

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Urban Affairs Committee March 7, 2023

LOWE: Welcome to the Urban Affairs Committee. Today is March 7, 2023, and I am Senator John Lowe from the District 37. Before I start, I would like each Senator to introduce themselves, starting at my right.

HARDIN: Brian Hardin, District 48: Banner, Kimble, and Scotts Bluff Counties.

BLOOD: Good afternoon, Senator Carol Blood representing District 3, which is western Bellevue and eastern Papillion, Nebraska.

J. CAVANAUGH: Good afternoon. John Cavanaugh, District 9, midtown Omaha.

LOWE: Thank you. Legal counsel is Elsa Knight and committee clerk is Raquel Dean. The pages today are Sophia, she is a political science and prelaw senior, and Logan, political science and criminology, both at UNL. Today and before all hearing-- today and before all hearing, all bills to be heard will be posted outside the hearing room. The senator introducing the proposed legislation will first present. Senators who serve on the committee are encouraged to ask questions for clarification. That said, the presenter and those testifying are not allowed directly to question the senators serving on this committee. For purposes of accuracy to record, we ask each presenter to state their own name and then spell it. That is so the transcribers can get the information down correctly. If you're planning to testify today, please fill out the testifier sheets that are on the table at the back of the room. Be sure to print clearly and fill it out completely. This is important. When it is your turn to testify, give the testifier sheet to the page or the committee clerk. If you do not wish to testify but would like to indicate your position on the bill, please complete and sign the sign-in sheet on the back of the table. The sheet will be included as an exhibit in the official hearing of the record. Your Urban Affairs Committee, we use a light system to promote maximum encouragement in the engagement of those wishing to express their position on the proposed legislation before us. The light system will be for 5-- 3 minutes, with 2 minutes on green, 1 minute on yellow. And when the red light comes on, we ask you to conclude your testimony quickly. We recognize opponents, then-- we recognize proponents and then opponents and then neutral testifiers. We will also acknowledge-- acknowledge letters received from all concerned parties. Should you have handouts you wish to share, please share ten copies or ask the clerk to make copies for you. The clerk will then distribute any handouts to all committee members. The following proponents and opponents and neutral testimony-- testimony,

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the bill presenter is offered the opportunity to close with final remarks. As a committee, we will work diligently to give a fair and full hearing. We will make every effort to accommodate special requests of assistance. At this hearing, we ask you to be respectful to the process and to one another. Please silence and turn off your cellphones. And with that, Senator DeBoer, you are first up.

DeBOER: Thank you. Good afternoon, Senator Lowe and members of the Urban Affairs Committee. My name is Wendy DeBoer, W-e-n-d-y D-e-B-o-e-r. I represent the 10th Legislative District in northwest Omaha, and I'm here today to introduce LB424, which creates the Department of Housing and Urban Development in Nebraska. I'm so excited to see so many people who are here today. I'm sure they're all here to talk more and more about consolidating, focusing, and making more efficient housing in Nebraska. The committee here is incredibly familiar with the importance of housing in this state, the high needs we have for more workforce housing, for safe homes for our families to live in and the dearth of these options throughout the state. You might remember at Legislative Council meeting this past fall, we had panels on both the rural and the urban issues in Nebraska, and both identified housing as a top issue. So this is not just an urban issue. It's not just a rural issue. This is across our state. As a Legislature, we have worked on and passed many different pieces of legislation to address housing just in my five years. Many pieces, and the efforts extend beyond those five years. But one thing that has been lacking throughout all of those efforts is a unified voice on the needs of the state. Housing policy and coordination occurs across multiple different agencies. The Department of Economic Development, the Depart-- the Department of Health and Human Services, the Nebraska Investment Finance Authority, or NIFA, and the Department of Environmental-- Environment and Energy just to name a few. This dispersed responsibility can create confusion for our families and our businesses when looking for housing help, whether it's buying, renting or building, and it creates inefficiencies in our government in general. I want to be clear that LB424 is not an indictment of the work of any of our state agencies and what they have done with respect to housing. Rather, this bill is about creating a consolidated department to coordinate our state housing efforts. Having a department that is answerable to the Legislature and the government-- Governor would help us to better work on housing issues in a coordinated manner. The department would be able to collaborate with all stakeholders and make sure everyone is aware of the efforts going on across the state. The new Housing and Urban Development Department will also be able to use the expertise of other state housing

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departments across the nation. Twenty other states currently have a housing department in some form. And I passed out to you a map earlier that shows those departments of housing. The red states do not have them; the green do. It's kind of a mix across the country. So now I'll pause for a second for my prepared comments and say this. It may be that this committee, with its expertise in these manners, may say, OK, we don't want to have the Housing Department the way it's designed in the bill. That's OK. I want the idea of how are we going to consolidate and coordinate our housing needs across the state. One thing that I have heard this session is a bill in the Transportation and Telecommunications Committee on the Broadband Office. And so the Governor has created a broadband office to be housed within the Nebraska Department of Transportation just so that they can share administrative costs, but that they will focus on broadband throughout the state. This is a little bit what I could envision for here. So having a, a coordinator, a person who could be in charge, they can share administrative costs with another department. It isn't about creating more government, but in fact less by having someone who's going to do this. We called the broadband guy the "broadband czar," so I think this could be the "housing czarina." And we need somebody who's going to get all of these things, put them in the same direction, and make sure that folks who are looking to solve some of these housing problems have one-stop shop to go to and talk to all of the folks about how they're going to address these needs throughout our state. It's not going to become a smaller problem. It's going to become a bigger problem. We are, in every community in Nebraska, short housing. So how do we solve that problem? And I am happy to work with this committee to give wide latitude to how we construct that solution. I just think the time has come for a solution, and I'm happy to answer any questions that you have.

LOWE: Thank you, Senator. Are there any questions? Senator Blood.

BLOOD: Thank you, Senator Lowe. Thank you for bringing this forward. I agree there is definitely more that needs to be done, but I have to bring a concern forward. Did you read Nicole Barrett's response yet online?

DeBOER: I think the gist of what I read for most of them is we have something that's working, why, why change it?

BLOOD: So actually, I think it's more complicated than that. It appears that there are some programs that might falter as a result of that, as well as multiple areas in state statute that haven't been addressed within the bill to-- that need to be modified in order to

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create, to create this type of fund. So have you talked to her in reference to this?

DeBOER: No, I haven't had a chance to talk to her.

BLOOD: OK.

DeBOER: I-- what fund? You said a fund.

BLOOD: It's a really long email, so to take up the time and read every paragraph-- but part of it says there's no language in LB424 that modifies Nebraska reverse Statute-- Revised Statute 71-812, which creates a Behavioral Health Services Fund and authorizes the DBH housing-related assistance program. There's also no language in LB424 to change Nebraska Revised Statute 76-903, which is the stamp tax that funds the DBH program. She lists a lot of concerns in reference to the language, which you've already said you're open to changing.

DeBOER: Yes.

BLOOD: That's why I was hoping that you had met with her--

DeBOER: No.

BLOOD: --to kind of discuss these issues.

DeBOER: She didn't come up to me, no.

BLOOD: And then my personal question is, why the executive branch? The executive branch has screwed so many things up over the last almost two decades. Why do we want to give them something else to screw up?

DeBOER: Well, I mean, it already is under the executive branch, right? All of these departments are under the executive branch that are now overseeing pieces of the, the housing issue. So I'm not saying we move it around or-- I mean, this is, this is where it belongs. It belongs with the executive branch. That's where the kind of administering of these kinds of things belongs. It's where it is now. It just needs to be consolidated into one person. That doesn't mean we would take everything out of DHHS. If there's a behavioral health housing fund that's over there and it properly belongs there, that's fine. We need a coordinator. And in terms of the specific things to address, that's fine. We need a coordinator who's going to sort of take all of those things and make sure that we're not overlapping, right? We might have things in one hand over here and one over here, and we're overlapping things. I mean, we should be making sure that we're getting the most

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out of every dollar we put into housing here so that it's going towards all the people who need it and not just sort of at an ad hoc basis.

BLOOD: And I agree complete with that. But I think there's a lot of technical issues that are going to have to be addressed first. One of them also pertains to those living with AIDS and housing. How it-- how the bill is written, they feel, eliminates oversight at the HOPWA program, which helps house people with AIDS. So I think there's definitely some mechanical things that might be bigger than this committee that need to be resolved with DHHS.

DeBOER: I can--

BLOOD: Again, love the concept.

DeBOER: I can work with them.

BLOOD: Very concerned about some of the issues that are stated.

DeBOER: I can work with them. And, again, like-- since we're sort of shifting gears to not create an entire department but instead creating the czarina of housing, I think maybe some of those issues would not be quite as pronounced.

BLOOD: Thank you, Senator DeBoer.

LOWE: Thank you, Senator Blood. Are there any other questions? Seeing none. Will you be staying for close?

DeBOER: Yeah.

LOWE: Thank you.

DeBOER: Thank you.

LOWE: We will now be taking proponents. Are there any proponents here today? Welcome.

BRAD MEURRENS: Good afternoon, Senator Lowe and members of the committee. For the record, my name is Brad, B-r-a-d, Meurrens, M-e-u-r-r-e-n-s, and I am the public policy director at Disability Rights Nebraska. We are the designated protection and advocacy organization for persons with disabilities in Nebraska, and I'm here in support of LB424. People with disabilities comprise about 13 percent of our state's population, just shy of 250,000 people. And

there are Nebraskans with disabilities in every single county. Over one-fifth, 21.9 percent of Nebraskans with disabilities aged 18 to 64 live in poverty, just shy of the national 25.4 percent. Only 10.7 percent of their peers without disabilities live in poverty. The gap between employed Nebraskans with disabilities and those without is 32.2 percentage points. People with disabilities are more likely to experience being in poverty for over one year. Poverty, of course, limits housing options and disability limits those options even further. Accessible housing is very scarce. Consequently, the overlap between disability and homelessness is significant. Nearly one-quarter of individuals experiencing homelessness have a disability, whether that be a physical, intellectual, developmental or mental disability. Vincent Litwinowicz's story on KETV demonstrates in stark reality the issues at play here: the interplay between housing, disability, homelessness, and public policy. And I would strongly encourage you to go watch the, the, the KETV story. It is illustrative. Homeless shelters are often not accessible, especially for those folks who require an assistive technology device or equipment such as a power wheelchair. Thus, relying on shelters, on shelters is an insufficient answer to the issue of homelessness and disability. When denied access to shelters, nearly seven in ten people with disabilities will stay in dangerous locations, like on a sidewalk or under a bridge. Housing is the centerpiece of an individual's personal life across their lifespan and a cornerstone to living independently. Accessible, affordable housing for persons with disabilities is vital to supporting their overall well-being. The bill intends that every resident of the state should have access to safe, decent and affordable housing, and it charges this new department with several goals that are pertinent to persons with disabilities. For example, to administer programs providing for the housing needs of all Nebraska residents, and that should include persons with disabilities. Talking about [INAUDIBLE] housing types, shortages of all types of housing. So we would support that a centralized housing department will provide a location where persons with disabilities in the disability community can bring their issues without having to figure out who's doing what and in what departments. Ideally, we would like to be able to acknowledge the need for accessibility in housing policy, including a focus on disability as well as affordability and having some representation from the disability community on the commission that's formed in the bill. As a result, we support the bill and would ask for the committee to advance the bill. I'll take any questions you have.

LOWE: Thank you, Mr. Meurrens. Are there any questions? Yes, Senator Cavanaugh.

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J. CAVANAUGH: Thank you, Senator Lowe. Thank you for being here, Mr. Meurrens.

BRAD MEURRENS: Sure.

J. CAVANAUGH: So I don't-- if you've heard the kind of criticisms that Senator Blood was raising from the submitted testimony. I don't-- you probably don't get to see the-- I think they're only available to us. But some of it was that-- I mean, there's-- I guess some of the criticism is about the programs are working as-- working well now and we don't need to mess with them as-- is that your experience, is that the housing programs are not really working?

BRAD MEURRENS: No, not at all. The, the, the, the rate of homelessness is high within the disability community. The difficulties in finding accessible housing that's affordable and accessible is, is extremely difficult. Again, watch-- go check out the, the KETV story. You'll talk to-- it'll say-- admissions from folks in the housing departments will talk about how the ability to find a house or a housing that will accommodate a person's wheelchair is very difficult. So I don't know if they're working as well for folks with disabilities as, as it might seem. And I think Senator DeBoer has a convincing argument, that that doesn't-- that's not a criticism of the bill. That's not a reason to-- that's not a reason to reject the bill. That's a reason to work with the Senator to figure out how can we coordinate and figure out is there a [INAUDIBLE] location where we can have all this information in [INAUDIBLE] and coordinate? I don't see-- I don't see-- I don't see it as a criticism. I think it's a-- I think it's a, a point that we need to do some coordination.

J. CAVANAUGH: I like, I like constructive criticism. Could you give us the name of that story again from KETV?

BRAD MEURRENS: Yeah, sure. It's called-- it's entitled Handicap-- which is, which is not a word we would prefer-- Homelessness, A Growing Problem in Nebraska, KETV, August 13, 2015. And I've given you the link on the-- and if you want, I'd be happy to email you--

J. CAVANAUGH: Oh, it's in the-- OK.

BRAD MEURRENS: I'll email you the link if you want.

J. CAVANAUGH: I appreciate that. I'll take a look at it. Thank you.

LOWE: Thank you, Senator Cavanaugh. Are there any other questions? Seeing none, thank you, Mr. Meurrens.

BRAD MEURENS: Sure.

LOWE: Other proponents? Welcome.

KRISTEN LARSEN: Hi. Good afternoon, Senator Lowe and other Senators. My name is Kristen Larsen. That's spelled K-r-i-s-t-e-n L-a-r-s-e-n, and I'm here on behalf of the Nebraska Council on Developmental Disabilities to testify in support of LB424. Although the Council is appointed by the Governor and administrated by DHHS, the Council operates independently, and our comments do not necessarily reflect those of the Governor's administration or the department. We are a federally mandated independent council, and our membership is comprised of individuals and families of persons with developmental disabilities, community providers and agency reps who advocate for systems change, equality services. And when necessary, we take a nonpartisan approach to provide education and information on legislation that would impact individuals with developmental disabilities. The bill, this bill, LB424, is an important bill because it would create the Department of Housing and Urban Development as an executive branch agency under the Governor. The DHUD would administer and serve as the lead state agency for state programs related to housing and homelessness and provide state oversight of and assistance to housing authorities. Every resident of the state, including people with disabilities, should have access to safe, decent, and affordable housing. Current efforts to address issues related to housing in the state are fragmented between multiple agencies, and creating this department will streamline housing endeavors. DHUD would administer programs that provide for the housing needs of all Nebraska residents with a focus on affordable housing and workforce housing and middle-income housing. I see the light has come on and I have a lot to go on here. I just want to say that this bill would-- ties in directly to the Olmstead Plan. The Council's been very active in the Olmstead Plan. And I reference a report that was conducted and submitted to the Legislature on January 1, 2021, prepared by Technical Assistance Collaborative, which really notes that there's been little progress in making, in making sure that we have safe, affordable and, most importantly, accessible housing for individuals with developmental disabilities. It is critical. They are a missing Steering Committee mene-- member on the Steering Committee, and we really need to have a more-- a place to streamline those areas. And, you know, so that's the main part. I'm trying to put it through the Olmstead lens, if that helps. And then I, I echo what Brad says, that we need to have representation on the commission as well during the strategic study to make sure that the person-- that people with disabilities, that that lens is incorporated into that report.

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McKINNEY: Thank you. Are there any questions from the committee?
Senator Cavanaugh.

J. CAVANAUGH: Thank you, Chairman. Thank you for being here, Ms. Larsen. Just to clarify, so you're suggesting that's a change to this bill is to add some more representation on the committee?

KRISTEN LARSEN: Yes, absolutely. You know, it talks about the nine members that would be oppo-- you know, be appointed to the commission. I would encourage another one be a person with a disability who has some subject-matter expertise in accessible housing. I also talk about-- you know, we talked about how this intersects with policy. And the policy of universal design is another component that needs to be looked at. You know, when you-- if you think about universal design, when you and I go into Walmart and we step on that, that, that door and the doors open, that, that makes it accessible for people in wheelchairs as well as moms with strollers and all of us. Universal design makes it easier to make-- to build on and add those accessible pieces as needed. And I think that's another area that we need to work with folks in construction to understand whether-- when they're developing housing and building new housing.

J. CAVANAUGH: Thank you.

McKINNEY: Thank you. Are there any other questions? No? Thank you.

KRISTEN LARSEN: Thank you.

McKINNEY: Are there other proponents?

JENNIFER HERTING: Hi. Good afternoon. My name is Jennifer, J-e-n-n-i-f-e-r, Herting, H-e-r-t-i-n-g, and I am here strongly in favor of LB424 while recommending that the proposed Department of Housing and Urban Development would adopt accessibility in addition to the defined needs for access to safe, decent and affordable housing. Albeit a seemingly small change in wording would mean for a large impact on the growing community of aged and disabled Nebraskans with housing insecurity. I am a social worker in northeast Omaha, specifically working with families that have children with profound medical needs and disabilities. A daily conversation I have with families is the concern for no available housing that is accessible that they can manage with limited and fixed income. There is always a raise to their current rent or the owner wants to sell the house or the cost of necessity keeps raising, but their SSI does not move. I see this happen constantly, and I go through the same steps. You know,

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we apply for Section 8. We talk about family they can stay with. We scour apartment complexes for accessible units on ground floor. But eventually I come to my last resort, which is calling shelters in Omaha. Usually, they present the same limitations every time, and I call regularly hoping for a change in policy, maybe a change in heart. I hear commonly, we can't take such high medical needs. It's too much of a liability. In reference to formula for a child's two feedings, I was told that residents are not allowed to have food in their rooms or that there's space in the emergency shelter, but those are cots on the floor. Time and time again, I tell families I wish I had better answers and I don't know where to turn. I seek out solutions, programs to help families lower household expenses and community organizations that help with housing. Although this problem hasn't showed up to my front door, it's also not that far away from me. I am the proud little sister to my brother Brandon, a 30-year old with intellectual, developmental and physical disabilities. He has cerebral palsy with a Gross Motor Function Classification of level four. This means that he is dependent on a wheelchair for all mobility and can take some steps for short distances when receiving extensive physical and weight-bearing support. He currently lives with my mom in a house that's a raised ranch. And every time he comes in and out of the house, he has a choice to walk the stairs in our basement or up the grassy hill in the yard. Stairs are challenging and he will avoid them at all costs. So every day, rain, six inches of snow on the ground, Brandon chooses to walk up the hill in our front yard to his home. This house is not accessible to him, but we make it work. This is the reality for many Nebraskans across the state. Just because a person with a disability lives there does not mean it's accessible. All Nebraskans should have safe, decent, affordable, and accessible housing without limitation. Any questions?

McKINNEY: Are there any questions from the committee? No? Thank you.

JENNIFER HERTING: Thank you.

McKINNEY: Are there other proponents? Is anybody here to speak in opposition?

GENE ECKEL: Good afternoon, Chairman McKinney and members of the Urban Affairs Committee. My name is Gene Eckel. That's G-e-n-e E-c-k-e-l. I'm a board member for the Nebraska Association of Commercial Property Owners and the Apartment Association of Nebraska. We are here today to oppose LB424 for a couple of reasons. One, if this bill is seeking to regulate the public housing agencies, then we are concerned that we do not believe that the state has that authority to do that because the

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public housing agencies are regulated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Second, we believe that the state's financial resources should be used to find ways to immediately subsidize and provide economic incentives for the development of more housing that could be offered to Nebraska citizens at an affordable price. Due to the dire situation that we have now for the lack of affordable housing, that time should be focused. Instead of building a, or creating a new agency, is actually finding ways to start building as fast as we can the safe, affordable housing. Further, as you look at this bill, we saw that the current structure of the proposed Housing Advisory Commission to be created under this legislation neglects to include the multifamily industry, which is one of the most important stakeholders in its goal to create affordable housing in Nebraska. I'd be happy to answer any questions that you may have that I can answer. Thank you very much for your time.

McKINNEY: Thank you. Are there any questions from the committee?
Senator Cavanaugh.

J. CAVANAUGH: Thank you, Chairman. Thank you for being here. Nice to see you, Mr. Eckel.

GENE ECKEL: Thank you, Senator.

J. CAVANAUGH: So, I mean, I guess you're saying, what, the biggest thing we can do is streamline and get more houses, more residences, whatever, properties built, is that right?

GENE ECKEL: That's our-- that would be our goal. And that's part of one of the things we've been working with the city of Omaha on their affordable housing action plan.

J. CAVANAUGH: Isn't there a version of this idea that does that, that streamlines the process so you have a one-stop place so that-- I mean, I know you've been around for a while.

GENE ECKEL: Sure.

J. CAVANAUGH: But you might know where to find all of the incentives and things. But new developers come along. They got to go to NIFA. They got to go to DHHS. They got to go city of Omaha. They got to go to all these different places to find incentives. If we put it all in one place, couldn't they make one call and that would eliminate the hurdles to more, more development?

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GENE ECKEL: The concept is there, and I think it's a good concept. Streamline it, make it simple. The problem is trying to figure out the best way to make that streamlined, especially when we're having to deal with, you know, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. I, I think it-- one approach would be that we talk with HUD, talk with the, you know, Secretary Fudge and see, well, how can we get this done in Nebraska to streamline it both at the federal level and the state and local level? I think that's the first thing we should look at. So the concept is fine, but I don't think right now-- the way it's currently written, I think there would be some problems with that. And, again, if we do come with a method to streamline it and we can work with the, the federal government to create something like this, then I think that there would definitely need to be on that commission members for the multifamily industry that are not included in this bill because, again, we're here to help solve the problem. We can build. We just need to be able to be part of that conversation so we can help.

J. CAVANAUGH: And you probably haven't seen the map that Senator DeBoer circulated, but it looks that maybe about half of the states have some kind of programming like this. Are you familiar-- is there a particular state you would point to as a model for one that works?

GENE ECKEL: I don't. And I'd be happy to take a look at that, that map and let's see what the other states have. Maybe-- again, if this, if this bill is not looking to regulate the public housing agencies, then maybe that's not going to be an issue. But if it is, then I think we have to have a discussion with, with HUD because they're the ones that are the ones that are regulating the public housing agencies. They're the ones that fund them. So if HUD is the one that's giving the dollars to the local housing agencies, which may be part of the problem, we need to have that conversation with them and try to fix that, that problem.

J. CAVANAUGH: Thank you.

GENE ECKEL: Thank you.

McKINNEY: All right. Thank you. Are there any other questions? No? Thank you.

GENE ECKEL: Thank you, Senator.

McKINNEY: Are there any other opponents?

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RON PRICE: Hello, all. My name is Ron Price, R-o-n P-r-i-c-e. I'm with NP Dodge Property Management company. Currently about a, a fourth of our portfolio is affordable housing, so we're really big into affordable housing as a whole. In looking at this plan, I think probably the hardest part of it is that bottlenecking everything into one organization. I don't really think it's a one-stop shop fit-all. I currently work with over six housing authorities in different areas in Nebraska. We also have different groups that we work with that aren't necessarily housing authorities but also help to provide low-income housing for individuals. All of them kind of do everything differently, but the farther out you go, the problems you get into is a tertiary market, you know, the eastern part of the state versus the western part of the state. The problems are so different. How does it-- is this one person going to take a lot of time or this group take a lot of time in committee to figure out what the differences of those are? I mean, do I need land? Omaha needs more land. But do I need that in Scottsbluff, Nebraska right now? What we're looking at it-- a lot of it too, but also, I feel like you could do an affordability study and get a lot of the information that you're currently saying that this committee is going to do over the next year and a half, which, again, as Gene showed Omaha's already done. They've got a five-year plan. So if they've got a five-year plan, do you then go overstep that five-year plan and say you have something completely different? I think your time would be better served learning and figuring out, what are your issues on costs? Why do we have such a supply chain issue? I mean, it goes international as well as local. But you know, the cost of wood and everything else, it's super hard to develop and super costly. Used to be able to build an apartment complex for \$100,000 a unit. You almost can't do it for less than \$150,000 right now. Why? That's the bigger question on how to solve for affordable housing, is how are you going to get that cost down so that it is more affordable to people? And the other thing you can look at is items that we can't control: taxes. We have properties right now, just to give an example, taxes went from \$18 million to \$26 million. So the cost continues to go up, up and up. And I don't see that tax cost or insurance costs going down at any time right now. So codes, different things that are requiring it, they cost more and more money. Those are the areas that could probably be focused on. But, again, could be done with the study versus necessarily creating a new Housing and Urban Development Department for the, you know, the state. And I'll leave it open for questioning.

McKINNEY: Thank you. Are there any questions from the committee? I guess-- I don't know if it's a question, but it's a comment. On one

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hand, everybody is coming down to the Legislature saying housing is the number one crisis facing our state. Then you guys are coming in opposition of centralizing a department to address the number one crisis in our state. And I'm lost.

RON PRICE: You're looking for a response on that?

McKINNEY: Yes.

RON PRICE: It's not that it's a opposition to generating a department for that. But the way this is specifically written, it doesn't seem like it's necessarily solving for the housing crisis more than it is creating a giant committee to discover why there is an affordable problem. So it's asking the question, what's the affordable problem? Not necessarily anywhere laid out saying this is how we're going to solve the affordability problem. Am I gaining more Section 8 money so that those individuals-- and we'll use seniors for an example because there was a great article in the World-Herald recently on that-- those individuals don't make a lot of additional money. And even with, what was it, an 8.5 percent increase over the last Social Security run and 6 percent prior to that 13 percent, most of them can't afford.

McKINNEY: I guess the, the issue is, though, the issue of the affordable housing problem, I don't think it's completely clear, although you say Omaha has conducted a study. If we're going to be honest, there is no affordable housing, especially not in my district. In many other districts across the state, their affordable housing really doesn't exist. It's an illusion that we say, but it's not a real thing. So I'm lost about why, why somebody shouldn't-- the state shouldn't look at this to see what is really the problem with our affordable housing crisis.

RON PRICE: Again, no disagreement towards that, just disagreement on the way the bill was structured in terms of what it's looking to accomplish and how it's looking to get there. But the idea that there needs to be a, you know, a problem with housing and how to solve it, you know, and probably one governing idea on what's the best way, I think that that is a positive thing. It's just hard to the way this is structured and written to say that it's going to actually do anything except cost taxpayers more money.

McKINNEY: So will you reach out to Senator DeBoer to assist her on trying to figure it out?

RON PRICE: Absolutely.

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McKINNEY: All right. Thank you.

RON PRICE: No problem.

McKINNEY: Any other questions? Senator Lowe.

LOWE: Thank you, Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Price. When you price a piece of property, whether it's rental or for sale, how do you do that?

RON PRICE: Well, a lot of the time--

LOWE: Especially toward the affordable housing?

RON PRICE: So when I'm, when I'm approaching it on the affordable housing side, I mean, we're depending on what county I'm in. I'm looking at what the area median income is. So, for example, a 60 percent area median income for a single individual in Omaha, Nebraska, is about \$39,100. You move over to Dodge County, that number decreases because the amount of income in the area decreases. So we, we go by the HUD guidelines on that one to kind of give us an idea what truly affordable is as far as rent raising everything else.

LOWE: And so are you, you able to find pieces of property like that that you're able to rent to for those prices?

RON PRICE: I'll be 100 percent honest, if it is not created through the LIHTC program, no. Not at all. And even when you-- the landlords attempt to keep the numbers down, you'll see that that-- we'll call it a Class C property, which is what most people would have considered affordable back in the day-- that's dwindling and shrinking more and more and more. As outside investors are coming in and buying those properties, they're creating them into more of a Class A with a higher amount of money. And they're doing what's called a value add for them. So they'll put a lot of money in, raise the rents \$200 to \$300 and say, hey, it's now a profit center for me. You know, the guy out in New York or California where, you know, a 2 percent increase in income is significant to them, where a lot of the Midwestern owners are not thinking in that exact same way. And because of that, that gap, you're losing all of that kind of middle area. And then, unfortunately, on the other side, your affordable housing; all those buildings are very old. So they're either past the point of rehabilitation or costs way too much for anybody to rehab right now. And some of them, unfortunately, are being torn down. Like, the towers have been torn down in Omaha. And you just can't keep up. There's not enough build to keep up with what's being displaced right now. So it's actually

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probably worse than people are, are thinking about at the moment when you think of true affordability.

LOWE: All right. Thank you.

McKINNEY: Thank you. Are there any other questions? Seeing none, thank you. Are there any other opponents? Anybody here to speak in the neutral?

SHANNON HARNER: Senator McKinney and members of the committee, it's a pleasure to be here today. My name is Shannon Harner, S-h-a-n-n-o-n H-a-r-n-e-r, and I'm the executive director of the Nebraska Investment Finance Authority, also known as NIFA. NIFA, as you know, is the state of Nebraska's housing finance agency. And in that capacity, we work with housing champions and organizations across the state. In addition, NIFA engages in understanding housing issues and solutions from across the nation through our network at the National Council on State Housing Finance Agencies. I reviewed a brief-- briefly reviewed the copy of the, the map that had different housing agencies in it. Many of those organizations are in the National Council of State Housing Agencies with NIFA. For instance, Kansas is one of those which is in our trade organization group. We applaud the aim of coordinating housing efforts at the state level and elevating housing issues. However, we're here in a neutral capacity because NIFA is already doing the coordination and much of what the bill is seeking. We think that this coordination function that NIFA has recently begun to undertake is even more evident with the recent report of Nebraska's statewide housing council, which is a statewide collection of local, regional, and statewide entities involved in the work of housing. You've heard a variety of people talk about the different levels and organizations involved in housing, and state funding does have some significant aspects of what is available to use in the state for housing. But housing is, is complex. It's multilayered. And really, it's a team sport. It takes people on the ground in every community to understand what their housing needs are and what they can do to help impact it, clear up through HUD and, and other organizations at the federal level all the way through. An executive summary of the statewide strategic housing framework is in front of you and is available at nifa.org in our housing framework area. I'd offer that as a thing for people to go look at if you haven't seen it. In addition, the Housing Advisory Committee set forth in Section 14 (2) of the proposed legislation is made up of many of the entities that are working on the housing council. And you'll see on the back page the, the people who are on the housing council, we've added more as we moved into the implementation phase, which in the next five years, our

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goal is to create 35,000 new units, 3,000 of which are rehabilitation units and 10,000 of which address very low income and accessible housing for people across the state. And with that, I would take any questions.

McKINNEY: Thank you. Are there any questions from the committee? No? Thank you. Are there any other neutral testifiers? No? Senator DeBoer, you're welcome to come up. For the record, there was two proponents, five opponents, and zero neutral from the online comments.

DeBOER: All right. Thank you, Senator McKinney-- Chair McKinney. And I think what you've heard is that a lot of people have similar ideas about needing to consolidate efforts, work together, get things figured out. I definitely think NIFA has a role to play. It sounds like maybe the first take of this bill in the green copy is not the, the, the final one, which, you know, sometimes we throw spaghetti at the wall and we see what sticks and we pull that off the wall and try and make that better. And then we come up with a law that works. But there is an idea here because we-- if you were to try to figure out all of the pieces of law about housing in Nebraska as a senator and you were to try and go through, you would have a difficult time finding all those pieces. By virtue of the fact that I wrote this bill and then DHHS said-- well, I didn't write this one. Actually, I was helped to write this one by people who work in the area, and then we missed some. They're scattered so many different places that we missed some. This is all over the map. We are not doing this in a coordinated manner. NIFA is definitely starting to step up and help us with that. But we ought to have somebody who's coordinating that, that the Legislature can work with, that the, the Governor can work with, that we can all work together because housing is such a big issue. And I have no need to try to take over. And it would be unconstitutional to try to take over what the federal government is already doing in this field. We just need to add our piece and make sure that we're coordinating with the feds and at the same time with the locals. We need to get everybody going in the same direction. Let's stop kind of going all in different directions and get everybody in the same direction to work on this issue. And that's what I would like to do.

McKINNEY: All right. Thank you. Any questions from the committee? No? Thanks.

DeBOER: All right.

BLOOD: We'll now open the hearing for LB532. Welcome to your committee, Senator McKinney, and you're welcome to start.

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McKINNEY: Thank you, Senator Blood. Good afternoon, Urban Affairs Committee. My name is Terrell McKinney, T-e-r-r-e-l-l M-c-K-i-n-n-e-y, and I represent District 11 in the State Legislature. And I'm presenting LB532 today. This proposed bill creates a clearer community development law. If passed, LB532 would streamline the process by which municipalities can revitalize and provide an overview of funding sources for the development through tax increment financing. Provisions include limits to how short an area may be designated as extremely blighted, extending the deadline for housing studies in cities other than those in a metropolitan class and placing limits on the creation of new redevelopment plans in areas still designated as blighted. LB532 expands on, on the 2022 legislative bills: LB752, LB796, LB797, LB798, and LB836 which relate to TIF in blighted area designations. While these bills were drafted independently, LB532 would combine these proposals that have already been considered by the committee into a single proposal with several minor changes. LB532 and its contained sections would help better achieve the original purposes of the aforementioned bills in one cohesive manner. Examples of changes in LB532 include designating an extremely blighted area for no less than 25 years and extending the housing study deadline to 60 months for cities that are not of a metropolitan class. The latter request specifically came to us from the city of Wayne. As we have learned, extending this deadline can be extremely beneficial for smaller towns that are already overworked and overbooked. I also want to briefly address the upcoming concerns with Section 7 of the bill, which states that if an area has been designated as substandard and blighted area for more than 30 years, the governing body of a city shall not approve a redevelopment plan or project unless it conducts a new study and analysis. Those behind me will explain their concerns with Section 7, and I encourage questions and debate in order to learn more. The reason that I think Section 7 is important is because although an area was designated as blighted for 30 years and then you're trying to reblight it again, I think it's good to understand, did TIF work or did it not work? Did you blighting it improve the area or didn't improve the area? I think if we take this provision out, it will be hard to understand if TIF is really working in these communities. I'm open to better lang-- some other language to address this issue, but I just don't think we should be reblighting areas without studying if it worked prior or if it, if it did. So that's it, and I'm open to any questions. Thank you.

BLOOD: Thank you, Senator McKinney. Are there any questions from the committee? With that, we will open it up for testimony. Will the first proponent please come forward on LB532? First proponent. And if you'd

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like to move forward-- I know it's a tight fit today, but we'd like to have our testifiers in the front if we can so we can just keep it moving forward.

KAYLE FLORE: My name is Kayle Flore, K-a-y-l-e F-l-o-r-e, and I'm here to support the amendment because when the, when the applications were taken, I knew nothing about it. So, whoop. Too busy running my own business. I've, I've run a, a small business boutique in north Omaha for 23 years. Men's clothing. And I started from nothing. And now we're 23 years in. We survived COVID. And I would like to be part of the growth of north Omaha. So I think it would be a travesty if we missed out on this abundant of money that's coming down the pike dedicated to reviving north and south Omaha. Like a lot of people say, this might be a once-in-a-lifetime deal. I don't know if this will ever happened again. So I'm for the proponent of making the amendment so that some money for small businesses that did not get in the application mode will be able to get some funds so that they can approve and expand and do other things with their businesses, such as I would like to do. And I, I think that we need to come together these days. We need to-- we need to unite. We don't need to have separate funds. There's enough money in this package for everyone. We don't, we don't want to give too much so that everyone can get some of the pie. So I see-- I've heard some numbers. I have not seen the lists of people that are, that are earmarked for this money. I have not seen that list, but I can say I've seen enough people that aren't on that list. And we've been talking and we've been getting together and that's why I'm here. Thank you.

BLOOD: Thank you for your testimony. Yes, we have a question. Senator Hardin.

HARDIN: Thanks for being here. With your business, what would you like to do? What would you like to improve? Can you paint a picture of that for us?

KAYLE FLORE: Sure. My business is 1,400 square feet in that triplex. The building is for sale, but it's, it's in terrible shape. And the landlord wants way more money than it's worth. But I would like to buy the building. I would like to expand. And probably move my business to another part of town or, or another state. I'd like to grow its online presence. We, we do a very good-- we're successful at what we do. We just, we just need to, to grow before someone else grows and overtakes us.

HARDIN: Thank you.

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KAYLE FLORE: You're welcome.

BLOOD: All right. Are there any-- are there any other questions? All right. Thank you so much for coming.

KAYLE FLORE: All right.

BLOOD: We're all-- will our next testifier please come forward for LB532, our next proponent? Any other proponents for LB532? All right, then we'll go to opposition. Any opposition for LB532? Welcome to the Urban Affairs Committee. Please spell your name.

DAVID LEVY: Thank you, Senator Blood, members of the committee. David Levy, D-a-v-i-d L-e-v-y, here as a board member of the Nebraska Association of Commercial Property Owners, which is a membership organization with about 500 members who own millions of square feet of commercial space and thousands of apartment units, mostly in Omaha and Lincoln, and Omaha by Design as a board member. President of the board of directors of Omaha by Design as well, which is a nonprofit organization focused on advocacy and uniting and educating for good urban policy and urban planning and urban design in the Omaha metropolitan area. While I am testifying in opposition to LB532, I first want to say that the groups on whose behalf I'm testifying as a board member support Sections 1-6 of the bill. As Senator McKinney said in his opening, those clean up and clarify and approve the community development law. They also leave cities with discretion. As I think you all know by now, TIF in cities can only be used with the approval of that city's city council, its elected legislative body. And Sections 1-6 leave those elected legislative bodies with discretion and local control. They all use the word "may." Section 7, however, which the groups on whose behalf I'm testifying, uses the word "shall." And in doing that, it takes away local control and the discretion of those elected legislative bodies really in cities of all shapes and sizes. All communities and all situations differ. It may be in a small town, for example, that's using TIF that after 30 years, the redevelopment of the area simply isn't done. Maybe a project comes along every 10 or 15 years and, and the redevelopment of that area hasn't accomp-- hasn't completed yet. Or in a city like Omaha, their downtown is very large, and that takes many more than 30 years. So that's really an ongoing effort. I see I'm already to the orange light, so I'll stop and offer what I think may be a, a compromise or a potential solution regarding Section 7. I understand Senator McKinney's desire for additional information. And my main point here is to retain local control and local discretion. And so rather than requiring a full reblight designation, which could undermine existing

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TIF projects and limit or prohibit the use of TIF going forward in that area, require a, a study at that point. Am that elected legislative body who's exercising its discretion with information on whether that redevelop-- how that redevelopment plan has produced, how it's worked, what's worked in that area over the last 30 years, what's not worked. I'll stop there, and I'm happy to answer any questions.

BLOOD: Thank you, Mr. Levy. Are there any questions? All right. Senator Cavanaugh.

J. CAVANAUGH: Thank you, Senator Blood. Thank you for being here, Mr. Levy.

DAVID LEVY: Yes, sir.

J. CAVANAUGH: OK. So I, I guess I'm reading this as they shall not do this unless they meet these other requirements. Are those other requirements out of their ability? Are they somehow outside of it?

DAVID LEVY: They're not out of their ability but, but what this bill, at least as I read it, would do would be to require to do a new blight study and to redesignate the area-- redesignate the area as blighted and substandard. Those studies are usually done on an, on an area. It's, it's impossible-- it's very difficult, if not impossible, to get the data to do a blight study on, on a single site or even on a single block. And so the concern here is that you have an area that is partially redeveloped after 30 years. For whatever reason, it's taken a long time. But it has redeveloped enough so that when you go to redo the blight study after 30 years, it comes up as, as not blighted at that point. But there still may be a lot of work to do. It's important to remember that TIF proceeds pay for infrastructure. They pay for things that have a public benefit and a public good. And, and so if Section 7 were to pass as written, it would take away the city's ability to fund those things using that mechanism because that area where you have the data to do the blight study might have redeveloped enough so that it doesn't meet the definitions in the statute of blight. But that doesn't mean that it doesn't need the help of TIF.

J. CAVANAUGH: I guess I'm-- maybe I'm misunderstanding. It sounds to me like what you're saying is at a certain point if we looked at it again, the area would no longer be blighted. And you're saying, but we want to continue to act as though it is.

DAVID LEVY: We want to continue to use the tool, because at the time that that area was designated, it met the statutory definition. But

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just because 30 years have gone by and some projects have happened, it doesn't mean that that project doesn't still need the, the assistance. And it's not-- again, I think it's important it's the project, but it's the infrastructure that goes with the project, the public goods that those TIF proceeds fund. And if you draw that hard line at 30 years, you're taking away the, the council's discretion to, to approve a TIF project in that area. If the council thinks that the area is no longer blighted and, and no longer in need of redevelopment, they can deny that TIF application. This is drawing a bright line for every situation across the state in every community.

J. CAVANAUGH: But should we be using TIF in areas that are not blighted initially? Like, if we go out to some spot and we say this area is not blighted, should we use TIF there just cause we want, we need to or we want to?

DAVID LEVY: No, you-- I mean, you can't. Legally, you cannot. But that determination is made at that beginning point for an area. Some areas will have redeveloped in 30 years and some will not.

J. CAVANAUGH: But isn't the objective of TIF to get an area developed to the point where it would no longer be blighted?

DAVID LEVY: Yes. And that may or may not be complete after 30 years.

J. CAVANAUGH: But if it's not complete, then wouldn't it still be blighted and qualify for this designation?

DAVID LEVY: The problem is you're studying the entire area. There might be a part of that area that is still blighted, but you don't have the data or the ability to do the blight designation on that very small area. And so by cutting that off, you're cutting off the ability to use this tool on those sites within the broader area.

J. CAVANAUGH: OK. Thank you.

DAVID LEVY: Um-hum.

BLOOD: Any other questions? All right. Seeing none. Thank you.

DAVID LEVY: Thank you very much.

BLOOD: Any other opponents on LB532? Welcome to Urban Affairs. Please spell your name.

TIM SIEH: Thank you, Senator Blood. My name is Tim Sieh. T-i-m S-i-e-h. I appear today on behalf of the city of Lincoln. I am an assistant city attorney for the city of Lincoln, and we are in opposition to LB532. But let me be clear that our opposition is limited to Section 7 as we've already introduced. Senator Cavanaugh, I appreciate the questions that you've raised. And I, and I appreciate the sentiment of, of Senator McKinney in terms of finding a way to, to, to make this work. The analogy I would use as we talk about downtown Lincoln in particular is that our redevelopment area for the downtown encompasses about 829 acres, everything from the west Haymarket to 17th Street, from R Street to G Street. That's a fairly significant amount of land. We started that TIF process-- or, we started the blighted designation for parts of it in 1987. And we expanded the area in '91 and again in 2007. And I will acknowledge fully that if you go to the west Haymarket area, no one would say that that's a blighted area anymore. TIF worked in that area, but the community redevelopment area for the downtown Lincoln isn't just the west Haymarket area. It extends to as far a block east of this building-- so 17th Street is a block to the east of here yet-- and includes areas of the downtown that have not yet redeveloped. And, and that's out over the course of-- my math is limited, but I think 35 years. And what Section 7 says is as of, as of 2026, TIF is over. Community, community development is done in Lincoln until you restudy that issue. Hard, hard argument to make. Why can't a city just go out and restudy it and take a, take a different approach? I think the answer is twofold. One, it will take a change in the way we have done business. We took the Legislature at its word and we did the downtown as a whole. So we, we studied the area as a whole and we created a plan as a whole. And we've tried to create a coherent, coherent plan for the entire downtown. But the second issue is-- and I see I'm almost out of time-- is that the, the low-hanging fruit has been picked. So the easiest sites to develop have been done. We're now getting to the sites that are the most challenging. And we-- with Section 7 of LB532, those, those most challenging sites that we're now starting to get some momentum toward redeveloping are actually going to be facing a new challenge now, a new obstacle. And so for that reason, the city is opposed to LB532, particularly Section 7. We do think there's an answer here. It just takes some additional time to figure that out. I'll take any questions. Thank you.

BLOOD: Thank you for your testimony. Do we have any questions? Senator Cavanaugh.

J. CAVANAUGH: I just-- I don't know why you looked right at me, but thank you.

BLOOD: I knew.

J. CAVANAUGH: Thank you for being here. OK. So, I mean, that-- your point is, I guess, taken. So I guess my question would be is that should blighted designations be open-ended?

TIM SIEH: I will say yes. I think blighted designations should be open-ended. But you do have elected officials in the form of city council members who have the ability to say (a) no to a project or (b) with the-- with Sections 1 through 6-- I don't remember which particular section it is in this bill-- gives the city council the clear authority to pull back that designation or, or-- decertify is a term that I've heard thrown around. So, so you do still have local elected officials that can, again, say no to a project or take away the declaration entirely.

J. CAVANAUGH: So I assume your experience is limited to Lincoln. But first-- my first question would be, how many projects has Lincoln ever said no to?

TIM SIEH: At the city council, projects have been approved, but there have been projects that don't make it to the city council.

J. CAVANAUGH: OK. And how much of this area has ever been decertified in the city of Lincoln?

TIM SIEH: None. It hasn't been done.

J. CAVANAUGH: OK, so-- and how many years have been-- they've been doing TIF in Lincoln?

TIM SIEH: We-- our first declaration of blight was 1987. I believe it was the Cornhusker Hotel just a few blocks from here.

J. CAVANAUGH: So in that 30-- what are we, 35 years, essentially, TIF has not successfully brought any, any acreage out of blight?

TIM SIEH: I would say it hasn't brought the entire downtown, which is how we looked at this from the start. We looked at it as a how do we, how do we fix the entire downtown in blighted and substandard conditions that exist across the board? There are parts of downtown where it has worked. Again, looking at the west Haymarket-- it's hard to say that that maybe still fits, but, but again, we look at this from an area-wide designation, not just-- that would be the change in policy that would have to happen. We would no longer look at things from an entire downtown with an entire plan. We would say, OK, what

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does this block look like? Is this block blighted and substandard? OK, we've got 30 years on that block. Let's move to the next block. Is this block blighted and substandard? OK, we've got 30 years independent on that block.

J. CAVANAUGH: But-- well, you said the entire west Haymarket area seems like it's been successful. So that's an entire section quadrant. I don't know, however you want to characterize it. Is there no discussion about lifting the blight designation from that area?

TIM SIEH: There could be discussion about that. It hasn't been-- it hasn't been in front of the city council at this point.

J. CAVANAUGH: OK. Because I guess my question is, if you're saying you've never-- you have the ability to do this, you've never done it, and yet you want us to remai-- to leave it in your hands after 35 years. I mean, we have no demonstration that, that, there is, this is a successful program and that it's being used. Well, I guess-- I'll just go back to my original question, honestly, was, without a time limit, as you said, the easy stuff has been done. Doesn't putting a time limit say, you blight this, it can be blighted for 40 years? Doesn't that put a shot clock on it so people are like, all right, we got to get this project in before the timer on blight runs out?

TIM SIEH: It would certainly put the shot clock on it, but I'm not sure that it gives urgency to someone that says-- if your only tool is TIF and you haven't used it in 35 years and now it's up for question, I'm not taking the risk on that new project. I'm just going to let it sit there. Your most challenging sites now just became more challenging.

J. CAVANAUGH: OK. Thank you.

TIM SIEH: Thank you.

BLOOD: Thank you, Senator Cavanaugh. Are there any other questions? Seeing none, thank you for coming in today.

TIM SIEH: Thank you.

BLOOD: Any other opposition to LB532? I see all of our cities are being represented here today. Welcome to Urban Affairs. Please spell your name.

JENNIFER TAYLOR: Good afternoon, members of the Urban Affairs Committee. My name is Jennifer Taylor, J-e-n-n-i-f-e-r T-a-y-l-o-r. I

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am also an assistant city attorney, as my esteemed colleague, Mr. Sieh, for the city of Omaha, and I appear before you this afternoon on behalf of the city in opposition to LB532. And, again, I think as we're all aware, our opposition is specific to Section 7 of the bill. Municipalities have employed the use of TIF to redevelop areas for, for many years. The purpose of TIF, as stated in the law, is to redevelop areas that have deteriorated, become substandard and blighted because of unsafe, inadequate, overcrowded conditions of buildings or dwellings, underutilization of property, inadequate planning of the area or excessive land coverage by buildings thereon or what I always focus on, the proper-- because of defective design and arrangement of buildings, faulty street or lot layout, congested traffic conditions. So there's a lot that we look at in the purpose of the community development law that we are trying to address when we utilize TIF to redevelop areas. As Mr. Sieh and Mr. Levy have indicated, cities will look at large areas and establish a blight designation-- a blighted standards designation based on a particularly large area. Oftentimes, it's because that's the data that's available to make that determination. You have to look at the condition of all the buildings. So in a particular area, you look at the condition of all the buildings. And if most of them or many of them are poor or substandard, it meets the definition. If many of the street layouts in there are poor or substandard or faulty, it meets the definition. So then you've de-- you've designated the areas blight and substandard and you've allowed the use of TIF as a tool. It would seem to make sense that once an area has been sufficiently redeveloped, that TIF is no longer necessary or isn't a tool that's needed to continue redevelopment of an area. And that, and that kind of tends to follow from the concept. However, what I think Mr. Sieh-- wow. That came up fast. OK. What Mr. Sieh has indicated and I think what we're concerned about is, if you look at an area-- and let's just say it is 100 acres of a particular area in downtown or north Omaha-- and 50 of those acres have developed. But on the other side of the street-- let's just say there's a street that goes down the middle of that area-- on one side, you have a great amount of development. Everything's been redone. You've built new buildings and you've, you've fixed all the street layouts. You've installed utilities and infrastructure. On the other side, you have a whole area where half the plots are half-built on, the streets are inadequate. There's no sewer. There's no utility infrastructure. But it's all in the same area. Well, now you look at that area, it's half-redeveloped. It no longer meets the definition, but that half that's on the other side of the street still most definitely needs the use of the tool in order to fix those problems that were in existence to begin with. So to go and say that you must

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recertify the entire area, you're actually requiring that that area not actually redevelop at all in order to continue using TIF as a tool. And I see my time is up.

BLOOD: Thank you, Ms. Taylor. Senator Cavanaugh, do you have any questions?

J. CAVANAUGH: Of course I do. Thank you. Thank you, Senator Blood. And thank you, Ms. Taylor, for being here. Well, first off, I guess I'm not sure I agree with the reading that you'd have to recertify the whole area. I mean, maybe I'm reading it more narrowly than you are. But so if, if there was a change to Section 7 that would allow for just a recertification of a portion of the area, would that change the opposition?

JENNIFER TAYLOR: That may make some difference. It depends on how we clarify that area. For example, north Omaha and downtown, to be specific, is actually one community redevelopment area, and it goes from Reed to Hamilton, the river to 48th. That was all-- that's all one single community redevelopment area. How I divvy that up in recertification, I'm not sure what we would do. But that's an, that's an avenue we could, we could pursue. I would also suggest-- and I wholeheartedly agree with Senator McKinney, I think more information and additional presentation of that information to the legislative bodies at the local level is important. In 2017, we started providing reports to our city council about the annual use of TIF in each community, and then we provide those reports to this Urban Affairs Committee. I, I would see a similar type of reporting requirement or reporting method would actually probably be beneficial. Asking cities that, for an area that has been designated for, you know, 25, 30, 35 or 40 years produce a report, present to the legislative body at the local level what you think has been successful. And to Senator McKinney's point, I agree. And if there hasn't been success, if there hasn't been that redevelopment, then let's talk about why. Because you know what? If that whole area that we've talked about still meets the blight and substandard definition after 30 years, even with the use of TIF being available, then I think we've got a bigger problem we need to address. So I think Senator McKinney is exactly right that if you have an area that after 30 years still is clearly in its entirety exhibiting substandard blight conditions, then we need to find new and other resources to devote. How else can we encourage development in that area? Because obviously, TIF isn't, isn't the right tool for that particular area. Again, we're now looking at what really can be determined on the local level. If you look at that area after 30 years and you say there has been some development, but there's great

opportunities here, but that's a challenging site-- like, like Mr. Sieh said-- that's a really challenging site due to topography, lack of utility, lack of street or public infrastructure or there is significant investment in infrastructure that needs to happen, we want to be able to utilize this tool so that that property can be redeveloped because it is so challenging. So those are all things that really need to be evaluated on a local level through a local legislative body. But I wholeheartedly agree that I think a reporting mechanism or trying to better understand how our tool is being used in particular redevelopment areas is a wonderful idea.

J. CAVANAUGH: So I'll ask you the same question I asked Mr. Sieh. Has any area in Omaha ever been decertified or taken out of blighted designation?

JENNIFER TAYLOR: Yes.

J. CAVANAUGH: Where was it?

JENNIFER TAYLOR: The city of Omaha actually at one time designated a portion of the old mill area as blighted and substandard. The purpose of that blight designation was actually to install a significant amount of street and, and sidewalk and sewer infrastructure. After that TIF was repaid, which was I think two years, that designation was removed. I would also suggest in the many conversations we've had about this concept over the last couple of years amongst the city attorneys and members of this committee, some of the concern has been whether or not the municipality has the right to or the ability to under the law to, for a lack of a better phrase, decertify an area. I have always presented to this committee that I believe the cities and municipalities have that right because we've done it. But many municipalities have indicated they don't believe they do because it's not prescribed in the community development law. So, actually, that's a large part of the reason that this concept has been introduced in the last couple of years is so that it's clear to communities that they do have the right and authority to remove a designation if they think it's appropriate.

J. CAVANAUGH: And is that in this bill?

JENNIFER TAYLOR: This bill does offer-- or, does allow municipalities the option to do so if they, if they-- if their legislative body sees that that is appropriate.

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J. CAVANAUGH: In those other sections where you haven't been talking about?

JENNIFER TAYLOR: Correct, the ones that we are actually very supportive of.

J. CAVANAUGH: So when we're talking about bifurcating or breaking up these areas, you mentioned that the city of Omaha blighted all of downtown and-- I'm sorry, what was the southern edge?

JENNIFER TAYLOR: The southern edge is Harrison. Hamilton? Hamil-- Harrison. Harrison. Harrison.

J. CAVANAUGH: Harrison. Well, Harrison's the county line.

JENNIFER TAYLOR: Yeah.

J. CAVANAUGH: Hamilton's somewhere in there.

JENNIFER TAYLOR: My apologies. Harrison Street in the south.

J. CAVANAUGH: So from Harrison Street. So from the county line to-- I'm sorry, did you say Reed Street?

JENNIFER TAYLOR: So the-- generally bounded by Reed Street to the north, Harrison Street to the south, Missouri River to the east and 48th Street to the west.

J. CAVANAUGH: And is there a, a reason that the city had to blight that entire quadrant of the city? I mean, that's--

JENNIFER TAYLOR: Actually, it's interesting. And I also appreciate bringing this bill because it allowed me-- or it got me to look this up. This was done in 1992. And actually in 1992, in order to comply with the 35 percent restriction or-- restriction on cities of the metropolitan class, the city of Omaha removed designations from several areas and recertified several others. And that's what it did in 1992. And this was the area that was redesignated.

J. CAVANAUGH: So the city did have to go through a process to determine that area was still blighted.

JENNIFER TAYLOR: Correct.

J. CAVANAUGH: And I guess my question is, those are some very different areas. I mean, 42nd Street on the west. That's UNMC. That's Blackstone. That's Midtown Crossing. That's downtown where we're going

to-- we're building the Mutual of Omaha Tower. That's the First National Tower. That's the Mutual of Omaha-- the Woodmen Tower. That's the courthouse. I mean, there's a lot in there. That's the CHI Center, the baseball stadium. It goes down to-- the zoo is in there, the old baseball stadium. And then-- I'm not 100 percent certain on where Reed Street is, but that's all of north Omaha. Those are some wildly different areas that have seen development investment very different over the last, since 1992, 21 years, right? 31 years.

JENNIFER TAYLOR: 31.

J. CAVANAUGH: Oh, jeez. I guess to my mind, the bifurcation issue here and requiring recertification, some of that area-- and, of course, Midtown Crossing and Blackstone is in my district-- those areas seem like they may be out of the necessity for a blight designation at this point. And so I guess that's where my mind goes when I think some of these areas in that giant swath would certainly merit continued designation. But some of them clearly don't. Or maybe not clearly, but in my, my uninitiated perspective, maybe wouldn't qualify.

JENNIFER TAYLOR: And I think-- I completely understand that. And I would point out just off the top of my head-- and this is actually information I think a study like, like Mr. Levy has suggested would bring to light. Yes, but just east of Midtown Crossing is an eight-square block area of vacant land that actually does not have appropriate streets running through it. It's all bifurcated by alleys. It has no decent infrastructure, no sidewalks. So in order to redevelop that area, there's a significant amount of public infrastructure that would have to be installed. And that's just a couple of blocks to the east of, of Midtown Crossing. If you look down--

J. CAVANAUGH: Isn't that property that the Mutual of Omaha bought and demolished themselves, though?

JENNIFER TAYLOR: No. There's-- a lot of it has been somewhat vacant. There's also a number of they would say underutilized, low-density development in that area as well that I think-- as we look at densifying our downtown urban core, those are properties that would be ripe for redevelopment, but it would need some assistance with demolition and with street infrastructure and utility infrastructure. There is also large vacant areas downtown that we would like to see broken up. Super blocks are not conducive to a pedestrian in, in a good urban environment. So in order to break those super blocks up when they're redeveloped, we need to install street infrastructure,

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sidewalk infrastructure, utilities, sewers, et cetera. And those are what makes downtown development oftentimes very challenging. So that-- so even though you could see right across the street or two blocks away a brand new building, that doesn't mean that that ten-acre site that is completely, whether it's full of old abandoned buildings or is vacant, doesn't need that assistance and that additional, that additional assistance in order to install that infrastructure that's necessary for development to occur there.

J. CAVANAUGH: Thank you.

JENNIFER TAYLOR: Um-hum.

BLOOD: I'd like to say any other questions, but nobody else is here so thank you so much for your testimony.

JENNIFER TAYLOR: I hope it wasn't me.

BLOOD: Me too.

J. CAVANAUGH: I think it was me.

BLOOD: It was likely him. Thank you for your testimony.

JENNIFER TAYLOR: All right. Thank you very much.

BLOOD: Any other opponents to LB532? Welcome to Urban Affairs. Please spell your name.

CHRISTY ABRAHAM: Greetings, Senator Blood, Senator Cavanaugh. My name is Christy Abraham, C-h-r-i-s-t-y A-b-r-a-h-a-m, here representing the League of Nebraska Municipalities. For the record, we are opposed because of Section 7, but I want to really highlight those sections of the bill that we do really like. And I want just to raise them up and thank Senator McKinney and his excellent legal counsel for working with us on those sections. The first is Section 2. It allows the city to clarify how long a designation of extremely blighted can last. This has been an issue in one of our municipalities. They declared some census tracts to be extremely blighted. The concern was because of the definition of extremely blighted, after a couple of years, it's possible they could move away from that designation. And so the city wanted to make clear that when you make that designation, it can last not less than 25 years unless removed sooner by the city. That's what Section 6 is, Senator Cavanaugh. This is, again, another issue that sen-- that municipalities across the state have been asking for, and that is allowing a municipality to review their designated substandard

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and blighted areas and determine whether those areas still meet the definition. If they do not, the municipality can be allowed to remove that designation. Omaha is certainly a leader in TIF and we appreciate them. We have city attorneys out there that unless there is specific statutory authority for them to deblight something, they did not feel comfortable doing it. That's what Section 6 does. It gives municipalities specific authority to deblight. The other section I want to raise up is Section 5. As Senator McKinney mentioned, this is the section requested by the city of Wayne. Wayne recently went through the process of conducting a housing study to do workforce housing, which is what something we want municipalities to do. Currently, the housing study has to be current within 24 months before carrying out construction of workforce housing. This study actually cost Wayne several thousand dollars, closer to \$14,000 to do that study. We love the city of Wayne. They are not growing at alarming rates. So in 24 months, Wayne is going to look fairly similar to the way they do now. And that's why they asked for this extension that the housing study be good for 60 months or 5 years. That extension does not apply to Omaha. It's only for other classes of cities. So, again, we are very grateful for this committee and their staff for working with us on this bill. We continue to look forward to working with Section 7 with you to, to figure out a compromise on that. The rest of the sections, we just want to say how much we support those. And I'm happy to answer any questions.

BLOOD: Thank you for your testimony. Are there any questions? Senator Cavanaugh.

J. CAVANAUGH: Thank you, Senator Blood. Thank you for being here, Ms. Abraham. I'm going to try and be brief on yours. On Section 7-- I appreciate the description of the other sections, by the way.

CHRISTY ABRAHAM: Yeah, thanks.

J. CAVANAUGH: On Section 7, would, if we just limited it to apply to the cities in the metropolitan class and the primary class, would that change how the League of Municipalities feels about it? I know they're members as well, but--

CHRISTY ABRAHAM: They are.

J. CAVANAUGH: --feel free to throw them under the bus.

CHRISTY ABRAHAM: Yeah. You know, not-- certainly not with them in the room, I'm not going to do that. No, I'm just kidding. No, we would, we

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would not abandon our members of Omaha and Lincoln. I think, from what I hear Senator McKinney saying and what I've heard previous testifiers saying, I think we can work a compromise out on Section 7. I think there is a way to massage the language to give the, the city councils and village boards the authority to be like, hey, we need more information on this substandard and blighted designation. We certainly appreciate the argument. Like, after 30 years, we need to sort of review and see what's happened in those 30 years. Has it worked? Has it not? So let's figure out some language that can work so everybody can come to a compromise on that.

J. CAVANAUGH: Thank you.

CHRISTY ABRAHAM: Sure.

BLOOD: Thank you, Senator Cavanaugh. I actually have a quick question.

CHRISTY ABRAHAM: Sure.

BLOOD: So-- and I'm not sure that has come out in the hearing today, but don't municipalities have the ability to set the standard already, like when they're going to review their TIF and how they're going to review their TIF?

CHRISTY ABRAHAM: Absolutely. We would agree with that. We think the community development law as written now gives municipalities a lot of authority to sort of develop their own policies and regulations about how they want to work TIF. So a municipality could already have in its internal regulations, hey, after 30 years, we really want to review our substandard and blighted designations and see how this is working. They absolutely can already do that now if they would like to.

BLOOD: And if memory serves correct, because it's been six years since I've been on the council, but isn't that the case in general for our, our more populous municipalities, that they do have policy like that?

CHRISTY ABRAHAM: Yes. And, and again, I, I lift up Lincoln and Omaha. They are very sophisticated when it comes to TIF and know what they're doing. And I think they have all sorts of internal policies like that that helps them, you know, navigate what is best for their municipality.

BLOOD: Fair enough. Thank you. Thank you for your testimony.

CHRISTY ABRAHAM: Thank you. It's good to see you both.

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BLOOD: Any other opposition to LB532? Any opposition to LB532? With that, any in the neutral, LB532? Any in the neutral to LB532? If not, we'll ask Senator McKinney to come forward and close. While he is coming to the desk, I'd like to say that we have no letters in reference to proponents, no letters of opposition, and none in the neutral for LB532. Welcome back.

McKINNEY: Thank you. Thank you to those who came to testify. I'm willing to work with the cities of Omaha and Lincoln to try to figure out a compromise on that language. We've had discussions with them and I told them I'm open to, you know, some alternative language. They haven't sent me any language, so I have nothing to present to the committee. So I would advise them that if they want it changed, send it over. Thank you.

BLOOD: Thank you, Senator McKinney. Are there any questions for Senator McKinney? All right, then we will officially close the hearing on LB532 and move forward to LB531. Welcome again, Senator McKinney.

McKINNEY: Thank you. And good afternoon again to the Urban Affairs Committee, Senator Blood and Senator Cavanaugh. My name is Terrell McKinney, T-e-r-r-e-l-l M-c-K-i-n-n-e-y, and I represent District 11 in the State Legislature, which is north Omaha. LB5-- we're here today to talk about LB531 and it would amend exten-- existing statutes outlining-- outlined during the LB1024 process and lay out the process going forward. Last session, we passed LB1024, a historic legislation spearheaded by Senator Justin Wayne and myself to devote American Rescue Plan dollars to economic recovery in north Omaha. As the process progressed, we combined efforts with south Omaha. And after the session ended, the hard work began with countless meetings and engagements with the community. A process, although imperfect, was needed because of decades of economic neglect in both communities. My number one priority coming into the Legislature was economic development and opportunity. Many asked why, and, and I'll say because I'm someone from north Omaha and I had a front row seat to the year-- yearly erosion of my community: consistent disproportionate levels of poverty, a lack of investment from the state and the city, poor health outcomes, poor educational outcomes, violence, mass incarceration and a constant tune of wait, it'll get better. And I'll make it plain. North Omaha is not a charity case for wealthy people to act as saviors. This, this community deserves a fair chance at the good life. And for my lifetime, we have taken a charitable route to address historical issues plaguing our communities. To date, that has not worked. However, many entities and individuals are doing great work in those communities. The vision behind LB1024 was our alternative

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approach because the status quo was not working. From the start, we have consistently repeated that we planned to approach these problems from an economic lens. As you all know, Olsson was hired to produce a north and south Omaha coordination plan. They met with and engaged with community members and stakeholders to understand what was needed. The community was then able to submit proposals for consideration for recommendations, and I would clarify that the Economic Special Committee comprised of senators did not evaluate or select projects for recommendations. The coordination plan was released at the beginning of the session. Olsson selected 35 projects for funding recommendations out of 365 proposals, totalling \$3.2 billion, which showcases a clear need in both areas. This process has honestly changed my perspective on many things, especially my work in the Legislature. My focus is to see this process through and work to ensure those historically left out can see the fruits of this legislation. The weight placed on our shoulders is not light, but north Omaha built me to carry it. Many may question my views and positions, but my care for my community stretches past this universe. Our goals are to see poverty substantially reduced, educational outcomes improve, crime decrease, our prison population declined, and healthcare outcomes improved. Most importantly, I hope north and south Omaha become economically independent and vibrant. I hear the stories of the past in north Omaha before the riots and I just think about the what-ifs. Honestly, the ball was dropped, but now we have an opportunity to pick it up and work to ensure that another kid doesn't have to sleep without food or the basic necessities. I know many have questions about the process and amendments going forward. I shared the amendment that we're working on with the committee. This hearing is a part of the process, and we're working on the amendment language to address concerns from the community after the recommendations came out, which will evolve as we move forward in the process. In the, in the amendment, we will provide direction to the Department of Economic Development to consider projects in the coordination plan. Although DED will take applications, if an individual or entity did not submit a proposal to Olsson, they will not be eligible for consideration. We will also task them with hiring a project manager or to monitor the implementation and progress of projects, primarily because we don't have the luxury to mess this up and its assured clarity for the future. The committee has been helping with changes and providing constant feedback, and the goal was to clarify how funds will be used and give direction to the Department of Economic Development once it's passed. I want to stress our commitment to ensuring that the process going forward is clearer and that we will work from now until sine die to get this past the finish line so we can get to work to transform

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our communities. Let's stay together and united as one. LB531 will help achieve the original purposes of the Economic Recovery Act more efficiently. And I'll leave you all with this. In his Nobel Peace Prize address in 1964, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "There is nothing new about poverty. What is new, however, is that we have resources to get rid of it." That was in 1959. Well, no, 1964. That was 59 years ago. And I just-- you know, one thing I hope we can do, and it's my goal while I'm here, is to get rid of poverty. Because I think if we get rid of poverty, a lot of the issues that plague our communities will decrease or be eliminated. And with that, I'll open up for questions.

BLOOD: Thank you, Senator McKinney. Do we have any questions for Senator McKinney? Senator Cavanaugh.

J. CAVANAUGH: Thank you, Senator Wayne or Senator Blood. Senator McKinney, thank you for being here.

BLOOD: He's taller than me.

McKINNEY: Just, just used to it.

J. CAVANAUGH: Yeah. Thanks for all your work on this. I know it's been quite a journey and there's some really exciting projects. And I guess just as a technical question. So you guys did-- we did the bill last year that then kind of set aside the money and then you had the meetings and, and then Olsson did this evaluation. How mechanically are we doing this? I think I heard you say we would appropriate the money to, to the Department of Economic Development, and then they would take grant applications.

McKINNEY: Applications. Yep.

J. CAVANAUGH: And to be eligible, you had to be somebody who submitted--

McKINNEY: Yes.

J. CAVANAUGH: --a, a project to Olsson. OK. And so are we asking for the same amount that was talked about last year or are we looking for more?

McKINNEY: So in LB1024, some money was set aside for-- it was \$60 million for the airport project, about up to \$30 million for Innovation Hub. I think \$5 million for a Chief Standing Bear film. \$1 million for financial literacy. And I think \$6 million for crime

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prevention internships. So that was already kind of set aside. So within the recommendations, there's \$225 million that still has to get allocated to projects.

J. CAVANAUGH: And if we don't act this session, what happens?

McKINNEY: If we don't act, then the money just sits there.

J. CAVANAUGH: And people can't get started on the projects we're talking about?

McKINNEY: No, and then potentially it can be taken away if we don't act.

J. CAVANAUGH: So we, we could lose it because-- is it-- this is federal funds, right?

McKINNEY: But also, yeah, we're up against a time clock because the money has to be expended by December 2026 and the state of Nebraska is already behind every other state in the country about two years.

J. CAVANAUGH: Thank you.

McKINNEY: No problem.

J. CAVANAUGH: I look forward to hearing from everybody.

BLOOD: Thank you, Senator Cavanaugh. And we'll move forward to proponents. Thank you, Senator McKinney.

McKINNEY: Yep.

BLOOD: First proponent on LB531. Any proponents on LB531? Just a reminder that we'd like for our testifiers to take turns and move slowly towards the front so we can make sure that we expedite and everybody is heard. Welcome to Urban Affairs. Please spell your name.

WILLIE BARNEY: Good afternoon. Willie Barney, W-i-l-l-i-e B-a-r-n-e-y. I want to say thank you, first of all, to the state senators who last year helped us approve an unprecedented investment for north and south Omaha. You heard our voice, and we're asking you to hear that again. We are united. And as Senator McKinney has said, we have a sense of urgency to move forward. And we are also ready, prepared and ready to move forward. I just heard one of the representatives from the city of Omaha say that we have to have different investments and different approaches. LB531 is part of that investment. We support LB531. We

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support the recommendations. But we also support the amendments that the community has asked us to push forward, which includes support for small businesses, for contractors, for Malcolm X, for Charles Drew, and also requesting additional funds. It's our understanding that the state has over \$2 billion in surplus. We have asked as a community for 10 percent of that to go towards community projects in north and south Omaha, equating to \$200 million. We're not asking for a handout. We're asking for a hand up. We are prepared. We have organizations, businesses, churches, neighborhoods, many of whom you will hear from. This particular bill is focused on economic development, job creation, entrepreneurship. There's so many stories about the past in north and south Omaha, but we are, as a group, are moving forward. Historically, over the last 15, 16 years, hundreds of organizations and businesses have worked together to make progress. Before the pandemic, we saw a 70 percent reduction in gun violence. We saw our graduation rates going up. We saw poverty go from 32 percent down to 22 percent. So we were making progress. The pandemic has interrupted that. And now we're ready to get back on pace. And to do that, the investment-- and we'll always talk about scale. This is the opportunity now for the state to help take our work, collective work of hundreds of organizations to scale. As I mentioned before, part of the proposal that we're talking about now is connecting well over 500 more youth to careers and internships. We're talking about adults getting prepared. Many of the projects you'll hear from here in a few minutes are projects, building, and development. Our specific work is getting the people of north Omaha prepared, building capacity within those neighborhoods, the small businesses, making sure that they're ready to go. I also want to mention contractors. They have said specifically they want to be involved in the work, and we have partners and those recipients or recommended recipients have made commitments to do work with those in north Omaha. Again, I want to send the message, and you will hear it today, that we are united. There is a sense of urgency, and we are truly ready to move forward in north and south Omaha. And we are very united around this. I'll take any questions that you have regarding our proposal as an empowerment network, which involves over 40 organizations, or any questions that you have regarding the north and south Omaha plans that have been put before you. We appreciate the time and we look forward to moving this forward with a sense of urgency.

BLOOD: Thank you for your testimony. Do we have any questions? Senator Cavanaugh.

J. CAVANAUGH: Thank you, Senator Blood. And thank you, Mr. Barney, for being here. So you mentioned you're asking for an extra \$200 million.

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Would that be just for specific projects or would it be to just increase the pool of money that would be available for those grants?

WILLIE BARNEY: A little bit-- thank you for the question. It's a little bit of both. So the groups that we have met with, hundreds of people in north Omaha and reviewing and coming back together around strategy. One, is we are in support of the recommendations. Two, we-- there are specific amendments, which I believe hopefully are included in the package that has been handed out. But it includes investments for small businesses, for contractors, for Charles Drew, Malcolm X, our refugee immigrant community, and also some media-related strategies that are a part of that. In addition to the phase two, which is what we're calling it with-- if there was an additional \$200 million that is allocated, it would help to expand and include other corridors that were potentially left out of the first round of amendments; so corridors around 30th Street, Ames, and Sorensen. There are specific projects that we believe as a community would be very beneficial to the transformation and economic development of north Omaha. And I'm sure that south Omaha would have some as well. And in that \$200 million, there are dollars identified for south Omaha, for Lancaster, and then those other qualified census tracts around the state.

J. CAVANAUGH: Thank you.

BLOOD: Any other questions? Seeing none, thank you for coming in today.

WILLIE BARNEY: Thank you so much. Look forward to moving this forward.

BLOOD: Our next proponent for LB531. Welcome to Urban Affairs. Please spell your name.

CESAR GARCIA: Cesar Garcia, C-e-s-a-r G-a-r-c-i-a. I am the executive director of Canopy South. Canopy South is in support of LB531. We are a community organiz-- development nonprofit based in south Omaha, focused on our work in elevating economic vitality, enhancing community vibrancy, bolstering high-quality education, and developing affordable and mixed-income housing. We were created due to an unmet need: the need to have an organization dedicated to breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty in south Omaha neighborhoods. Our work, as our name indicates, is meant to serve as an umbrella where we work in partnership with residents, stakeholders, service providers, nonprofit organizations, elected officials and other agencies. Our partners have been helping amplify the needs of south Omaha, a

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community with high needs and with residents that typically do not advocate for those unmet needs. Canopy South, along with several of our partners, have been working on supporting the allocation of ARPA funds for north and south Omaha for over a year. Collectively, that's hundreds of hours, financial resources, and unwavering efforts that each of our organizations have dedicated to our right at this point. I would like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude, gratitude to the Economic Recovery Special Committee for taking such a bold, strategic, and transformational initiative. For establishing the process for hiring a third-party consultant to vet projects and applications, we commend you for the amount of work and the thoughtfulness. Through this sound process, Canopy South and our partners have been recommended to receive funding that have-- that will be leveraged to foster transformation, fundamental change, and lasting economic growth in north and south Omaha. Projects will impact youth enrichment and educational programs, workforce development, healthcare, broadband infrastructure, public space improvements to attract tourism, affordable housing, small business support, and multimodal transportation. We are joining today in unity with many of the organizations from north and south Omaha that have successfully submitted applications that have been recommended to receive funding. We're also counting the support of many organizations that were not recommended for funding directly, but understand the historical importance of this opportunity to inject millions of dollars into our local economy. The once-in-a-lifetime funding will help both north and south Omaha communities that have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, and these funds will help bolster the communities [INAUDIBLE] the landscape that currently exists and the changes that-- and changes the outcomes for thousands of families by improving their quality of life now and generations to come.

BLOOD: Thank you, Mr. Garcia. Are there any questions? Senator Cavanaugh.

J. CAVANAUGH: Thank you, Senator Blood. Thank you for being here, Mr. Garcia. So just so I'm clear I understand you, Canopy South is one of those that you recommended the Olsson plan. But if we make this allocation, we're not making a direct allocation to Canopy South. We're just making it to the Department of Economic Development. And you have the opportunity to get that fund, but no guarantee that you're going to get it.

CESAR GARCIA: Correct. I believe the idea would be that those that were recommended will be the same companies that will be taken into consideration. We still have to go through the process. We believe

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that the recommendations by-- and it was a very sound process and that it would be easier for us to later on work with the DED and then show it again why we were selected.

J. CAVANAUGH: OK. Thank you. I appreciate that.

BLOOD: Any other questions? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony. Next proponent, LB531. Welcome to the Urban Affairs Committee. Please spell your name.

JOEL DOUGHERTY: Thank you, Senators. My name is Joel Dougherty, J-o-e-l D-o-u-g-h-e-r-t-y. I'm the chief operating officer of OneWorld Community Health Centers, serving Douglas, Sarpy, and Cass counties. We are a federally qualified health center with 18 clinical locations and three additional support services, locations, and a mission to provide care for all people. In 2022, we provided care for over 50,000 people, and 85 percent of our patients are racial and ethnic minorities who live at incomes of below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. Our main clinical location is in the heart of Omaha in the historic stockyards in the Livestock Exchange Building. We know that COVID had an immense impact on our patients and the community. We experienced it firsthand and have been a leader in providing testing and vaccination. The pandemic exacerbated underlying health and economic disparities. Low-income families were and are much more likely to work in essential or public-facing jobs, have fewer resources, larger transportation hurdles, and less access to healthcare and support services. This was especially true for COVID in the meatpacking plants, one of the biggest industries in Nebraska and in south Omaha, where large outbreaks were-- of essential workers were commonplace. This was also true for small business owners, hospitality, fast food, landscape, roofing, construction, and childcare. So much of the economic vitality of the metro area is reliant on healthy workers who live in south Omaha. Collaboration is key in making transformational change. In north and south Omaha, collaboration and coordination is visible and active every day because we know working together can raise the economic status, health and well-being of our communities. Many organizations within south Omaha have been working together over decades. These organizations have consistently demonstrated their commitment to the community through a proven track record of successful programs and initiatives that have made positive impacts. The projects recommended for ARPA funding in south Omaha span various sectors, such as healthcare, workforce, business and economic development, youth and adult education, housing, infrastructure, and tourism. All of us are just out of space. We're in need of attracting a talented workforce, and we continue to

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collaborate on building the strongest and economically vital community possible built on the long history of south Omaha as the port of entry into Omaha for immigrant populations. OneWorld partnered with Canopy South, Front Porch Investments, Girls Inc, the Latino Center of the Midlands for the application we submitted and were recommended for funding by this special committee that had a very transparent process. All of us have a commitment to coordinating our efforts to assure success. In short, it's time to make investments in south Omaha that will have a lasting effect on the future. I see my time is up, so I will respect the light. And I'd be happy to answer any questions from the senators.

BLOOD: And we thank you for respecting the light. Are there any questions from the committee? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony. Will the next proponent of LB531 please come forward? Next proponent. Remember to kind of keep moving forward so we can make sure everyone's voices are heard today. Welcome to Urban Affairs. Please spell your name.

KENNY McMORRIS: All righty. Yes, yes. Senators, my name is Kenny, K-e-n-n-y, McMorris, M-c-M-o-r-r-i-s. And I have the pleasure of serving as the chief executive officer for Charles Drew Health Center in north Omaha. I'm here to show strong support for LB531 and the recommendations included in the coordinated plan by the Economic Special Committee and the projects that will contribute to the economic vitality of north and south Omaha. LB531 builds upon several provisions of the Economic Recovery Act created by LB1024 last year. North and south Omaha historically has some of the highest needs of all Nebraska largely due to the history of discrimination, segregation, and redlining. North Omaha is one of Nebraska's most economically deprived areas. Rates of unemployment, poverty, uninsurance and chronic disease are all significantly higher in north and south Omaha. We live with the stark reality that individuals experiencing poverty are at high risk of adverse health effects from obesity, smoking, substance use, and chronic disease. In addition, the studies continue to highlight that social and economic conditions are significant determinants of health: the confluence of income, wealth, education, employment, neighborhood conditions, and the social policies that interact in complex ways to affect our biology, health-related behaviors, environmental exposures, and the availability of accessible healthcare services. In short, one cannot speak about economics and wealth building without centering health and healthcare. Charles Drew has been a-- have been an essential component of the safety net healthcare system for 40 years, providing comprehensive primary medical, dental, behavior health, including

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substance use support, and enabling services regardless of the person's income and ability to pay. Last year, we served over 13,000 patients and accounted for over 40,000 health center visits. Approximately 31 percent of our patients were uninsured and 82 percent had incomes of 100 percent below the federal poverty level. Charles Drew continue to be-- continues to be an excellent investment in the long-term well-being of the community in terms of the population's health and the overall economy. Our health center provides support to those individuals who the health systems traditionally do not serve. We are truly the safety net of north Omaha. Investments in community health centers have shown to reduce costs for long-term healthcare systems and provide economic benefit for the surrounding community. As you can kind of see in my handout there-- and I won't get into statistics, but we had a general overall economic impact of over \$35 million. We employed over 300 individuals within the community. Most of the individuals either grew up or reside from-- in north Omaha. In short, I'm here to express our sincere support and gratitude for the process thus far. We stand ready to serve. North Omaha is ready to go. I'm a native of north Omaha, born and raised in north Omaha. My family was one of the first families to get services at Charles Drew Health Center. So I've seen what is possible. But we have a long way to go, and we can do more. I'll take any questions.

BLOOD: Thank you for your testimony. Do we have any questions? Seeing none, thank you for coming in today.

KENNY McMORRIS: Thank you. Let's get this done.

BLOOD: Next proponent, LB531. Next proponent. Welcome to the Urban Affairs Committee. And please spell your name.

MARCOS MORA: My name is Marcos Mora, M-a-r-c-o-s. Last name, Mora, M-o-r-a. Good afternoon. As a member of the Latino Economic Development Council, Cinco de Mayo Omaha and the South Omaha Business District Board, I am a lifelong resident of south Omaha. My family has resided and taken part in activities along historic South 24th Street since 1925. Nebraska is our home, this great state of Nebraska. I'm here today to advocate for the bills on the floor that are vital to south and north Omaha. As the COVID pandemic devastated these ethnic districts harder than any place across Nebraska, funding is now needed and essential to rebuild these districts for its businesses, community, and families. Today, we come together with south and north Omaha to form unity and to ask our political leaders to do the right thing by supporting the bill on the floor today in order to get much-needed relief and development in east Omaha. Thank you.

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BLOOD: Very nice. Thank you for your testimony. Do we have any questions? Seeing none, thank you for coming in.

MARCOS MORA: Thank you.

BLOOD: Our next proponent for LB531, please come forward. Welcome to Urban Affairs. Please spell your name.

GLADYS HARRISON: My name is Gladys Harrison. G-l-a-d-y-s H-a-r-r-i-s-o-n. I am a native of north Omaha. I am the owner of a second-generation small business that was passed down to me from my mother, Patricia "Big Mama" Barron. I live in north Omaha. I work in north Omaha. And thank you for allowing me to be here today. I am an advocate of this bill. This money will help create sources of income for many people. Charles Drew was just up here. That's an organization that employees of mine, they go there when they get sick. Mr. Marcos was just up here. He's also a musician. He did not tell you that. This money can be used to bring arts and entertainment to our city, which means we're going to be able to create more jobs. And I've, I've said it from the beginning. To me, it really doesn't matter who gets the money as long as it's a business in north Omaha and as long as that business is going to do business with other businesses. I can grow my business just off of the businesses who do get that money doing business with me. This would allow that money to circulate not just once, not just twice, but for 20 or 30 years. So that when my grandson, who is seven, Braden [PHONETIC], takes over Big Mama's, it will be a business that he can pass on to his children.

BLOOD: Thank you for your testimony. Are there any questions? Yes, Senator Lowe.

LOWE: Thank you, Senator Blood. I'm intrigued. What is Big Mama's?

BLOOD: Oh, my gosh.

GLADYS HARRISON: Where you been?

LOWE: I'm waiting for the invitation.

GLADYS HARRISON: Big Mama's is a soul food restaurant that has, has been featured nationally on television. We get customers from all over the world that come to north Omaha just for our soul food and-- which brings tourism to the city, which brings people coming to the city to spend money. And we would like to grow and expand our business so that we can fulfill my mother's dream of feeding people from all over the world, and this money can help do that.

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LOWE: Thank you. I'll be there.

GLADYS HARRISON: I'll be looking for you.

BLOOD: I don't know, Senator Lowe. We may have to excuse you for the rest of the day.

LOWE: Really?

BLOOD: Any other questions? I actually have two questions. The first is-- and, and there was one other testifier that touched down on this, but I want to get this on record. Why is it so important for us to, to make sure that we start generating generational wealth now? Because that's-- we've lost that in a generation, right? We, we all know we've lost that. Not just in the black and brown community, but in our community as well, right? Why will this help generational wealth?

GLADYS HARRISON: Well, many people, most people in the black and brown community never had the opportunity to create--

BLOOD: I agree.

GLADYS HARRISON: --generational wealth for their family. And so this is so important to bring people out of poverty. This, this is what this money can do so that we can reduce recidivism, recidivism so that we can allow more people to have good paying jobs that allow them to send their kids to college, to buy a house, to have a retirement plan, to allow people to pursue their dreams of owning a, a small business. And me being a small business owner, you know, we are what drives the economy in this country. You know, it's big business that does business with the little businesses. And we need more opportunities like this for us to be able to take people from a place of poverty and a place of wealth. And, you know, the people in my community love the community. We want to live in this community. We want to grow this community. And this money would give us the ability to do that.

BLOOD: And to have generations to come do that.

GLADYS HARRISON: And for generations to come. I told you, I have a grandson. He's seven and he knows that he's going to run Big Mama's when I'm gone, and this money can allow that to happen by these other businesses doing business with us. Some businesses might need to have a building built or, or an upgrade, and we've got contractors that are ready to do that work. Some businesses might not ready to be-- might not be ready to scale. But we have organizations like the Empowerment Network who want to help those businesses get to a point where they

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can scale and create wealth that is going to circulate to everybody. And it even trickles up, you know. The more businesses we have in north Omaha paying taxes, employing people, right, the better the city is. Yes. And you all can get some new chairs in here because these chairs are too short and too low.

BLOOD: I know. They are. You notice, I don't sit-- I sit on the top part when I sit on them. So the other question I have-- and, again, you touched down on this and we haven't had anybody else touch down on this. Why is it so important that we include the arts when we're talking about this type of funding and this type of growth, not, not just financially, but also historically?

GLADYS HARRISON: Art is the heartbeat of a culture. My grandfather, Basie Givens, was a well-known musician here in Omaha. And it provides the beat. It provides a release for people to, you know, come enjoy themselves and come and have fun. It brings people together. And without art, you don't have culture. And, and, and business, you know. I own a restaurant and we like to have live music. It brings people in. People spend more money, which means I'm going to pay more taxes, right? Yeah.

BLOOD: Would you say that it also helps protect your history?

GLADYS HARRISON: It does protect our history. If you ever come to the restaurant, there are pictures of my grandfather and the very first bass that he'd made with his own hands there at the restaurant. We would like to grow opportunities for people to come, up-and-coming musicians. Again, working with Marcos to have a, a place for folks to come and, and hone their talent and display, you know, their musicianship. And this money can help all of those things happen. You know, you've heard it. It's a once-in-a-lifetime chance. We've got to do the right thing this time because it may not ever happen again. And there are literally families whose lives, whose livelihoods, whose futures are depending on this.

BLOOD: Thank you very much.

GLADYS HARRISON: You're welcome.

BLOOD: Appreciate it. Thank you for your testimony. Next proponent for LB531. Welcome to the Urban Affairs Committee. Please spell your name.

ITZEL LOPEZ: Yes. Good afternoon. Itzel Lopez, I-t-z-e-l L-o-p-e-z. I'm here today to support the recommendations in the coordination plan by the Economic Recovery Special Committee and all the other impactful

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projects that will serve as catalysts for a much-needed development in east Omaha. I am also the board president for the Latino Economic Development Council. I'll start by sharing that many will be surprised to learn that there are about 1,500 Latino-owned businesses in Nebraska and that the Latino population in Nebraska will triple by 2050. When LEDC came together about a year ago, there was a need to focus on youth and the adults in south Omaha, a need for workforce and Latino leadership development, and the need to celebrate the culture of, of us Latinos. Our mission is to create conditions for economic growth by increasing tourism while paying homage to our culture and its historical preservation. Our council is committed to creating a thriving economic landscape by executing a multipurpose transformational project along south Omaha in the business district on 24th Street between L and Q, which also includes the historic Plaza De La Raza. Today, we're here together to move the heart of our community forward, a community that is inclusive to all members of society, regardless of citizenship status, color, race, and ethnic background; a community that provides access to quality services for all. Not only will advancing this bill forward will support these projects, the ones that were recommended by Olsson and any additional projects that may be included in future amendments, but the whole like, like building generational wealth. I would want to think that the future generations of all of us in Omaha will improve. Thank you.

BLOOD: Thank you for your testimony. Do we have any questions? Seeing none, thank you for coming in.

ITZEL LOPEZ: Thank you.

BLOOD: Will our next proponent for LB531 please come forward? Welcome to the Urban Affairs Committee. Please spell your name.

ABAN LAA: Yeah. Thank you. My name is Aban Laa, which is spelled like A-b-a-n L-a-a. I'm representing here-- I'm the executive director for the New Life Family Alliance and a board member of Black Men United. And both of them are grassroots organizations in north Omaha. I'm here to support this bill because it is an opportunity for us as the immigrant and the refugee to create-- to get an opportunity for the job creation and training and capacity building. It's been a long time for us to get this kind of opportunity. So this will be an opportunity for us to enhance the skill of the community so they can move up and they can at least escape the life of poverty. Maybe-- I have four kids, three out of them are born in Omaha and raised in Omaha, one in college and the other one will actually go to UNL next year. And I don't want them to leave this state. Because in my community, a lot of

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graduate and a lot of kids, they, they move out of the city and they move out of the state. And maybe some-- probably, I have to look into it like, why their kids are moving out. It's because lack of opportunity. And this bill will create this opportunity for the kids so they can stay here and they can contribute to the state. So I really support this bill. Thank you.

BLOOD: Thank you for your testimony. Do we have any questions? Senator Cavanaugh.

J. CAVANAUGH: Thank you, Senator Blood. And I'm sorry. It's Mr. Aban Laa?

ABAN LAA: Aban Laa. Yes.

J. CAVANAUGH: So you mentioned job training and capacity building. Can you just elaborate on what-- any particular job training and capacity building that we're, we're talking about?

ABAN LAA: OK. [INAUDIBLE] now they're working. They-- either they have like, they work in not a skilled job. OK. Although there is some of them, they come here and they have the degrees and all those things. But because they've been not-- they've been not getting any opportunity for them to, you know, to upgrade their, their skill or drive to learn new skill over there. Those-- so they can learn these jobs. This is the thing we are trying to provide for them. So at, at least, it will increase their income at the same time. But at the same time, also will, will solve other problem in the community, because some of the kids now that are [INAUDIBLE] like-- because their parent that are working long hours and all those things. So there is-- the kids, almost no supervision for them. So with this job creation, it would be better for them to get other jobs so they can [INAUDIBLE] so the parent, they can devote some of their time for their families.

J. CAVANAUGH: Thank you.

ABAN LAA: OK. Thank you.

BLOOD: Thank you, Senator Cavanaugh. Any other questions? With that, thank you for your testimony.

ABAN LAA: Thank you.

BLOOD: Welcome to the Urban Affairs Committee. Please spell your name.

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IMANI MURRAY: Hello. My name is Imani Murray. That's I-m-a-n-i M-u-r-r-a-y, and I represent Ital Vital Living, an all vegan smoothie industry that focuses on health and wellness through our product. Ital Vital Living started from my own personal health journey. As I looked around at my family and the black community as a whole, we are dying early from preventative diseases that can be healed with a healthy lifestyle, food, and daily movement through exercise. With the use of these ARPA funds, will allow Ital Vital Living to expand to a full-service restaurant and a gym, becoming a health hub in the heart of north O. We have been in our location on 24th and Lake, going on three years now. Since then, not many small businesses have been coming into the area and definitely not any food restaurants in the neighborhood, which truly makes a business district thrive, as we can see in other areas in Omaha. The community truly needs this funding for existing businesses, but also for new businesses to truly even want to be in that area. We want to be able to be a part of a walkable neighborhood, where we can make many stops to shop, eat, and have entertainment in a thriving space. This funding will transform our neighborhood and truly make that a possibility of a thriving space with businesses, residents will want to be a part of but, most importantly, be proud of. COVID-19 devastated, especially in north Omaha and small businesses due to mandatory closures, primarily having more difficulty obtaining capital to rebound and survive. The U.S. Census Bureau stated as of May of 20-- May 5, 2020, 81 percent of small businesses in Nebraska reported a large negative effect on their businesses and as of December 2021, 55 percent still report negative effects on their businesses. This reality is exacerbated in communities like north Omaha where low-income people of color have disproportion-- disproportionately experienced job loss, severe health challenges through the pandemic. The unemployment rate of black Omaha residents is 12 percent and is three times higher than the unemployment rate for whites. North Omaha is feeling the impacts of increased violence resulting from the pandemic and access to food and mental health services for the most vulnerable residents of north Omaha. Ital Vital will prioritize, prioritize community needs of healthier choices with our food and drinks and snacks. Our goal is to hire people who experienced unemployment during the pandemic and promote job growth through-- to build resiliency. Our focus is community well-being and our vision is to close the gap of food deserts by providing healthy food choices right in our own neighborhood. The ARPA fund is for investments in these communities to alleviate poverty, enhance economic stability and improve affordable housing, provide community-based food security and reset north Omaha

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to be stronger and ensure an impactful recovery and directly address the needs of residents who have historically had the least support.

BLOOD: Thank you for your testimony. Do we have any questions? Senator Lowe.

LOWE: Thank you, Senator Blood. And thank you, Ms. Murray, for being here. You may be the expert that I need. Is Big Mama's a health food restaurant? I'm going to guess it has lots of flavor, so no?

IMANI MURRAY: Yeah, like she says, it's--

LOWE: It's healthy for the soul.

IMANI MURRAY: --healthy for the soul. And we need--

LOWE: All right. All right. Thank you.

IMANI MURRAY: --we need all the food businesses here. Because like I said in my speech, of-- businesses and restaurants really help a thriving community survive. So we need more food businesses in general.

LOWE: A good variety is always good.

IMANI MURRAY: Yes.

BLOOD: Thank you, Senator Lowe. Senator Cavanaugh.

J. CAVANAUGH: Thank you, Senator Blood. And thank you, Ms. Murray, for being here. So are you-- is, is your business one that's been, I guess, selected in the Olsson process?

IMANI MURRAY: Yes. We've been recommended for funding.

J. CAVANAUGH: OK. And, and you mentioned, I think, a few things. I know you have to go fast when you're talking, but I just kind of wanted to [INAUDIBLE]. So you-- are you planning an expansion and a move out of your current location? Is that what [INAUDIBLE]?

IMANI MURRAY: Yes, we are. Right now, our current location is really small. It's really just a walk-up, our drive thru, so we want to expand to have a healthy food restaurant and also have a gym, as well, to have boutique business as a-- for able to-- people to afford it, to have a gym there as well.

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J. CAVANAUGH: And if this all goes to plan, are you guys ready to hit the ground running? You got a spot picked out?

IMANI MURRAY: Yeah, we're ready to hit the ground running. We have a location and we're working with contractors. My current landlord, right now, also does construction so we will be working with her with this project.

J. CAVANAUGH: Great. Thank you.

IMANI MURRAY: Thank you.

BLOOD: Thank you, Senator Cavanaugh. Seeing no other questions, thank you for your testimony.

IMANI MURRAY: Thank you.

BLOOD: Welcome to the Urban Affairs Committee. Please spell your name.

GLENN PETTIS: My name is Glenn Pettis, G-l-e-n-n P-e-t-t-i-s. I am the legal representative for the Multipronged Economic Development Partnership, which was grateful to have been recommended to receive a grant of \$5,800,000 for the development of our project. Twelve years ago, a group of professionals, entrepreneurs and investors from south Omaha came together to create economic growth in south Omaha. Focus groups and marketing studies were performed. Several successful economic development projects were visited in other states by our members to prepare our project. This group incorporated community investment opportunities and purchased a building on five acres located at 5025 South 33rd Street at an old cold, cold storage building. We hired an architect and started our plans to develop this property. Our plans were severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused financial losses to many of the businesses of our members. Some of the members wanted to sell our property to recover their financial losses. The property was listed for sale. Other members decided to create a new partnership to proceed with our original application for ARPA funds. This group is South Omaha Global Market, LLC. Midwest business and projects will be responsible for the general coordination or oversight of our project. One of the biggest obstacles for development in south Omaha is a limited availability of land. The Multipronged Community Economic Development Project will complete our project using several parcels of land. Members from the South Omaha Global Market, LLC own four properties located in the qualified census tracts for the construction of three global markets. The entrepreneurs will invest their own capital at their locations. We

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will build a commercial kitchen, an area for food vendors, an auditorium, areas for retail businesses, areas for two light manufacturing companies, a tortilla factory and an ice cream factory. Public markets develop small businesses and promote community diversity through one-of-a-kind shopping, dining, and cultural venues with products from many nations. Entrepreneurs must receive training and technical assistance in order to be a part of the project. Collective Development, one of our partners, is a real estate investment and property management company in south Omaha. Their portfolio consists of 500 residential units. We will build a building with apartments on land located at 29th and Jackson Streets. Max Honaker of Collective Development is the owner of this property. We have the opportunity to build a global market and affordable housing apartments on this property. We will build our project using the existing vibrant, entrepreneurial spirit and diversity of south Omaha. We will-- we have periodic cultural events, farmers markets, flea markets, and concerts at the three sites of our south Omaha, as well as other cultural activities.

BLOOD: Sir.

GLENN PETTIS: Our project will support-- I'm sorry.

BLOOD: I'm sorry. We just wanna make sure everyone gets heard today.

GLENN PETTIS: That's all right.

BLOOD: Are there any questions for our testifier? Nope. Seeing none, thank you for coming in today.

GLENN PETTIS: Thank you.

BLOOD: Thank you for respecting the light. Welcome to the Urban Affairs Committee. Please spell your name.

LEO LOUIS II: Good afternoon. Leo Louis, L-e-o L-o-u-i-s, II. I serve on the board of the Malcolm X Memorial Foundation, and I am here as a proponent for LB531 and its amendments and recommendations by the Olsson Foundation. Our organization has existed for over 50 years and we have struggled for over 50 years. With the support of community members pulling money out of their own pockets to support our organization, we have been able to survive. Through some philanthropic efforts, we were able to get a strategic plan created back in 2012 to develop our property, which is over 18 acres, which will support a-- over \$18 million project. We are very much in support of this bill and we appreciate Senator Wayne and Senator McKinney for introducing this

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type of legislation. Because individuals that I've seen growing up in my community have struggled for a long time to understand the political process and the economic ramifications of decisions made by individuals they have never met and never seen who sit in rooms like this. So to the people behind me, to the people who are watching, and to the people here on this panel, I salute you all for participating in this process. And I hope that the passage of this legislation will be an encouragement to other young individuals who have not been able to understand the process. Let these dollars, let the decisions touch their lives, in that when they grow up, they'll decide that they want to advocate for their dreams and their wishes and use funds to develop their own businesses, their own organizations, that can help them flourish and build a better community for all of us. Because that's what I see happening here. And I hope that this gets passed.

BLOOD: Thank you for your--

LEO LOUIS II: I'm open for any questions.

BLOOD: --thank you for your testimony. Do we have any questions? Yes. Senator Cavanaugh.

J. CAVANAUGH: Thank you, Senator Blood. I get chided for not being close enough to the microphone. Sorry. Thank you for being here, Mr. Louis, and I appreciate your comments. And it kind of just made me think about-- so in terms of the, the museum is on the-- one of the approved projects. I guess I'm not quite sure what the nomenclature is. One of the projects that you, you submitted for the Olsson and were recommended for an allotment.

LEO LOUIS II: So actually, the Malcolm X Memorial Foundation submitted for the Olsson and did not get any recommendation.

J. CAVANAUGH: OK.

LEO LOUIS II: We are still here in support because we understand that it's vital for us to support and along with the amendments, we believe that those amendments will be able to support, not only our organization, but other small organizations that weren't recommended as well.

J. CAVANAUGH: OK. And that, that must have been-- I was reading the amendment and saw what I thought would encompass your organization. So I guess my question is, you know, in terms of addressing these kind of things you were talking about, is that the plan for the expansion of

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the museum, outreach to the community, getting some education? Well, I guess I-- put it out to you-- just-- what do you plan to do?

LEO LOUIS II: Well, from the perspective of our organization, that we believe that cultural education is vital to a community's survival. And as we talked about earlier, arts is a part of that cultural development. Also, our organization has a \$18 million project which will encourage housing, arts, education, financial literacy, and a number of other things that will economically impact our community, along with the obvious, which is tourism. We bring in over 4,000 tourists every year to our institution.

J. CAVANAUGH: Oh, OK. Thank you.

LEO LOUIS II: Yep. You're welcome.

BLOOD: Thank you, Senator Cavanaugh. Any other questions? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony.

LEO LOUIS II: Thank you.

BLOOD: Welcome to the Urban Affairs Committee. Please spell your name.

LINA STOVER: Lina Traslovina Stover. L-i-n-a S-t-o-v-e-r, and I am the executive director for the Heartland Workers Center, which is a nonprofit located in south Omaha, and we advocate for low-income-- I mean, low wage and immigrant workers. I am also one of the applicants that was not selected by Olsson, but I am here as a proponent of LB531 because of what it means for the community. The outcomes of the projects alone are going to benefit the community greatly. So it's great to see the-- I love to hear all the, the, the ideas and the stories, but it also, in the more immediate future, it's going to provide jobs, it's going to provide areas for opportunity, for training, and it's going to provide areas for people to also get together in new places. I'm a sociologist, so this question about how do we solve our poverty has always been my question, since my comprehensive exam. I answered [INAUDIBLE]. And I know that this investment, it's not the only answer for the poverty question, but I do believe that investing in the infrastructure of areas of the city that have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19 and poverty will benefit the entire community. There is a lot of great ideas out there, 365, and only a few were selected. But that also shows that the community is willing to work. And I think that we can all get creative and think about ways to make the other 350 more that need to have support. It is imperative that projects suggested by Olsson receive

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the funding without any delay, to your point about timing and-- so the community can start benefiting from the investment in, in these areas. Thank you so much. And I'm willing to answer any questions.

BLOOD: Thank you for your testimony. Are there any questions? Any questions? No. Good job. Thank you. Welcome to the Urban Affairs Committee. Please spell your name.

ALEJANDRA LOPEZ: Good afternoon. My name is Alejandra, A-l-e-j-a-n-d-r-a, last name is Lopez, L-o-p-e-z. My testimony and support will be for the Multipronged Economy Development Project. I am a representative of Patty's Childcare Center. Patty's Childcare Center is a member of the South Omaha Global Market. Patty's Childcare Center was incorporated in 2016. At the present time, we have two childcare centers offering bilingual education to 190 children in the city of Omaha. We have created 32 full-time jobs in our childcare centers. At the present time, we are building a new childcare center in south Omaha and we're projecting to have 45 jobs in 2024. Patty's Childcare Center is offering two properties to the South Omaha Global Market and we will invest additional capital. The first property is located on 5125 South 24th Street, Omaha, 68107. At this property, we will be building a commercial kitchen, auditorium space for meetings. Total investment is projected to \$3,200,000. We have already planted and budgeted the construction and completion of this project. No more empty parts will assist us with the development of the commercial kitchen. This nonprofit organization has supported the startup and developed food processing companies and has contributed to job creations in Omaha. The commercial kitchen is a necessity for the community in south Omaha. People who start small food basis enterprises have barriers to the development of their companies, many being in a home kitchen, but as the business grows, the resident kitchen is no longer appropriate to accommodate their large-scale production. Challenges faced by this business include lack of access to affordable, commercially licensed, industry kitchen space, high cost of capital investment required to formalize a food production business, lack of technical support and business assistance with cost analysis, business planning, packaging, product-- product-line expansion and marketing resources. ARPA funds will enable the South Omaha Global Market to address these needs to be developed a commercial kitchen and helping the entrepreneurs to start and grow their business, while creating and sustaining jobs for the low-income person.

BLOOD: Perfect. Any questions? Senator Cavanaugh.

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J. CAVANAUGH: Thank you, Senator Blood, thank you, Ms. Lopez. So the-- I think Mr. Pettis was here talking. Is this the same project?

ALEJANDRA LOPEZ: Yes.

J. CAVANAUGH: And the commercial kitchen, that's something somebody could rent out for a day or for a certain number of hours, is that--

ALEJANDRA LOPEZ: Yes. That's what we're planning on doing. Going to have the food trucks come over to the building and do their, do their business inside the commercial kitchen or have some other like, rent it for days or weeks or do contracts on it.

J. CAVANAUGH: And so there's-- I, I guess-- there-- there's a whole lot of-- there's interest in that already?

ALEJANDRA LOPEZ: Yes.

J. CAVANAUGH: Or I guess a need that you're seeking to fill, probably.

ALEJANDRA LOPEZ: Yes. So we do have, like I said, we do have childcare centers in our south Omaha area. We do have that one as a commercial kitchen that we have already used. And we have seen several companies already kind of like trying to come into daycare, like for the hours that we're not running the daycare, come over and try to deliver business there. But because we are a childcare center, we can't really offer that at the moment over there. Yes.

J. CAVANAUGH: And, actually, I was going to-- my next question about childcare. So you're going to go from 32 to 45 employees for your childcare center?

ALEJANDRA LOPEZ: Right now, we-- like I said, we do have two already open in south-- one in south Omaha and one in Papillion. So we are working on opening our third childcare center in our south Omaha area as well.

J. CAVANAUGH: And how many children can you take care of?

ALEJANDRA LOPEZ: This new place will be-- our record is going to be for 190 kids itself, just for the building, the new one that we're constructing for 2024.

J. CAVANAUGH: And what are the ages?

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ALEJANDRA LOPEZ: We are taking care of kids from six weeks all the way to 13 years old.

J. CAVANAUGH: Oh, wow.

ALEJANDRA LOPEZ: Yes.

J. CAVANAUGH: And their parents can't go to work if they don't have a place to go during the day?

ALEJANDRA LOPEZ: Yes. Yeah. And we, we are really flexible. We work from Monday through Saturdays. We open from five in the morning all the way to 6, 7 p.m., to help out the community in the south Omaha and our Papillion locations.

J. CAVANAUGH: Thank you.

ALEJANDRA LOPEZ: Thank you very much.

BLOOD: Thank you. Next proponent.

ALBERTO VARAS: Good afternoon, Urban Affairs Committee. My name is Albert. Well, my actual name is Alberto but I usually go by Albert Varas, spelled A-l-b-e-r-t-o, Varas, V-a-r-a-s. So thank you for your time. As the CEO of the Latino Center of the Midlands, I'm deeply grateful for the opportunity to speak before you today. I would like to express my sincerest appreciation, appreciation for the consideration process thus far. And I hope to add my voice to this discussion on an equitable distribution of funds to the communities that have been most affected by the pandemic. Our organization's mission is to cultivate generations of engaged, thriving Latinos through educational support, workforce development, and leadership opportunities. We serve the community through three main programs: workforce education innovation, pathways to success, and family and community well-being. Our Workforce Education Innovation Program strengthens Omaha's bilingual and Latino workforce through educational initiatives and on-the-job training. We provide a range of opportunities, including GED, ESL, computer classes and we also provide internships for youth, ages 16-21, and provide them with meaningful networks. Our programs help individuals gain the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed and work and contribute to their community. Our Pathways to Success Program is designed to help individuals young, high-- middle and high school students, through tutoring, mentoring, college prep, as well as a range of extracurricular activity and leadership development opportunities. Our Family and Community Well-Being Program focuses on improving the

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overall health and well-being of families and, and our community. We offer a range of services, including health education and promotion, community referrals, civic engagement and community outreach. We believe that these programs are essential to building a brighter future for the Latino community in Nebraska. And we understand that the current bill proposes-- to be allocated for the most affected areas of the pandemic. We urge the committee to follow through on Olsson's recommendation and to honor the commitment of LB1024. Although the Latino Center of the Midlands has-- is a direct beneficiary, the positive impact to south Omaha will be tremendous and foster better and richer life for its residents. As the CEO of the Latino Center of the Midlands, I can attest to the significant impact that these funds will have on our organization. In closing, I urge the, the committee to consider the impact that this equitable funding can have in the Latino community in Nebraska. We're committed to working together with you to achieve the shared vision of an equitable society, where all Latinos can achieve their fullest potential. Thank you for your time and consideration.

BLOOD: Thank you for your testimony. Do we have any questions? Seeing none--

ALBERTO VARAS: Thank you.

BLOOD: --I do have a quick question.

ALBERTO VARAS: Yes.

BLOOD: Who's the adorable young lady with you today?

ALBERTO VARAS: That is Isabella Varas [PHONETIC]. And she took a, a break from school to participate in a real world civics--

BLOOD: What a great lesson.

ALBERTO VARAS: --lesson.

BLOOD: Thank you.

ALBERTO VARAS: Yeah. Thanks.

BLOOD: Welcome to the Urban Affairs Committee. Please spell your name.

CHARDALE BARNES: My name is Chardale Barnes, that's C-h-a-r-d-a-l-e, last name Barnes, B-a-r-n-e-s. My company is Stable Gray. It's a branding agency off of 24th and Lake Street. Our original location is

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3223 North 45th Street, which is the original place of Big Mama's Kitchen. I want to speak just on behalf of the creatives and arts. A lot of people have spoken about that. My company submitted a proposal that would create in excess of 10 jobs for creatives and technologists in north Omaha, but we did not receive a recommendation. I think that it's imperative, if we want this bill to be a success, that we create inroads to prevent brain drain in north Omaha. I don't hear anyone speaking or looking to address that, but I think that a lot of the, the funds allocation, currently, is looking backwards instead of forwards. And I think that we, as north Omaha, have to be competent in terms of where the market is headed and we need to be supporting and funding areas that will create opportunities for future jobs. The workforce is changing. Technology, I believe, is part of the arts. I believe that software design and marketing and those spaces are imperative for all of these companies to be successful. And so we see the work that we're doing as capacity building. It's building websites, it's building clear messages for companies in north and south Omaha, and it's also allowing people to work from Omaha and do business with other cities and states. So I'm in support of the bill, even if we don't get a recommendation. But I would request that our proposal be given another look, especially in the area of creating internships and new job opportunities for the arts. Thank you.

BLOOD: Thank you for your testimony. Are there any questions? Senator Cavanaugh.

J. CAVANAUGH: Thank you, Senator Blood. And thank you, Mr. Barnes, for being here. And I appreciate your coming and supporting it, even though, you know, you got some criticisms about it, but I appreciate that support. And I guess my question is what we've heard so far is folks who-- the only people who are eligible, will be eligible, if we pass this, are folks who did submit an, an application so you submitted one.

CHARDALE BARNES: Yes.

J. CAVANAUGH: OK.

CHARDALE BARNES: Yes. Our company is Stable Gray.

J. CAVANAUGH: And I apologize. I haven't read the, the whole thing, I guess. I didn't commit it to memory, but.

CHARDALE BARNES: Don't worry about it.

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J. CAVANAUGH: So-- and I, I guess maybe, I don't-- I'm not fully seeing the picture, but did-- are, are we being asked to give an additional allocation that would free up some funds for folks who weren't allocated that maybe you could get-- qualify under the new-- the expansion?

CHARDALE BARNES: Yes, that-- that's my understanding. Currently, the allocation with the new funds recommendation was about \$5 million. I believe that that's a bit low, considering how many opportunities we have in the space of arts. If we look at, you know, for example, restaurants as an art, culinary arts, technology and branding and marketing-- there was a mention, for example, that there wasn't enough information for people to know how to submit. So there's a lot of areas in which the arts, research, and development can add value. And that's for both north and south Omaha. We're open to partnering with other agencies and we know of several to engage and create, again, inroads. We're, we're currently in progress with working on internships with UNO. We've created four full-time jobs to date and we work with over 18 contractors. So we are on pace this year to do over \$1 million in business, but we can do more than that with, with capacity. So this is about capacity and it's about creating inroads.

J. CAVANAUGH: Thank you.

BLOOD: Any other questions now? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony.

CHARDALE BARNES: Thank you.

BLOOD: Just a reminder that we keep moving forward, making sure that everyone's voices are heard today. Welcome to the Urban Affairs Committee. Please spell your name.

VANEZA RAMOS: Good afternoon. My name is Vaneza, V-a-n-e-z-a. I'm here to support the Multipronged Economic Development Project. My business, La Michoacana ice cream shop, is a member of the South Omaha Global Market. La Michoacana, Inc. was incorporated on December 2008. We had two locations in south Omaha, 24th Street, and we were planning to build an ice cream factory in south Omaha. My husband started working this project for years. I'm sorry.

BLOOD: It's all right. Take your time.

VANEZA RAMOS: He, he died from COVID-19, 2020. It's still hard. Our business was serious-- seriously affected by the pandemic, pandemic. We couldn't apply for some benefits offered by the government because

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the business was under my husband's name. It was very difficult maintain 26 employers that we have on the payroll at this time. We have property located at 2302 South 26th Street, Omaha, Nebraska. With the support of the midwest business and projects, we would, we would review plans and the budget to make the necessary [INAUDIBLE] for the development of the project. We are planning to increase the distribution for, for our popsicles, popsicles and the midwest-- in the midwest, I'm sorry-- by having our products in freezers, have placed in grocery stores and supermarkets. Also, we will increase the number of pushcarts of the street-- of the street vendors in the summertime. At the present time, La Michoacana ice cream shop have five carts owned by La Michoacana and we will sell vendors a product for cost of production. ARPA funds will support us with the development of this project. We will create more jobs and economic developments in Nebraska. Thank you.

BLOOD: Very good. Can you spell your name, your entire name, again, please?

VANEZA RAMOS: V-a-n-e-z-a.

BLOOD: All right. Thank you. Any questions? Senator Cavanaugh.

J. CAVANAUGH: Thank you, Senator Blood. I like-- I've have-- always have questions, but I appreciate it. Thank you for being here and thanks for your, your testimony. Just so I'm clear, is your, your project one that was approved and recommended in the Olsson recommendations?

VANEZA RAMOS: Yes.

J. CAVANAUGH: Yes. OK. And do you have an idea, just for us, how many jobs? I mean, that sounds like a lot of potential jobs you're working on creating there. Do you have any kind of ballpark what you're talking about?

VANEZA RAMOS: It's going to be a manufacturing for ice cream. And we're going to need like, maybe, 20 workers in there so we, we can produce more product to, to, to sell to the stores that have already freezers in them.

J. CAVANAUGH: And what flavor of ice cream?

VANEZA RAMOS: Anything you want.

J. CAVANAUGH: Anything I want?

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VANEZA RAMOS: Anything.

J. CAVANAUGH: All right. Now we're talking. Thank you.

VANEZA RAMOS: Thank you.

BLOOD: Wait. We have one more question.

VANEZA RAMOS: Sorry.

BLOOD: No, no worries. Senator Lowe.

LOWE: Thank you, Senator Blood. I owned an ice cream shop at one time so I'm very intrigued by this. You started out small with your husband and now you want to grow larger?

VANEZA RAMOS: Yeah.

LOWE: I'm sorry about your husband's death.

VANEZA RAMOS: Thank you.

LOWE: Thank you for coming.

VANEZA RAMOS: Thank you.

BLOOD: Thank you for your testimony.

VANEZA RAMOS: Thank you.

BLOOD: Next proponent, LB531. Welcome to the Urban Affairs Committee. Please spell your name.

JONATHAN CHAPMAN: Thank you. Good afternoon. My name is Jonathan Chapman, J-o-n-a-t-h-a-n C-h-a-p-m-a-n, and I have the pleasure of serving as the newly promoted vice president of community collaboratives for the Empowerment Network. I also serve as the board chair for the Hartman Avenue Neighborhood Association and in addition to that, I serve as the pastor of Church on Purpose. So I'm here today, present to vocalize my support for the economic recovery plan, of course, LB531, also support for the amendments that are being offered, as well as the request for additional funding. I'd also like to offer my support for the Empowerment Network's strategy to prepare north Omaha residents for participation in the growth and the advancement of the community, specifically in the arenas of jobs and careers that are created through the projects that have been recommended for funding. It was a little challenging trying to figure

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out what hat I was going to present from because I serve in multiple capacities. But as, as I sat and listened, it-- I, I believe that my pastoral hat is the most impactful right now. And so, as a pastor, one of the responsibilities we have as pastors is to give people hope who are struggling to find it. I think what has been evident in our community for too long is that people are skeptical that government will support their freedom and not just their oppression. The effects of COVID-19 were exacerbated by the lingering skepticism that government actually means our good. And for far too long, there have been too many examples that help to provide evidence for the skepticism. But for the first time in a long time, when I look in the eyes of the people in our communities, I see collective hope. And this, I believe, is a catalyst moment, because the people believe that you want to do the right thing. We know that affordable housing is a priority, but I believe that the people believe that you want to invest in their lived experiences, in their houses, not just places to house them. We know that Nebraska wants to build prisons, but I believe that people believe that you want to build their businesses to employ their sons, not just build prisons to lock up their sons. The lifeblood of entrepreneurship is hope. And the participation and the presence of all of these people here today is evidence of their hope in this moment and they're trusting you to not just do the right thing, but to do the righteous thing. Over 360 applications is evidence of the power of participation. People who have often felt like things were happening to them are excited about making, making things happen for themselves. And so I'll close with the words of the '80s cinematic prophet Spike Lee, who simply said do the right thing.

BLOOD: All right. Thank you for your testimony. Do we have any questions? Seeing none, thank you for coming in. Next proponent, LB531. Welcome to Urban Affairs. Please spell your name for the record.

NYOMI THOMPSON: Hello. My name is Nyomi Thompson, that's N-y-o-m-i T-h-o-m-p-s-o-n, and I'm representing I Be Black Girl. I Be Black Girl serves as a collective for black women, femmes, and girls to actualize their full potential to authentically be through autonomy, abundance, and liberation. I'm testifying in support of LB531 because it provides an opportunity to address long-standing economic and health disparities. The COVID-19 pandemic compounded the already existing public health and economic security crisis that continues to fall hardest on black Nebraskans. In fact, black-owned businesses are more concentrated in the economic areas that were hit the hardest during the pandemic. According to the Stanford Institute of Economic Policy Research, at the peak of the pandemic, 40 percent of black small

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business owners were reported to be out of work, compared to 70-- 17 percent of their white counterparts. The disparate racial impact of COVID-19 is deeply rooted in historic and ongoing social and economic injustices. Such a complex issue with several factors will require an adequate amount of economic resources and opportunity to move forward from what is known to be one of the most devastating economic and health downfalls in our lifetime. Although this bill does provide economic opportunity as stated above, we do believe there is an opportunity for the process to be more equitable. Over a 10-year period, the number of businesses owned by black women increased 179 percent, compared to 20 percent for all businesses. However, many black women who own businesses have difficulty accessing credit and face capital constraints. We encourage the committee to consider an amendment to allocate a set amount of funds directly to support black women-owned small businesses. In addition to these businesses, allocating resources to community organizations whose mission aims to eliminate barriers black women founders face in Omaha and Nebraska as a whole. Due to years of systemic oppression and racism, black people have been left behind when it comes to economic opportunity and generational wealth. LB531 can be viewed as a form of reparations for the Omaha community, providing opportunity for community members to not only support their families, but strive for their professional and economic goals. It is for these reasons, we urge you to move LB531 forward and thank you for your time.

BLOOD: Thank you for your testimony. Do we have any questions? Seeing none, thank you for coming in. Next proponent to LB531. Welcome to the Urban Affairs Committee. Please spell your name.

JADEN PERKINS: Let's see. Just a second here. Good afternoon, members of the Urban Affairs Committee. My name is Jaden Perkins, J-a-d-e-n P-e-r-k-i-n-s, and I am the north Omaha community organizer for the Heartland Workers Center. Heartland Workers Center is an organization that develops community leaders in order to foster a culture of civic engagement to advocate for the change that we want to see. And we are here in strong support of LB531. I grew up in north and south Omaha. I come from a family full of small business owners and I can attest to the fact that for far too long, north and south Omaha has suffered from a lack of investment. With lack of investment comes lack of high-paying jobs, economic neglect and rampant poverty, which contributes to unhealthy homes and mass incarceration. Because of the historic vision set forth by the passage of the Economic Recovery Act in 2022, the state of Nebraska has the opportunity to instill positive, transformative change in our communities for generations to come. LB531 seeks to clean up some of the barriers to make sure that

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more businesses, community centers, and churches are able to access these funds to provide much needed economic support to our city's most vulnerable residents and help create a more equitable and thriving community. Make no mistake about it, this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Today, I urge you all to be on the right side of history and advance this bill to General File. Let's get the job done. Thank you.

BLOOD: Thank you for your testimony. Do we have any questions? Seeing none, thank you.

JADEN PERKINS: Thank you.

BLOOD: Next proponent of LB531. For all of you that have been waiting, thank you for being so patient. Welcome to the Urban Affairs Committee. Please spell your name.

ANGEL STARKS: Thank you. Angel Starks, A-n-g-e-l S-t-a-r-k-s. Good afternoon, members of the Urban Affairs Committee. Thank you for taking the time to listen to testifiers today. And thank you, Senator McKinney, for bringing this bill. I am here today representing Spark, a nonprofit in Omaha, Nebraska, focused on holistic community development in north and south Omaha. Spark would like to express its enthusiastic support for LB531 and the proposed amendments to the bill. The past year has been one of the most exciting times for the people of east Omaha in a long time. After the passage of LB1024, an intense community engagement process started and folks, looking forward to this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, began to develop their project proposals. Spark was happy to help several of our partners and developers that we work with, with technical assistance and support to apply for the Economic Recovery Act funds, many of whom were recommended for funding, such as Ital Vital Living, the Culture House, and the Omaha Star. Unfortunately, Spark did not receive funding for its proposal, but we look forward to supporting and collaborating with the organizations that will ultimately be awarded. LB1024 is one of the best things to happen in east Omaha. It helped unite the community and get on the same page about how we can move forward as one. It also exposed the need and gaps that exist to make the area more economically vibrant. This is why we support additional state funds for the Economic Recovery Act to continue the excellent work that has already begun. More funds mean more opportunities, jobs, and innovation that will launch organizations included and scored-- launch east Omaha toward a brighter future. I'm sorry. We suggest that any additional funds allocated toward the program go to organizations included and scored well in the initial Olsson recommendations, not to

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undermine the extensive public engagement process that occurred with our community members. We appreciate Senators McKinney, Wayne, and Vargas for their hard work to make this a possibility and for keeping the community informed every step of the way. Thank you. And I would be happy to answer any questions.

BLOOD: Thank you for your testimony. Do we have any questions? Seeing none, thank you so much. Before our next testimony, I just want to remind everybody that if you are here but you are not testifying, but you want to make sure that you are counted as, as being here and having a voice, we do have a sign-in sheet by the door. So please take a moment and sign in if you are not testifying. And with that, welcome to Urban Affairs and please spell your name.

MATT WALLEN: Thank you. Good afternoon, members of the Urban Affairs Committee. My name is Matt Wallen, M-a-t-t W-a-l-l-e-n, and I'm the senior vice president of community impact and analytics for United Way of the Midlands, located in Omaha. United Way of the Midlands maintains the state charter for Jobs for America's Graduates in Nebraska and administers the JAG program across the state in 11 different school districts and 24 program locations. I am here to testify in support of LB531 and the, and the projects recommended in the Economic Recovery Grant Program Coordination Plan, issued to the Nebraska Legislature in January. Jobs for America's Graduates in Nebraska has been delivering quality, in-school elective classes for credit since 2019. We started in three schools and have since grown to 24 programs, serving just under 1,000 students across the state. The JAG model is an evidence-based program that has been in classrooms across the country in 40 different states for over 40 years, serving 1.5 million youth. In just three years in Nebraska, we have surpassed the national standards in all five primary JAG national metrics: graduation rate, employment rate, full-time positive outcomes, full-time employment, and continuing education. The JAG program model has three primary components: project-based learning, trauma-informed care, and employer engagement. This model is used to help students master up to 87 competencies in several different clusters, such as career development, basic skills, leadership and self-development, life survival skills, workplace competencies, and economic empowerment. After mastering these competencies, students gain confidence in their abilities to succeed, participate in community-learning projects, and develop leadership qualities that contribute to their personal success and enhance their community. The JAG project that was submitted and recommended for funding under the Small/Quick Wins category and the Economic Recovery Grant Program Coordination Plan, included five JAG programs located in qualified

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census tracts in north and south Omaha. The project locations include Benson High School, Monroe Middle School, King Science Technical Magnet Middle School [SIC], McMillan Middle School, and South High School. All programs are located in qualified census tracts. After the triple-blind review system to evaluate the project from a variety of criteria, the JAG project scored in the upper tier of applications reviewed. In eight, in eight of the 12 categories in-- well, I'm going to skip here. We are grateful to partner with north and south Omaha communities, with the state, and with the committee on this important project to support students living in north and south Omaha. Bringing this evidence-based program, like the JAG Advantage model to communities, basic qualified census tracts has advantages beyond just setting students up for success. The data behind the model shows that JAG graduates are more likely to gain full-time employment, stay and contribute in their local community, have increased earnings over their career, increase local tax revenue by the midpoint of their career, and increase the likelihood of homeownership. The benefits go well beyond the classroom to support and transform the community. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you this afternoon about the JAG Nebraska Project. I strongly encourage you to follow the Economic Recovery Grant Program Coordination Plan recommendation--

BLOOD: Sir.

MATT WALLEN: --for JAG Nebraska.

BLOOD: Thank you.

MATT WALLEN: I'd be happy to answer any questions you might have.

BLOOD: Thank you for respecting the light. Any questions? Senator Lowe.

LOWE: Thank you, Senator Blood. And thank you, Mr. Wallen, for being here. On the floor of the Legislature, we're discussing education this week. What would the students of north and south Omaha, what would they-- their grades and everything be if it wasn't for the JAG program?

MATT WALLEN: Oh, the JAG program has, has really helped enhance their grades. It's enhanced attendance records. It's reduced the referrals to principal's office. It's-- it helps them, it, it, it helps them improve their academic achievement. I, I can't speak to exactly what their grades would be, but the JAG program really enhances their,

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their career achievement, their academic, and, and sets them up for success in a career down the road after graduation.

LOWE: So the JAG program has been a great success for north and south Omaha.

MATT WALLEN: Yes.

LOWE: Thank you very much.

MATT WALLEN: Thank you.

BLOOD: Thank you, Senator Lowe. Any other questions? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony.

MATT WALLEN: Thank you for the opportunity to be here.

BLOOD: Welcome to the Urban Affairs Committee.

BOB PELSHAW: Thank you.

BLOOD: Please have a seat and spell your name.

BOB PELSHAW: Good afternoon. I'm Bob Pelshaw, B-o-b P-e-l-s-h-a-w. I'm with the Pelshaw Group and we were designated as a supplemental project under Olsson's review and guideline. I'm here as a proponent, not only of LB531, but all the amendments and anything that's associated with it. And I want to thank Senator McKinney and all of the senators and all of you for your consideration and also, the, the team of community leaders and other proponents and people that have come together to work on this very important, very vital piece of legislation. I'm going to say something, though, that's going to kind of stir the pot a bit, though. As a proponent, I would like to respectfully remind everyone that as I understand it, the original purpose of this legislation was for not only economic development and generational wealth, but transformational impact and jobs. And as such, a lot of money was paid to Olsson and their team. And they did extensive work and they come up with, in that report and recommendation, the economic impact score, which I greatly support. And I would like to encourage all legislators to put greater weight and greater emphasis on the economic impact score. I'm old enough to remember Park Fair and-- the 16th Street pedestrian mall and the Blue Lion Center and the original Central Park Mall, none of which meant-- they were great projects at the beginning, but they didn't stand the test of time. They didn't meet the economic impact expectations and they didn't have the scrutiny of Olsson's economic impact score.

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Specifically, I would like to suggest moving forward, although I know it's on the purview of this specific legislation, but since I'm here and stirring the pot-- if the legislators would consider looking at the-- looking at all projects, catalysts and supplementals that scored 3.0 on the economic impact score and higher, they would have approximately the same amount of allocation, although I do support Willie Barney's and the Empowerment Network's request for additional funding. Absent that, I really strongly want to encourage everyone to remember the original purpose of the legislation. Let's not squander the opportunity. I grew up in south Omaha. I'm the son of a Mexican immigrant. My wife is a Latina, born in Guatemala, and she's a naturalized citizen. I've had successful businesses in development in north and south Omaha. I've created hundreds of jobs. And if ours-- and if you focus on the economic impact score, you'll create hundreds more, maybe thousands, and impact generations with great success. Thank you.

BLOOD: Thank you for your testimony. Do we have any questions? Seeing none, thank you.

BOB PELSHAW: Thank you.

BLOOD: Real quickly, can you raise your hand if you're here to testify on LB531? How many people do we have left? Can you raise them up high? OK. Thank you. Next proponent, LB531. Welcome to the Urban Affairs Committee. Please spell your name

LATRON LOUIS: Latron Louis, Latron, L-a-t-r-o-n, Louis, L-o-u-i-s. I represent Code Z Outreach, violence prevention, gang intervention; I do a lot of work with the youth. OK. I didn't bring a fancy-- I didn't type up a fancy letter or anything like that. I did bring somebody with me. I brought my heart, my heart for the north Omaha community. I'll be blunt. I'll be simple. We need your help. We need you. We simply need your help. Growing up in north Omaha, you know, seeing poverty, it led me to a troubled life. Going on a paper route and seeing that abandoned house sitting there that I was terrified to walk past just to simply do my paper route to be able to buy me some clothes because all the other kids had clothes. And my mom worked her butt off and was never home. All right. With this bill in what's our support and with these amendments and what's our support, I think it would be very helpful for the north Omaha community and the people running businesses and living in the north Omaha community. It's simple. You-- if you ride through, you'll get a different feel. It'll feel different. You'll feel the hopelessness, you'll feel the despair, you'll feel the things that we feel, living in north Omaha and wishing

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that we had more, wishing we could do more. Every day I get up and I get out here, on my own. I'm trying to get Code Z Outreach off the ground. But I've been doing this community work since 2008 and-- on my own and trying to help people as much as I can. But if I have some backing behind me, I could help a lot more people. You know, I could uplift a lot more people. I see people struggle to, to get their businesses off the ground. Some of the most important people in our lives run small businesses, like the candy lady on the corner. She may have an LLC, but she is important to us. But she can't get her business off the ground enough to get a building. You know, I'm not recommended. I didn't know anything about anything, but I do support the efforts and I hope that you all will help us in supporting the efforts, in building up things like the Malcolm X Center, which is a tourist attraction. We're in the corridors of downtown, which is thriving and they're, they're continuing to build it. But when tourists come, they have to ride through this poverty-stricken area with no economic development. You know, and I think-- I just think that this, this bill is one of the most important things to happen in present day history. And I think that if this goes through, with the help of you all, we can make north Omaha a better place. And I appreciate your time.

BLOOD: Thank you. Let's see if we have any questions. Senator Lowe.

LOWE: Thank you, Senator Blood. Sounds like you're already trying to make north Omaha a better place.

LATRON LOUIS: Correct.

LOWE: Keep up the good work.

LATRON LOUIS: Thank you.

BLOOD: Senator Cavanaugh.

J. CAVANAUGH: Thank you, Senator Blood. Thank you, Mr. Louis, for being here. I'm sorry. I missed writing down your business-- Code?

LATRON LOUIS: C-o-d-e Z Outreach.

J. CAVANAUGH: Outreach?

LATRON LOUIS: Yes.

J. CAVANAUGH: And you do gang intervention?

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LATRON LOUIS: Yes.

J. CAVANAUGH: And are you-- did you put in for any money through Olsson?

LATRON LOUIS: I didn't. I didn't know anything about it until afterwards.

J. CAVANAUGH: So you're just supporting the mission overall?

LATRON LOUIS: I'm supporting and hoping that I could subcontract, you know, with one of these great organizations that's doing the work, who may need me to help out.

J. CAVANAUGH: Appreciate your testimony. Thank you.

LATRON LOUIS: No problem.

BLOOD: Next proponent, LB531. Welcome to the Urban Affairs Committee. Please spell your name.

ROBERT PENN: Hi. My name is Robert, R-o-b-e-r-t, Penn, P-e-n-n, Neter Enterprise. I'm an entrepreneur. I've been in Omaha most of my life. I've went back and forth from California and Nebraska, so I'm a boy of both states. I am here to simply say I grew up here. I even went to prison here. I spent all my 20s in prison, in state prison here in Nebraska, and I'm 50 years old. As far as gang prevention or intervention, I've been doing that for the last 25 years. And I just want to say to all of the senators here, out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks. And, and to-- when I first heard about the legislator getting together and actually considering allocating money to north and south Omaha, at first, I'll be honest with you, I didn't believe it. Because it's unprecedented. It hasn't happened before. And I just want to say thank you, personally, to all you guys, just doing it. For me to be 50 and to see that, I thought I would never see such a thing, see all the senators come together collectively and do what needs to be done. So I want to say thank you to all of you, personally, for doing that. But what we do is I personally hire gang members. I personally took in people and put them in a truck and employed them, preventing them from taking other people's lives. I understand their language. I've been a part of that language as a child. And God is the best of planners, so I have no qualms or problems with what I currently do. But what I want to say to you all, particularly our project on Sorenson, we have eight acres of land. What we will do, we will continue to reach out to troubled youth, gang bangers, some of-- some people are not gang members. Some people are

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just older men that made a, you know, a bad decision and they just need some gainful employment. So we need to help them, too. So there's a lot of people that have made a transition on their own. They just need a little help, a little upliftment. So I'm extremely pleased with this project. I'm in support of everyone in the community that's involved in this. And we're working with other people in the community, Empowerment Network and many others and we will, with the funds we receive, we will hire troubled youth and we will prevent people from going to prison.

BLOOD: Thank you for your testimony. Do we have any questions? Senator Lowe.

LOWE: I, I missed the business that you're in.

ROBERT PENN: Neter Enterprise, N-e-t-e-r Enterprise, LLC.

LOWE: Thank you.

BLOOD: Senator Cavanaugh.

J. CAVANAUGH: Thank you, Senator Blood. And I was going to follow on Senator Lowe. So you guys have a project on eight acres of land on Sorensen?

ROBERT PENN: Yes.

J. CAVANAUGH: What's the-- what are you going to do there?

ROBERT PENN: We're looking at-- we spoke with several people. We're looking at we could probably put about 40 units. We're, we're adjacent to the Habitat for Humanity project that used to be the old [INAUDIBLE], so we're right adjacent-- we're right next to them. I think they're putting in about 85 homes. We probably could do half of that. They, they are approximately about 15 acres. We're probably about around eight.

J. CAVANAUGH: So you're, you're going to build single-family homes?

ROBERT PENN: Yes.

J. CAVANAUGH: OK. Great. Thank you.

ROBERT PENN: And we're, we're going to exclusively focus on-- it'll be part of our RFP to exclusively focus on troubled youth.

J. CAVANAUGH: For the home ownership or for the construction?

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ROBERT PENN: For building, as far as developing skills.

J. CAVANAUGH: Thank you.

BLOOD: Senator Lowe.

LOWE: Thank you. And thank you, again, for being here. What is the cost of a single-family home that you're going to be building, so that a person could buy it or if you rent it out, what would the cost of building each one of those homes be?

ROBERT PENN: Well, when you look at the costs, particularly in that area over there, it wouldn't be-- it wouldn't be economically feasible, because some, some, some people's definition of low-income housing is not a house at all. And so it's kind of a vague term. I don't know why people use that. You need a place to live. And, and so it wouldn't be economically feasible to build homes in an area where everything is ranging 2 to 2 and a quarter, you can't put up a \$100,000 home. That wouldn't be economically feasible. But in a particular area where we're at, we can go from a \$100,000 home to a, a quarter million dollar home in that same area, though, because we have that, that combination of the range there.

LOWE: And when you employ these men that may have had a troubled past, are you having great success with, with their lives after they've been in, in your employment?

ROBERT PENN: Absolutely. Like I said, I'm not-- it's not-- I'm not going to brag or anything, but I've, I've saved lives almost every week, just with a conversation. You know, there is individuals like I said-- I've had situations where there is someone going to take someone else's life. And I talk to their parents. We put them in a truck, we send them across the country, employ them, give them gainful employment. That's another thing is gainful employment. You know, you need gainful employment in order to have self-esteem. And so we've, we've been tremendously successful with that. Actually, the numbers show, the data show that when people are reached out to, they'll change themselves.

LOWE: Thank you.

BLOOD: Thank you, Senator Lowe. Any other questions? Seeing none, thank you for coming in.

ROBERT PENN: Thank you.

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BLOOD: Next proponent, LB531. Welcome to Urban Affairs. Please spell your name.

JAMES OVERTON: James, J-a-m-e-s, Overton, O-v-e-r-t-o-n. I'm here today to actually go ahead and thank Senator McKinney, McKinney and, actually, Justin Wayne and Vargas-- Senator Vargas and this committee, to actually, go ahead and actually getting some funding in north Omaha. But my thing is, like I said, we own a series of businesses in north Omaha: Jim's Rib Haven, next to North High School, 38th and Ames. We own Southern Spoon, on 40th and Ames. We own now the defunct Reign Lounge or 3's Lounge, as a conglomerate. And then, we also owned a series of actual houses and, and housing-- low-income housing, in north Omaha also. So all the money that we've actually generated over these years was obviously pumped back into north Omaha for the past 40-some odd years. I'm not originally from Omaha. I'm a transplant. I've seen what 75 North has actually done in the past in Atlanta, and what they're trying to do here in north Omaha and I'm grateful for [INAUDIBLE] thing. But what I wanted to say is actually, I want to make sure that we understand that the small business owners actually need some of this funding, too. This was what it was originally designed to do, is to make sure these small business owners get those fundings that actually do-- we want to expand. We want to create more jobs. We are tried and true in the community. You know, Jim Zerhaven has been there for 40-plus years and I was transplanted here in Omaha from Atlanta. I saw what we can actually do as far as an economic impact to the area, not only providing jobs and providing hope for the youth that come from North High School, speaking with them, talking to them on a regular basis and seeing exactly where they were headed in their lives. We make connections and inroads in the community that have unsurpassed in, actually, my wildest imaginations. But even still, with the actual businesses that are actually there in that actual area of that vicinity, we don't actually see any parts of this really funding coming down to us. I know Olsson did their thing and actually went ahead and actually puts things out and different things like that, but that's not touching the people. Don't get me wrong, you've got lots of groups that are asking to do something with those funds, but at the end of the day, the people that are tried and true, I want to make sure that they actually get a chance and actually see some of those funds. Our organizations, Lantex LLC, which is our actual LLC that we do our housing and our actual real estate under. Not only do we do housing and real estate, we do actually commercial, single-family homes, we rent to Section 8 tenants and everything else. So many people call me every day about housing, saying that they can't actually find a place on Section 8 that can rent because, like I said,

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nobody wants to accept it. And plus, it's actually too low to actually cover the now market rate rents now. And so those things are actually things that need to be addressed. Make sure that this funds trickle down to the people that can really do something to make an economic impact. Don't get me wrong, there's big fish that are going to do things, but the smaller fish, as a cooperative, can do way more than those two or three big fish that you're trying to feed. That's it.

BLOOD: Thank you for your testimony. Any questions? Seeing none, thank you for coming in.

JAMES OVERTON: Thank you.

BLOOD: Next proponent, LB531. Welcome to the Urban Affairs Committee. Please spell your name.

TUT KEAT: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Tut, T-u-t, my last name is K-e-a-t. First of all, thank you very much to Senator, to Senator, Senator McKinney and Wayne. I appreciate you a lot. The reason why I come here-- I'm a South Sudanese community leader. I'm a program coordinator from New Life Family Alliance and community organizer. I'm the founder of New Life Family Alliance. And I have found a New Life Christian Church of South Sudanese, Omaha, Nebraska. So the reason why I been work very hard for this community who are immigrant-- when I move here in this country, I was 32 years old. I don't speak English. I don't know to write. I work very hard to know to write and read. So Nebraska is my second state. My first state is Michigan-- Grand Rapids, Michigan. I move here in Omaha, 2006. 2006, when I move here, 2008, God called me to help this community, to make a bridge: African American, Latino, white community, Native American. Lord called me to work with them. That why I [INAUDIBLE] New Life. [INAUDIBLE] to work together and pick one voice and one mission. It's all Sudanese community in the life community here in Nebraska. We vote and we pay tax. We have a lot of issue in our community. Our second generation, they join gangs. We work very hard to have the youth to get out from the gangs and violence. Third, our generations, English is our second language. The womans, they work Monday to Friday. They don't have time to go to school to learn the language. New Life Family Alliance provides second language. It's called ESL and [INAUDIBLE]. And--

BLOOD: Sir, I'm sorry to have to stop you. I apologize.

TUT KEAT: OK. So we work very hard to work together and help the community. Thank you very much.

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BLOOD: Thank you. Let's see if we have any questions. No. Any questions?

J. CAVANAUGH: I was just--if I might ask.

BLOOD: You just kind of did it halfway.

J. CAVANAUGH: I have-- I-- well, sometimes you can't decide.

BLOOD: All right, Senator Cavanaugh has a question for you.

J. CAVANAUGH: Better to ask not then to not ask. Thank you, Senator Blood. Thank you, is it-- how would you pronounce your last name-- Keat?

TUT KEAT: Yeah. Keat. K-e-a-t, is my last name.

J. CAVANAUGH: I wrote it down.

TUT KEAT: Yeah. My first name is Tut.

J. CAVANAUGH: Tut?

TUT KEAT: Yes.

J. CAVANAUGH: Well, thank you for being here, Mr. Tut [SIC]. So, I guess, in terms of the projects, are-- is your, your organization a recipient of the-- some of the granting or the recommendation?

TUT KEAT: Oh, yes.

J. CAVANAUGH: At this point? OK.

TUT KEAT: So the executive director from New Life is Aban Laa. We work with Black Men United. We work together. So we support this bill and we try to get the young men from the community.

J. CAVANAUGH: And then some of that, that English as a second language education program going to be funded through this? Or is that just a, a--

TUT KEAT: Yes.

J. CAVANAUGH: OK. And, I guess, in terms of economic development, it's a lot easier to get a job if you can speak the language here.

TUT KEAT: Yes.

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J. CAVANAUGH: That's one of the arguments.

TUT KEAT: Thank, thank--

J. CAVANAUGH: Yeah.

TUT KEAT: --thank you very much.

J. CAVANAUGH: Thank you.

BLOOD: Thank you for coming in. Our next proponent, LB531. Welcome to the Urban Affairs Committee. Please spell your name.

NADIA SPURLOCK: Hi. My name is Nadia Spurlock, N-a-d-i-a S-p-u-r-l-o-c-k. During President Biden's 2023 State of the Union address, he proclaimed, he proclaimed that our country is currently in a mental health crisis and a state of gloom that should be a top concern for the nation. I wholeheartedly agree. I hope you all do as well. And I recognize that the solutions to the mental health crisis are directly related to solutions to issues within economic development, employment, affordable housing, and anything else that ensures the basic needs of citizens are being met, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, I believe happiness and excitement are also created in spaces that allow citizens to both advance in and genuinely enjoy this life with the support of entrepreneurial endeavors, the creation of spaces solely dedicated to health and leisure, and any other efforts that contribute to uplifting and supporting communities beyond their basic needs, especially within communities that have been historically marginalized, such as north and south Omaha. As a north Omaha native, a soon-to-be graduate of UNL and a new auntie, every day I imagine Nebraska being an environment that is vibrant, safe, leading in tourism and enjoyment, desirable for future generations, and welcoming to all. And I know in my heart that this is possible for us. The only thing separating us from being able to have more impact in these areas is access to resources. LB531 very literally provides the resources that will allow us to simultaneously and successfully adjust all the aforementioned areas and then some. This is why, in my eyes, supporting LB531 and this amendment is exciting. Supporting LB531 means to support true liberation and getting us closer to a world, world that prioritizes the well-being and the voice of its inhabitants. I feel very, very fortunate to have representation in the Senate-- in the Senate that truly cares for the community and its advancement. And I believe both they and LB531 deserves the support of us all.

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BLOOD: Thank you for your testimony. Do we have any questions?

NADIA SPURLOCK: Thank you.

BLOOD: Good job.

NADIA SPURLOCK: Oh, thank you.

BLOOD: Thank you so much. Next proponent, LB531. Welcome to the Urban Affairs Committee. Please spell your name.

TERESA HUNTER: Hi. I am Teresa Hunter, T-e-r-e-s-a, Hunter, H-u-n-t-e-r. As Senator McKinney said, he had a front row seat in seeing the deterioration of north Omaha. I, too, had a front row seat in seeing that happen as well. North Omaha has been historically underrepresented, misrepresented, and neglected and its resources have been limited, restricted, redlining, prohibited or denied for far too many years. I personally experienced the shock of seeing my parents pay off their home and finding out that that home was not supposed to have been sold to Negroes. While those cove-- covenants are no longer enforceable, our community still suffers from the long-term impacts and their harmful and hurtful misdeeds that happened long ago. And because of those things, we still have disinvestment in our community and a lack of resources. And the wealth is still trying to be gainful at that time-- at the same time. Excuse me. LB-- LB531 provides an opportunity to rebuild our neglected, neglected community through job creation, job training, entrepreneurship, housing and all of those other things that have been mentioned before. And I'm just asking for your vote to support LB531 to give north Omaha-- the north Omaha community the attention and support that it desperately needs and deserves.

BLOOD: Thank you. Any questions? Seeing none, thank you for coming in and thank you for your patience today. Any other proponents, LB531? Any proponents, LB531? Moving forward. Welcome to the Urban Affairs Committee.

STEVE CERVENY: Thank you.

BLOOD: Please spell your name.

STEVE CERVENY: Good afternoon. My name is Steve Cerveny, S-t-e-v-e C-e-r-v-e-n-y. I'm a deputy chief with the Omaha Police Department. I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today and for all the important work that you do. The Omaha Police Department is in support of LB531 and the measures it provides. From a law enforcement

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standpoint, it is crucial to build up our communities. The success of a police department relies entirely on the success of the communities the officers serve. Law enforcement must build relationships through community-oriented policing and its problem-oriented approach to solutions. We believe LB531 takes this approach. Community-oriented solutions seek input and talents from all members of the community to help strengthen neighborhoods, solve problems, and progressively continue to encourage growth. We think LB531 helps strengthen commitment to community empowerment, assists in providing immediate and long-term, proactive problem-solving solutions and promotes the implementation of creativity through specialized programs that cater to a community's needs. LB531 does this by prioritizing grants toward economic recovery within qualified areas. It streamlines the process for providing internships and crime prevention within specific boundaries in need of these efforts. It ensures affordable housing that will provide rehabilitative growth and maintains funding for financial literacy programs and other efforts that will improve economic and health situations for individuals in specified areas of need. These are a few of the bill's benefits. And we believe LB531 efficiently and effectively helps reduce crime by promoting and streamlining transformation, growth, job creation, entrepreneurship, and long-lasting economic strength. But more importantly, it will directly help create vibrant communities within the city of Omaha. Thank you.

BLOOD: Well done. Any questions? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony.

STEVE CERVENY: Appreciate your time.

BLOOD: Any other proponents, LB531? Welcome to the Urban Affairs Committee. Please spell your name.

RYAN McINTOSH: Good afternoon, Vice Chair Blood, members of the committee. My name is Ryan McIntosh, M-c-I-n-t-o-s-h, and I appear today on behalf of the Nebraska Bankers Association in support of LB531. The NBA has been supportive of this process over the last year and has continued to seek ways for our members to be engaged and hope to be engaged in that process moving forward. You've heard lots of incredible testifiers today and the impact and the potential impact of this bill is very clear from that. So with that, I'll, I'll conclude and just urge the committee to advance the bill and look forward to the rest of the process.

BLOOD: Thank you for your testimony. Any questions?

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RYAN McINTOSH: Thank you.

BLOOD: Thank you. Welcome to the Urban Affairs Committee. Please spell your name.

JENNIFER CREAGER: Thank you, Senator Blood, members of the committee. I'm Jennifer Creager, J-e-n-n-i-f-e-r C-r-e-a-g-e-r, registered lobbyist at the Greater Omaha Chamber, here in support of LB531. Thank you to Senator McKinney for carrying the bill and for-- to Senator Wayne for his work. We just wanted to simply be on the record in support. I'll be brief. We were supportive, last session, of LB1024. Investments in east Omaha, proposed in LB1024 and which will ultimately be implemented by LB531, present an opportunity for truly generational impact in parts of our city that have historically been underinvested and disinvested. We all have a responsibility to get this done and get this done right. As this committee continues to finalize the recommendations and implement the strategy, the Chamber wants to continue to be a partner going forward. And we offer our assistance to the committee as a resource. Thank you.

BLOOD: Thank you for your testimony. Any questions? Seeing none--

JENNIFER CREAGER: Thank you.

BLOOD: --any other proponents to LB531? Bless you.

HARDIN: Thank you.

BLOOD: Any opponents to LB531? Any in the neutral? Welcome to the Urban Affairs Committee.

GAYLA LEE-CHAMBERS: Hello, Senator Blood. How are you?

BLOOD: I'm well, thank you. Please spell your name.

GAYLA LEE-CHAMBERS: My name is Gayla. G-a-y-l-a, last name Lee-Chambers, L-e-e-C-h-a-m-b-e-r-s. I am here supporting this bill as a neutral. And I want to explain to you why. I purchased a building-- 58,000 square foot building in 2018. I won the building fair and square in an auction. I was the only woman and-- out of 100 men. And I won this beautiful historical building in north Omaha in 2018. I closed May 1, which was my daughter birthday, I'll never forget, in 2008. In that process, I was approached by a, a, a member of the Marriott Association, because they said, on the board of the tourism, to actually look for opportunities for funding for the building because they liked the idea of what I was doing. I received money from

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tourism under Douglas County for the last four year-- planning money to help create and develop, develop this, this big, beautiful building. But I keep being told that you know why you scored 1.7. And I have to say, that in this funding that I received, it was a passthrough, because it was given to Allie Porner in McKettle. And they said on the committee of the Olsson board and I got a 1.7. And I keep being told is that, you know why you didn't get a high score, which-- I had a true business plan. I have been in business for 35 years. I am 63 years old, so I'm not new to this game. But I keep being told why I keep failing when I go out for this type of grant funding, because of my name, who I am. They keep telling me, Gayla, you know why you score this low, because of your father, Ernie Chambers. Now, I named this building after him, but I have to say, Ernie Chambers, my father, which I love deeply, has not put in a dime in this building. It's been all my money and all my investment, which I earned and worked very, very hard to, to get to this point. It was just like neither said the turnback money, which he founded. People keep saying, you know why you can't get any money-- because of your name and who you are. So I'm here at a neutral standpoint because I saw a lot of flaws with the whole process of this application process with, with Olsson. Because I am a true business person. I've made my money in the private sector, not being a nonprofit organization. I made my money as a true business person in the community.

BLOOD: I'm sorry.

GAYLA LEE-CHAMBERS: So I just want to say-- I'm sorry. Yeah, the red-- want to say that I'm here as a neutral and I'm hoping that we can get reconsideration for those businesses that did not score high enough to be reconsidered for funding because there was a whole lot of people that own infrastructures, like myself, that did not get recommended for any funding. God bless you all and thank you so much.

BLOOD: Thank you. Any questions? Wait. Nope. Seeing none, thank you so much. It was nice to see you again.

GAYLA LEE-CHAMBERS: Yeah.

BLOOD: Any other in the neutral? With that, we will close the hearing for LB3-- oh, we won't close the hearing yet. We'll have Senator-- sorry, I was looking at it was 5:00. LB531. Sorry, Senator McKinney. Before Senator McKinney starts, I would like to say that we had nine letters in support and zero in opposition and zero in the neutral. Senator McKinney.

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McKINNEY: Thank you. I want to first say thank you to everyone who took the time out of their day to come down and support LB531. I really appreciate it. And just for me, as someone who grew up in north Omaha, I view this as an opportunity to change the trajectory of many kids that grew up in the same areas I grew up in and faced the same challenges that I had to face as a kid. And that's my ultimate goal, is for supporting this bill and working with Senator Wayne and other senators is because I don't want another kid to fall through the cracks. And I'm going to do all I can to address the concerns that people might have, but I won't say we can address them all. We have our limitations as a body and as senators. But whatever, whatever is in my power to address those issues, I'll, I'll do so. I like-- I understand that the process was not perfect, but we were working in a condensed time frame. So there were some things that were imperfect and I'll, and I'll be the first to admit that, but we were working to do as best as possible with the time that we had to engage with the community. Taken-- basically, I didn't have an interim, honestly, working every day of the week, meeting every day, doing all we can to listen to people and try, as best as possible, to get this done and get this completed the right way. Although, you know, some entities didn't get supported, I would tell anybody, no matter if you get supported or not, we, we have to view this in a holistic perspective. It's not just about a project or your project. It is about the community as a whole. And traditionally, the community as a whole has been underserved in many ways and this is an opportunity to right that wrong and start that process. And this is just a process, you know. I'll, I'll be here for at least another session and, you know, I'll run again and continue to work to put more resources back into north and south Omaha. It was my number one priority coming in, it'll be my number one priority until I'm out. So going forward, I'll work with other senators on the Economic Special Recovery, Recovery Committee to figure out the amendment and get it to a space to where, you know, we get-- we can get it passed and get it passed on the floor with everyone's support. I'm open to any questions and concerns. If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to me. None of this is a conspiracy. I'm open to listen to anybody. I, I have no dog in the game besides trying to help my community. Thank you.

BLOOD: Thank you, Senator McKinney, do we have any questions? With that, now I will close the hearing on LB531.

McKINNEY: Thank you.

BLOOD: Thank you all for coming and being so patient today.