator Sanders is, I think Senator Sanders, is that next week, whenever her bill is [INAUDIBLE], she talks about retention, teachers' retention. So I'm hoping that they're thinking there's some money there. But yeah, I'm willing to do anything because you can't, yeah, you can't have kids with no teacher. The teacher is the most important thing in that classroom.

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**CONRAD:** Agree.

**LINEHAN:** Not the colors of the walls or how many gadgets they have, but the teacher in front of the classroom.

**CONRAD:** I agree. Thank you.

**LINEHAN:** Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Thank you. Any other questions for Senator Linehan? I guess I've got one, maybe yet. This bill would help to incentivize of course getting teachers, getting them started. I'm all for paying teachers more. I think teachers are underpaid, but I would really like to have more of an incentive type program to pay, you know, pay the best teachers even more. Any ideas on that? I know it's complicated subject.

**LINEHAN:** Very, very complicated.

**MURMAN:** You don't have to answer if.

**LINEHAN:** No, I mean, I know it's a perennial argument, right, about how they're paid. I do think and I was, pulled up Millard's pay scale. And this is what we need to dig into. It's easier, I think, for some people to make more money, because if you're a coach, you get a stipend. If you're this, you, you know, that a lot of things that teachers used to do for free, frankly, they're expected to do. My sister was a teacher for probably 30 years and she didn't have any children. This just shows how much the world has changed. I guess she didn't want them, she doesn't have children, so she was expected to sponsor the FHA Club, sponsor the Pep Club, be a class sponsor, teach home ec, and didn't get any extra money for that. So that's changed. I'm not saying it's great, but it's at least now you don't expect them to dedicate their whole life. Way back when you used to take teachers about how many kids they had, what they're, you know, so it's gotten better. We still have some work to do.

**MURMAN:** Thank you. Any other questions for Senator Linehan? Thank you very much. That will close the hearing for LB385 and close the hearings for today. Thank you all for coming.