

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
Appropriations Committee March 4, 2025

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

**PROKOP:** Good afternoon. Jason Prokop, District 27, which covers west Lincoln and Lancaster County.

**M. CAVANAUGH:** Machaela Cavanaugh, District 6, west central Omaha, Douglas County.

**LIPPINCOTT:** Loren Lippincott, District 34.

**ARMENDARIZ:** Christy Armendariz, District 18, northwest Omaha and Bennington.

**DORN:** Myron Dorn, District 30.

**STROMMEN:** Paul Strommen, District 47, the Panhandle.

**CLEMENTS:** Assisting the committee today is Cori Bierbaum, our committee clerk. To my left is our fiscal analyst, Nikki Swope. And our pages today are Demet Gedik and Wesley Earhart, UNL students. If you're planning on testifying today, please fill out a green testifier sheet located in the back of the room and hand it to the page when you come up to testify. Online position comments must have been submitted on the Legislature's website by 8:00 a.m. the day of the hearing to be included in the record. If you have submitted a comment online, we ask that you not testify in person today. If you will not be testifying, but want to go on record as having a position on a bill being heard today, there are yellow sign-in sheets at the entrance to my left. These sign-in sheets will become exhibits in the permanent record after today's hearing. To better facilitate today's hearing, I ask that you abide by the following procedures. Please silence your cell phones. Move to the front chairs to testify when your bill or agency is up. When hearing bills, the order of testimony will be introducer, proponents, opponents, neutral, and closing. When we hear testimony regarding agencies, we will first hear from a representative of the agency, then we will hear testimony from anyone who wishes to speak on the agency's budget request. When you come to testify, please state and spell your first and last name for the record before you testify. Be concise. We request that you limit your testimony to 5 minutes or less. When you begin your testimony, the light on the table will be green. When the yellow light comes on, you have 1 minute remaining,

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and the red light indicates you need to wrap up your final thought and stop. Questions from the committee may follow. Written material may be distributed to committee members as exhibits only while testimony is being offered. Hand them to the page for distribution when you come up to testify. If you have written testimony but do not have 12 copies, please let the page know so they can make copies for you. With that, we will begin today's hearing with Agency 31, Military Department. Good afternoon.

[AGENCY HEARINGS]

**ARMENDARIZ:** So we're going to move onto LB25 and LB62. And because the subjects are closely related and testifiers might overlap, there's been an agreement to do the two bills together. And we will start with Senator Ballard on LB25. Welcome.

**BALLARD:** Thank you, Vice Chair. It's good to see everyone in Appropriations. My name is Beau Ballard. For the record, that is B-e-a-u B-a-l-l-a-r-d, and I represent District 21, in northwest Lincoln, northern Lancaster County. LB25 provides funding to ensure the Nebraska volunteer firefighters have radio equipment and training they need to protect our rural residents and their properties from increased threat of fire. The bill mitigates inoperable issue-- interoperational issues and appropriates additional dollars to the Nebraska Public Safety Communication System, and bolsters local investments through the establishment of a one-to-one matching grant program. Grants will be used to provide mobile radio programs and installation of radios, as well as other equipment. The total appropriation under LB25 is \$5 million. The grant to any single applicant is capped at \$3.5 million. For context, are 17 rural fire districts within Lancaster County that utilize county radio system infrastructure. The initial system, implemented over 15 years ago, was funded by a grant with ongoing funding systems available. Since the time of the original installed, the equipment has aged and fallen out of manufacturer support. According to a study commissioned by Lancaster County, options of addressing the outdated system included replacing old equipment with new equipment with similar technology, upgrading the existing system with improving features and joining with the regional, regional digital system such as the State Radio System, Omaha Regional Network, or the city of Lincoln radio system. Each of these options has its own opportunities, challenges, and costs involved with the county's rural fire district. First responders in county-- in, in counties willing to invest in the system that mitigate inoperability issues deserve support from the state. The fires in Lancaster County in the fall of 2022 have brought the need to

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modernize our communication equipment to the forefront in a dangerous way. Almost 300 responders stepped up and helped to contain the wildfires. While Lincoln, Lancaster, and the surrounding counties worked together well, they're still limited by outdated communication systems. The stories about these radio systems that find their way into the news are usually dramatic ones. But on a daily basis, these poor performing communication systems are a continual hindrance to the operation of public safety agencies and a source of frustration among our first responders who rely on them. Outdated radio systems risk the safety of firefighters and make it even more difficult to do an already dangerous and challenging job. This may sound familiar, as I brought a similar bill last biennium. Our emergency responding reserve deserve robust support in serving our communities, ensuring the operability of communications systems. With that, I'd be happy to answer any questions, but there are technical experts behind me as well, as well as Senator Brandt.

**ARMENDARIZ:** Thank you, Senator. Any questions? Senator Spivey.

**SPIVEY:** Thank you, Vice Chair. And nice to see you on this side.

**BALLARD:** It's good to see you.

**SPIVEY:** I'm usually in front of you testifying, so now you're in the hot seat.

**BALLARD:** It's good to see you.

**SPIVEY:** Thank you again, Senator. So I actually am serviced in Douglas County by a volunteer firefighter department. Yep, I live in Ponca Hills, so very north in Omaha. So I just know the importance of, like, the work that they do. And, again, volunteers taking the time to ensure our safety. And I just was wondering, as I was thinking about this and as you were talking, have the counties ideally put in any investment into this as well or has it always only been state funded?

**BALLARD:** Yes, counties have put an investment towards this, but there just needs additional help. At least I know for as far as my county, Lancaster County, has put additional investment to the radio system.

**SPIVEY:** OK. Thank you.

**BALLARD:** Yes.

**ARMENDARIZ:** Any other questions from the committee? Seeing none,--

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**BALLARD:** Thank you.

**ARMENDARIZ:** --we'll have Senator Brandt come up and talk to LB62.

**BRANDT:** Good afternoon. I find it kind of ironic that I'm down here asking for \$19 million while Senator Clements is in TNT asking for \$52 million, which is the better bargain, way better. So good afternoon, Vice Chairman Armendariz and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Senator Tom Brandt, T-o-m B-r-a-n-d-t. I represent Legislative District 32: Fillmore, Thayer, Jefferson, Saline, and southwestern Lancaster Counties. Today, I bring you LB62 on behalf of Nebraska's volunteer fire departments. LB62 continues the progress made by Senator Brewer in previous years to fund portable and mobile radios to volunteer fire departments across the state of Nebraska, ensuring they have interoperator-- "interoperatable" communication capabilities through the Statewide Radio System called SRS. The bill would appropriate \$19 million from the General Fund for fiscal year '25 and '26 to the Department of Administrative Services, specifically for the Office of the Chief Information Officer. Currently, only a limited number of Nebraska's 400-plus volunteer fire departments have the necessary radios to connect to the SRS. This means that in many cases, upon arrival at emergency scenes, these departments have restricted communication capabilities, particularly during mutual aid responses. By equipping all volunteer fire departments with SRS compatible radios, LB62 will ensure seamless communication between first responders, local law enforcement, and other public safety agencies across the state. This will improve response coordination and enhance the safety of both emergency personnel in the communities they serve. Volunteer fire departments play a critical role in protecting Nebraska's rural communities, yet most lack access to the SRS system. The first round of funding benefitted over 175 volunteer fire departments. However, demand exceeded available funding and many departments that applied were unable to receive radios. This bill seeks to close that gap, ensuring all volunteer fire departments have the communication tools they need to respond effectively. You'll hear from testifiers today who will provide further details on the impact of this initiative. I also have a breakdown of where the first round of radios were distributed in that handout. And with that, I'd be happy to take any questions.

**ARMENDARIZ:** Thank you, Senator Brandt. Any questions for the senator?

**BRANDT:** OK.

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**ARMENDARIZ:** Seeing none, thank you. And I'd welcome proponents for LB62 or LB65 [SIC]. And if you could state if you have a preference of one or the other or if you're testifying for both. Appreciate it.

**JOEL CERNY:** Yeah, I'll be testifying for both bills--

**ARMENDARIZ:** Appreciate that.

**JOEL CERNY:** --because I want to head north before the storm hits.

**ARMENDARIZ:** Nope.

**JOEL CERNY:** So good afternoon, Appropriations Committee. My name is Joel, J-o-e-l, Cerny, C-e-r-n-y. I'm the Fire Chief for the Linwood Rural Fire Protection District. Our fire district sits in the northeast corner of Butler County and the northwest corner of Saunders County in Senator Storm's district. I'm one of the directors of the National Volunteer Fire Council for Nebraska State Volunteers Association, and I'm the chairman of the Nebraska Fire Chiefs Association Legislative Committee. I want to relate to you a story about a fire call that Linwood VFD had on April 22 of '22. Linwood VFD was paged out to a fast-moving field fire, a quarter mile east of Highway 15 and just north of the Linwood Spur. I was one of the first on scene and with wind blowing around 40 miles an hour, I requested mutual aid right away from David City and Schuyler fire departments. After the fire jumped the highway and was headed southeast, I requested Bellwood, Skull Creek, Prague, Morse Bluff, and North Bend fire departments for more grass rigs, tankers, and manpower. With fire departments coming from four different counties to assist us on the call, communications was a disaster as each of the counties were using a different frequency than the Butler County fire departments use. In the fall of 2024, Linwood did receive one statewide handheld radio and a mobile base radio through the statewide radio grant program. These radios will now enable us to talk to all the mutual aid departments that have also received their statewide radios. When Linwood VFD picked up our radios in Lincoln and took the required training to properly use the radios, they told us the value of the radios was \$25,000. At this price, there's no way a small rural fire district could ever afford to make such a purchase as the amount is almost half of our annual budget. Please remember that there are many other fire departments in Nebraska that are in the same predicament as us. There are still 3 of the 8 departments in Butler County that have not received statewide radios, as well as 1 of 4 in Colfax County, 5 of 13 in Saunders County, and 6 of 10 in Dodge County. These numbers I got from the state's website, and I've copied that site there if you guys

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want to check it out. I would also remind you about the large grass fires in Custer County just last week. There was at least 46 different departments there, and I'm sure they struggle with their communications until the Nebraska Wildland Incident Response Assistance Team got there and got their communication system set up. Finally, one of the main issues that came out of the 9/11 terrorist attacks was the lack of good communications. These bills will help Nebraska alleviate that issue. And I ask for your support to move LB25 and LB62 out of committee and onto the floor for further passage. Thank you, and I'm willing to answer questions.

**ARMENDARIZ:** Thank you. Any questions from the committee? Seeing none, I welcome the next proponent for LB62, LB25.

**DAN RIPLEY:** Hi, my name is Dan, D-a-n, Ripley, R-i-p-l-e-y. I'm a volunteer firefighter EMT with Hickman Fire and Rescue. Thanks for letting me talk today. I'm a proponent of LB25 and LB62. I guess, specifically, what's, what's interesting about the fire services is we think it's just fire. The volunteer fire service is made up of farmers, teachers, ranchers, and they're all over the, the, the state, obviously. These folks choose to kind of sometimes how we spend our budget. Our organization, specifically, has chosen to spend our small budget on ambulances. We were able to get 2 ambulances over the last 5 years through some grants, the Leona Helmsley grant, we've got some pretty significant cool devices that help save lives. And we've actually saved a life. We have a mom in our district that has three kids and had a cardiac arrest event on her birthday, and due to our equipment and where we chose to spend that funding, we were able to bring her back to life, which is pretty impactful. But some challenges that we have is interoperability, communicating with our rural agencies that are next to us, our mutual aid agencies. If we call for another ambulance from a rural agency, if they're in a different county, we're not able to talk to them necessarily right away. And, and as cliché as it saves, time is muscle when it comes to cardiac arrest, time is muscle when it comes to strokes. And then, obviously, fires grow very rapidly. So fire grows in size pretty fast. And if we're not able to communicate with one another, it creates for, for pretty dangerous situations. The grass fires that were in Gage, Saline, and Lancaster County just a few years ago was a, a prime example when we had one of our friends in Crete fire get burned over. It was a, a dynamic event with multiple radio systems and multiple agencies working, communication basically had to be trying to hold two radios with one hand and maybe a third one with your elbows to try and put it mayday out for that firefighter that was injured. We had no way to communicate with our law enforcement, who ended up being the

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closest people to go get this injured firefighter, put him in his sheriff's deputy cruiser, and then take him to the city of Lincoln ambulances on a different system closer to Lincoln. And so we had this garbled mess of trying to help our people that are just volunteering. He's a teacher at Doane and, you know, he volunteers for his community who wanted to do this. That being said, interoperable-- interoperability is huge. We had success with this, with this radio system, just most recently in Broken Bow, the fires that were up there that, that the state supported, using that interoperable system allowed agencies to communicate. But one radio is not enough. If you can imagine when you go to an event, you have firefighters inside, you have firefighters outside, you have first responders inside, you have first responders outside. Being able to just talk to that one person to one person isn't enough. Everybody on that incident needs to hear what's going on. Time is, is muscle. Time is life and death. And that may sound cliché, but I think you all understand that Crete Fire and Rescue had their kind of an active shooter event last year where a gentleman had fired across the street at his neighbors, which hit some of them, and then they were basically pinned in their house. And to try and communicate to the Lancaster sheriff deputies to Crete Fire and Rescue, to Wilber Fire and Rescue was a big challenge. And, and this system allows those agencies to all go to a common channel and to at least have that communication. So with that, those are my reasons why I'm a big proponent of this. And it's, it's a good thing for, for Nebraska and for our rural fire service. We just don't have the funding to buy radios that are good, and these are good radios. But when they cost as much as they do, when it comes time to buy a new LIFEPAK or an AED, what we would, you know, shock someone's heart back to life with, we're always going to choose that, because we, we choose that over what we would choose to keep us safe. And then the radios are what keeps us safe. And that's where we need your guys' help. So with that, if you have any questions, I'd love to answer them.

**ARMENDARIZ:** Thank you. Any questions? Senator Spivey.

**SPIVEY:** Thank you, Vice Chair. And thank you so much for being here--

**DAN RIPLEY:** Yes, ma'am.

**SPIVEY:** --and your service. With the radios, I was talking to someone out in the Rotunda earlier about this, that I know that there was a grant before that allowed you to purchase them and get them out to the different counties and volunteer firefighter departments. With the kind of maintenance of these radios, do they last longer? Is this

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something that you have to purchase, like, every 5 years because of changes in technology or how does that piece work?

**DAN RIPLEY:** Yeah, that's a great question. I'm not going to lie, I think everything has a lifespan. I'm not a radio expert, so I don't know what that is. I know what we have now is about 15 to 20 years old. I don't think any of us probably drive a vehicle besides my daughter that's 15 or 20 years old, and it's a good school car. But for reliability of, of public safety, it's not there. I wish I had a better answer. I'm sure everything does, but I know the, the, the radio systems, I'm assuming if we entrust it to protect our troopers, all throughout the state had a lot of research, education, you know, just opportunity to troubleshoot the challenges that it has. And if it's, if it's good enough for them, I'm, I'm willing to say it's good enough for us as, as volunteer firefighters and EMTs.

**SPIVEY:** Absolutely. Thank you for that. And just my last question, with LB62 or LB25 and/or both, do you imagine that these funds would help get new technology out to all of the spaces in the-- I don't know if you saw the, like, handout that Senator Brandt had, like, where all the counties are and it has, like, the number--

**DAN RIPLEY:** Yes, ma'am.

**SPIVEY:** --of where those are. So would that, like, replenish all of that and these are going to be new or is that how you imagine the funds being used--

**DAN RIPLEY:** I guess, how I would--

**SPIVEY:** --or will there be discretion?

**DAN RIPLEY:** Yeah, no, I would say my impression would be it's, it's to fund new radios. So currently-- I don't know, technology is really cool. So the radios that we've got 15 to 20 years ago are kind of like what our kids now play with as walkie-talkies in the backyard. We find our parts on eBay because they just don't make parts anymore for them. But the, the radios that they're-- that are out there now, and that's what I would advocate for is new ones, I would say are firefighter friendly. They have knobs to use when you have gloves on your hands. They have lapel mikes that when you're breathing in SCBA and you have a lot of noise from a chainsaw or a positive pressure fan going off, that fan, you know, is very loud, you can hear someone speaking rather than holding a radio. As funny as it sounds, you know, our channels can get changed. It has an ability to, to lock your channel so that

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that channel doesn't get changed to a different channel, and you miss important communication. So I think we need the new ones. I think that's, that's-- I don't think we need to go through trying to fix what we have that might be old. In Lancaster County, we have, you know, multiple counties surrounding us, and we all operate on a different system. And so if I want to talk to Cortland, I either have to buy another radio, call them on the phone, or go through a dispatch center that then contacts their dispatch center to tell them what I need that then gets back to us. And so it's kind of like this telephone and, unfortunately, we're, we're imperfect, things get missed accidentally, vital communications may not get communicated that we need to hear, so.

**SPIVEY:** Yeah.

**DAN RIPLEY:** Really good question.

**SPIVEY:** Yeah, thank you for that.

**DAN RIPLEY:** Yes, ma'am.

**SPIVEY:** Appreciate it.

**CLEMENTS:** I'm back.

**SPIVEY:** Welcome back, Chair.

**CLEMENTS:** Senator Dover.

**DOVER:** Yeah, first of all, in this document here, that this is a kit that says right here where the kit is, it's \$2,500 per kit. You're looking for two kits per district and that equals \$19 million. And my question is, do you have anybody speaking from the-- about the radios here about the cost of the radios or the abilities of the radio? Do you know if they're testifying today? All right. OK. Thank you.

**DAN RIPLEY:** Perfect. Thanks.

**CLEMENTS:** Other questions? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony.

**DAN RIPLEY:** Yes, sir. Thank you.

**CLEMENTS:** Next proponent, LB25 and LB62? Good afternoon.

**CHELSEA JOHNSON:** Good afternoon, Chair Clements, members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Chelsea Johnson, spelled C-h-e-l-s-e-a J-o-h-n-s-o-n. I'm appearing before the committee in my

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capacity as a member of the Lancaster County Board, and here to speak on behalf of the County Board in support of LB25. Rural fire departments are essential to the safety of Lancaster County. The rural fire department volunteers who serve our community represent the best of Lancaster County. They selflessly put themselves in harm's way to protect their friends, neighbors, and the general public. Their dedication and commitment to public service is unmatched. However, all of our volunteers' bravery and sacrifice cannot overcome the funding gap that exists for critical communications equipment. Our volunteers are working with aging radios that operate on an obsolete network backbone that is at the end of its useful life and can no longer be maintained. The communication challenges that arose during the October 2022 wildfire that ravaged southern parts of Lancaster County serves to highlight the need for new radio equipment. Frankly speaking, departments responding to the fire could not talk to one another over their radios at the most critical times. To address the significant need, the Lancaster County Board invested \$500,000 of its ARPA allocation, both to purchase communications equipment for rural fire departments and to fund a study that explored interagency operability of rural fire departments that respond within Lancaster County. That study demonstrated that the cost in Lancaster County to implement a new radio system would be somewhere between \$1.48 million and \$9.15 million. This is the cost for rural fire departments in Lancaster County alone. We understand that funding for radios for rural fire departments primarily is a local need. However, it is a local need that has regional and statewide implications for the firefighting system as a whole. Fires do not respect boundaries, and rural fire departments routinely honor mutual aid agreements to respond to incidents in neighboring counties. Given the extraordinary costs of addressing the problems and the high stakes for statewide public safety, the Legislature over the last couple of sessions has appropriated significant funding to begin addressing this issue by providing single radio kits to individual departments across the state. In order to accelerate updates to radio systems beyond issuing a single radio kit to individual departments, LB25 creates a grant program that would match on a one-to-one basis, local political subdivisions' commitment to achieve interoperability. Lancaster County already has made an initial financial commitment in support of our firefighters, and this legislation would significantly increase our community's ability to address this time-sensitive public safety issue. We ask this committee to build upon the great work that you accomplished over the last couple of sessions to fund the most critical needs of our rural fire departments, who are so vital to ensuring the safety of our rural population. We thank Senator Ballard

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and this committee for your continued leadership on this important issue. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I would be happy to answer any questions.

**CLEMENTS:** Are there questions? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony.

**CHELSEA JOHNSON:** Thank you.

**CLEMENTS:** Next proponent?

**BILL MONTZ:** Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, my name is Bill Montz, and that's B-i-l-l, and I'm going to stand, if that's all right, last name Montz, that's M-o-n-t-z. Today, I'm representing-- I'm sorry?

**CLEMENTS:** Move directly in front of the microphone, please.

**BILL MONTZ:** Oh, I'm sorry. There, is that better?

**CLEMENTS:** Yes. Thank you.

**BILL MONTZ:** Or, actually, I'll probably end up sitting down, might take a crane to get me up. But today I'm representing two different agencies. I'm representing my own agency, which is the Seward County Sheriff's Posse, and also the Lincoln County Sheriff's Posse as well after conversing with them this past weekend over the phone. My, my testimony will be short and sweet. And, again, at the end of this, I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have. We were-- our agency speaking on behalf of Seward County Sheriff's Posse, was involved in the Tyler Goodrich search last year on multiple different occasions. The radios we currently have, and I wish I would have brought one with me to actually give me a visual of what, what it looks like, it's one of these family service radios that you can go, like, to Walmart and buy, you know, for 20 bucks or whatever. They're, you know, not a very good option, to say the very least. There may be a line of sight at 1,000 feet under normal atmospheric conditions; they're not suitable for public safety, to say the very least. And while we were on this operation with the Tyler Goodrich search, I was, I was in a unified command post, you know, you know, running the situation. And those radios are-- they compromise safety, interoperability, and the logistics of the operation, to say the very least. I, I am in support of both bills. I should have said that to begin with, I guess. I'm in support of both bills on behalf of the Lincoln County Sheriff's Posse and the Seward County Sheriff's Posse. Some of the testimony before me kind of echo what I was going to say about, you know, the need for

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those radios for public safety, for the safety of the members doing searches. And I would like to see, on behalf of both agencies, I would like to see both of these bills include language that includes agencies that do search and rescue operations that not-- that are not necessarily fire departments or rescue squads or law enforcement. That's basically the reason I'm here. I'll keep it short and sweet because like Joel, we want to get home before the weather hits. And at this point, I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.

**CLEMENTS:** Are there questions?

**BILL MONTZ:** I hear crickets chirping.

**CLEMENTS:** Yeah. Seeing none,--

**BILL MONTZ:** Again, thank you for this opportunity. Thank you for everything the Appropriations Committee does for public safety, for the good people of the state of Nebraska. Thank you.

**CLEMENTS:** --thank you for your testimony.

**BILL MONTZ:** This is going to look kind of weird.

**CLEMENTS:** Take your time. Next proponent? Welcome.

**JERRY STILMOCK:** Mr. Chairperson, members of the committee, my name is Jerry Stilmock, J-e-r-r-y S-t-i-l-m-o-c-k, testifying on behalf of my clients, the Nebraska State Volunteer Firefighters Association, Nebraska Fire Chiefs Association. For senators new to the committee, Senator Spivey, Prokop, and Strommen, in 2023-- new to the, new to the Legislature-- thank you, Senator-- new to the committee-- Senator Machaela Cavanaugh. The Legislature appropriated \$5 million in 2023, and another \$2 million in 2024, plus legislation that Senator Dover introduced and was approved by the Legislature last year for funding of volunteer fire radios. You've heard the critical nature of them. The, the, the, County of Buffalo have expended funds for radios. The County of Gage expended-- expended radio-- funding for radios for the volunteers and others. And Otoe County has expended county funds for two repeater towers to better assist first responders in communicating. But the, the Lancaster County, Gage, and Saline County fires in 2023, the, the message this afternoon on this issue is it's not just north central Nebraska and the Panhandle. It is throughout the state where these massive fires are occurring. Last week, there were four airdrops that occurred and, hopefully, as someone recounted earlier, we'll get some-- we will receive some moisture in Nebraska that we so desperately need. This is going to be the only opportunity

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that I have to speak to you this afternoon at this moment. It's kind of like a trial setting. I get one opportunity, then the other side goes and the other side completes. I don't know who's behind me who's going to complain or object or oppose. But with \$7 million and over 186 sets of these radios being distributed, they are working. They're, they're doing the job. They're allowing the commanders, the chiefs to communicate. And I don't know if any of you took a foreign language in high school or college, but let me tell you, I did in the first-- through the first, second year of college. If you don't use it, you lose it. And why do I say that? Not in relation to foreign language, but you have to be able to jockey. You have to be able to use the radios. And that's why one element, and we're supportive of both bills, by the way, one element of Senator Ballard's bill is, is training. And that training is provided by the state without any charge for use of the Statewide Radio System. The radios do what they're supposed to do. We've had tremendous success over the 2 years. So whoever may come after me and has the mic last at least before the closing senator, should they choose so, I've not heard any complaints on behalf of our membership that have been able to receive these. Senators, I'm going to conclude with this. Fire Chief Wragge from the city of Norfolk was scheduled to be here this afternoon in person. He was kind enough to submit his testimony. I won't ask to read it, but with the permission of the chair, I'd ask the page, one of the pages to approach. I have copies for you to include in your file. I was going to ask permission to read it, but I think that would be not a good use of your time. And so, if I may, I'll just ask that that be distributed.

**CLEMENTS:** Yes.

**JERRY STILMOCK:** And thank you to the introducing senators this year for carrying on the tradition of the importance of helping out the volunteers in the field so they can, in fact, communicate. There's a gentleman that I know is behind me, Mr. Dave Collett, he is in the capacity with the OCIO Office on the state board-- for the state of Nebraska through DAS. And he would be able to, as I understood it in preparation for this afternoon, be able to come up in a neutral position and answer questions to assist the committee in hopefully gaining additional information to support, once again, another funding opportunity. Thank you, Senators, I appreciate your courtesy.

**CLEMENTS:** Are there questions from the committee? Well, I've got a question.

**JERRY STILMOCK:** Yes, sir.

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**CLEMENTS:** We're talking about departments not being able to talk to each other. How many different radio systems are there? Why can't they communicate?

**JERRY STILMOCK:** Yeah, the-- some of them are operating on older frequencies, and those would be the older radios, the ones that have not been able to receive funding. Now think of that as a, as an operational among the department members of the Syracuse Volunteer Fire Department. So if they are slighter radios, they're all older radios, they can communicate among themselves on a particular frequency or band of frequency, b-a-n-d. But with the radios that are being discussed here, they are capable of multiple bands, multiple frequencies, so that not only would you be able to communicate internally with the members of your own department but, most importantly, as the gentleman stated earlier, that the branch of communication, whether it'd be to dispatch or to police service or to law enforcement on the local side or the state troopers, that, that breadth of being able to communicate through the state-issued radios is what's opened up. And, sir, I'd be remiss to say, I mean, the, the person that first brainchild this item was a state trooper. 3 or 4 years ago, he came to the volunteers and said I have an idea. And that would be to blanket, get the radios out to the volunteers, not just with the State Patrol. Hopefully, I've answered a portion of your question, sir.

**CLEMENTS:** Yes. That's fine. The 186 sets purchased, would you discuss the cost of the set?

**JERRY STILMOCK:** Yeah, and my information would be old. I'd prefer if you, if you would defer to Mr. Collett. He would be able to answer that with present prices, so were accurate rather than 3 years old, sir.

**CLEMENTS:** Very good. Thank you.

**JERRY STILMOCK:** I'd appreciate it.

**CLEMENTS:** Other questions? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony.

**JERRY STILMOCK:** Thank you. Good day, Senators.

**CLEMENTS:** Other proponents for LB62, LB25? Good afternoon.

**BETH BAZYN FERRELL:** Good afternoon, Chairman Clements, members of the committee. For the record, my name is Beth, B-e-t-h, Bazyn, B-a-z-y-n, Ferrell, F-e-r-r-e-l-l. I'm with the Nebraska Association of County

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Officials. I'm appearing in support of both bills. We support the goals of both of these bills, enhancing public safety and increasing the ability to have appropriate emergency responses. You've heard from other testifiers the critical need for communications in these situations, and I don't think I can add anything to that that would be more powerful than what they have, have said as examples. We've heard that the radio systems are expensive, and counties-- some counties have been able to help with that. Some counties have not been able to because of levy limits and budget limits and so on. Volunteer agencies struggle to come up with the funding as well. And so we support both of these mechanisms for funding. And we'd also like to thank you for the funding that you've provided in the past. I would be happy to answer questions.

**CLEMENTS:** Are there questions? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony. Next proponent? Seeing none, anyone in opposition of LB25 or LB62? Seeing none, anyone in the neutral capacity?

**DAVE COLLETT:** Good afternoon,--

**CLEMENTS:** Welcome.

**DAVE COLLETT:** --Senator Clements. Chairman and members of the committee, my name is Dave Collett, D-a-v-e C-o-l-l-e-t-t, and I manage the Statewide Radio System for the state of Nebraska. I'm really just here to answer questions or anything. Senator Dover, you had a question about the amount of cost. And also, Senator Clements, you had a question about the cost. Each actual radio cost about \$8,000 to \$9,000. And then we have also included in the, in the package that we have been putting out, a, a mobile radio, a portable radio, and a vehicular repeater that allows that portable radio to work through the mobile radio onto the Statewide Radio System. The Statewide Radio System was designed to have coverage for mobile radios, not for portable radios, so that vehicular repeater is a very important part of this. For those that we have been able to put the, put the full kit into their hands, my thoughts going forward with this money would be to actually increase the number of radios that can use that-- the equipment that we have started out with to, to do that. So they would-- I would increase the number of portable radios, the number of mobile radios, one vehicular repeater can work with mobile-- with multiple radios. So that is part of my, my, my thoughts on going forward on this. The original intent of the legislation was to provide interoperability between volunteer fire departments and Statewide Radio System users, which is the State Patrol, NDOT, many different counties. We have 220 different agencies that use the Statewide Radio

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System currently. So with that, I will take any questions that you might have.

**CLEMENTS:** Are there questions? Senator Lippincott.

**LIPPINCOTT:** The folks back in Merrick County, Central City, they got a radio that they use for the county. I understand it's about a \$900 radio. It's a Motorola XPR 7550e radio, \$900. They say that that works fairly well.

**DAVE COLLETT:** Yep.

**LIPPINCOTT:** They also have a statewide radio, it's a Motorola APX 8000XE.

**DAVE COLLETT:** Yes.

**LIPPINCOTT:** And that's about \$10,000. Is that correct?

**DAVE COLLETT:** Correct.

**LIPPINCOTT:** And then in addition to that, you have to have a \$25,000 suitcase that you have to carry around with you. Is that correct?

**DAVE COLLETT:** So in Merrick County, there is a difficulty with coverage. We do not have a lot of coverage in Merrick County. So, yes, for them to use a portable radio onto the statewide system, they would have to use that suitcase going through there. The difficulty is that, that \$900 radio is not with the modern capacity and capabilities of the Statewide Radio System. The Statewide Radio System is a Project 25 standards-based radio system, which was mandated after 9/11 for interoperability. So the, the \$900 radio is a analog radio that is direct line of sight between the two radios. The Statewide Radio System works across the entire state. You can have people here in, in Lancaster County talking to people in Scotts Bluff County and anywhere across the state, it works all the way across. So-- and that is one of the reasons for the ability for the interoperability is to be able to do that.

**LIPPINCOTT:** If I may follow up,--

**CLEMENTS:** Yeah.

**LIPPINCOTT:** --it just doesn't work for Merrick County.

**DAVE COLLETT:** I, I--

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**LIPPINCOTT:** So, yeah, but you're aware of that. Now, also, it was brought to my attention that a Wave cell phone-based Motorola radio, which only costs about 300 bucks, works like a champ.

**DAVE COLLETT:** So we do have a-- as part of the Statewide Radio System, we are connected in through what is called Critical Connect, which is a, a connection to the cloud that allows a cell phone to talk back onto the radio system. It does work fairly well across anywhere that you have cellular coverage. The concern-- we have a few concerns over that. One of those is that it really is not a public safety grade piece of equipment. It is a consumer grade piece of equipment and it does not-- the cellular companies do not have the same requirements for uptime that, that I put on my system. My system normally runs five nines of reliability, which means that 99.999% of the time my system is running. Cellular companies have outages often. So while we do support that, and they do use that onto the Statewide Radio System, they can talk back and forth to any radio that is on the Statewide Radio System. And there are a couple of places that have actually tried to use that as a public safety grade piece of equipment. The-- at-- in the Panhandle, there was one of the cities out in the Panhandle was going to use those specifically for their officers out there. They used them for about 3 months, and then they decided to go back to the actual public safety grade radios because of the officer safety issues.

**LIPPINCOTT:** In addition to that, then you also have to have ground-based towers. Correct?

**DAVE COLLETT:** Correct.

**LIPPINCOTT:** And recently, there in Central City, \$6,000 upgrades. So that also has a, an expense. And then if I may, just follow up. Everybody's got a cellular telephone. All the cell phones have apps, and there are walkie-talkie apps that do work. And, of course, we know with the new phones, they also have satellite capabilities so they can operate out in the Sandhills. Line of sight is not an issue. What's the status there in terms of workability and functionality and cost?

**DAVE COLLETT:** Like, like, like I say, the-- this is my, my cell phone. I actually use it on the Statewide Radio System to, to talk back and forth onto, to the other, to, to other users. The biggest problem with using a cell phone app or something like that, is it is not designed directly for public safety. It is designed for people to talk back and forth, for a business to talk and forth-- back and forth, and and do other things like that. It-- the immediate response that you need from

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a, from a radio, a radio is a one to many communication. So you have one radio in your hand and it goes out to everybody who is on that, on, on that radio channel. The cell phone, it is direct communications between one or two. It takes much more time for it to set up the call and do everything. Most radio transmissions are less than 3 seconds.

**LIPPINCOTT:** Well, thank you for that. Just one additional follow up. And that is the other day there, in my hometown, we have a fire south of town.

**DAN RIPLEY:** Right.

**LIPPINCOTT:** We have-- we need to get ahold of the sheriff. The sheriff is called, but he's going the wrong direction, west of town. Can't get ahold of him. So I'm sure the wheel has been invented regarding this communication thing with the sheriff, with the ambulance, with the fire department and everybody, but we, we seem to disconnect here. And we talked to a couple years ago, if we spend money and get this statewide radio, everything's going to be solved, but it's not being solved. So, I mean, this is truly a safety issue.

**DAVE COLLETT:** Yes, it is. I, I, I totally agree. My goal as a, as a part of the Statewide Radio System is that anybody who needs to talk to somebody else can talk to them. We are not there. We use multiple different radio systems. And even currently there are people who are putting in new, new systems that are not compatible with other systems. Adams County would be one of those that it's not compatible with, with even, even the radio, you know, the \$900 radio or the \$9,000 radio. They have proprietary systems. And with people moving, moving those things that way, it makes it very difficult. Most of the consideration is budget considerations.

**LIPPINCOTT:** You know, in the military we could talk to different people. And,--

**DAVE COLLETT:** Yeah.

**LIPPINCOTT:** --you know, this is important stuff. I don't know why we can't solve it.

**DAVE COLLETT:** It can be solved. It takes money.

**LIPPINCOTT:** Money thing.

**CLEMENTS:** As usual. Yes.

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**DAVE COLLETT:** Anybody else?

**CLEMENTS:** Let's see, did I have a-- I did ask how many-- why are there so many different radio systems? Is it different generations? Well, first I wanted to ask, how long, if we appropriate money for new radios, what's their lifespan? Is this system going to be obsolete soon?

**DAVE COLLETT:** No, the system will not be obsolete soon. We have-- we do an upgrade every 2 years to the radio system. So it is at the latest and, and best, best portion. And everything works the way it is supposed to. The, the lifespan of a mobile or portable radio, the ones that we are putting out, I am-- I, I would be surprised if they don't last more than 10 years, most of them. And you've heard people talking about they're using radios from 15 years ago, that is just, just because of the quality of, of what, of what is being put out there is, is that way. We're not using the same cell phones we were using 15 years ago.

**CLEMENTS:** Right. So, yeah, I'm glad to hear the system is upgradable--

**DAVE COLLETT:** Yes.

**CLEMENTS:** --as, as needed. That's--

**DAVE COLLETT:** And we keep it fully upgraded.

**CLEMENTS:** Very good. I think that answers that question. The, the question about what a kit-- these kits that were given out, what was the cost of one kit?

**DAVE COLLETT:** The cost of one kit is about \$25,000.

**CLEMENTS:** OK. So you have the radio, the mobile unit, and vehicle repeater.

**DAVE COLLETT:** Yeah, vehicular repeater. Yes.

**CLEMENTS:** And the combination of those is \$25,000.

**DAVE COLLETT:** Yes.

**CLEMENTS:** And you need each of those items to be functional?

**DAVE COLLETT:** You, you need the, you need the mobile and the vehicular repeater. You need one of those. A portable radio, many portable

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radios can use the same vehicular, vehicular repeater and mobile radio.

**CLEMENTS:** Oh, OK.

**DAVE COLLETT:** So we have put out all these different kits to the different areas, kind of setting them up to be able to start purchasing actual-- the, the radios for their firefighters to, to move forward. So this gives them the interoperability with the Statewide Radio System, while still being able to, to move forward and use their portable radios for other uses.

**CLEMENTS:** And what just a portable radio cost?

**DAVE COLLETT:** The portable radio is \$8,000.

**CLEMENTS:** That's the \$8,000?

**DAVE COLLETT:** Yes.

**CLEMENTS:** All right.

**DAVE COLLETT:** I know.

**CLEMENTS:** All right. Senator Dover.

**DOVER:** You know with-- technology is just advancing quickly. And you have Elon Musk and Starlink. And those-- telecommunication that we have today, who knows in a matter of 2 years,--

**DAVE COLLETT:** Correct.

**DOVER:** --what new technology may be out there. I mean-- and I, I guess, I don't know if it's even a question you can answer, but it seems to me that kind of as Senator Lippincott was kind of talking about a little bit. I mean, it's hard to invest this kind of money because, I mean, if you have a 10-year lifespan, but in 10 years, it's going to be a vastly different world we're living in.

**DAVE COLLETT:** Correct.

**DOVER:** And so it just seems as though as-- are you aware of anything with Starlink and those kind of things that-- I mean, you'd be, you'd be able to communicate all the time and not worry anymore.

**DAVE COLLETT:** The-- Starlink is not something that I have been following very closely. Some of the more advanced areas that they're

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moving into now is to have private LTE, private phone systems that you use, that then you would put a-- basically, same we do for the, the radio, you just put your own cellular towers across the state. That it would take quite a bit more, quite a bit more investment to do that. But that is where some of the, some of the things are moving currently is to have your own private cellular system. Georgia just recently did that, where they, where they have moved most of their stuff to a, to a private LTE system compared to having a radio system. But they also, they also do-- they have radios that are compatible with both. Their radio can work on the cell system and on the LTE system.

**CLEMENTS:** All right. Other questions? Seeing none, thank you for coming. Thank you for your testimony.

**DAVE COLLETT:** Thank you.

**CLEMENTS:** Is there anyone else wishing to testify in the neutral capacity? Welcome.

**BRAD WELLS:** Good afternoon. Brad Wells, Central City Volunteer Fire Department, B-r-a-d W-e-l-l-s. I am from Merrick County. I'm standing neutral because we can certainly always use the funds. I'm a really "propotent." In our community, I've got 35 members on my department. The governing bodies have supplied all our members with radios. I brought props along, but I guess we're not-- we can't use the props, but I could give you an idea of what we're talking about as far as radios go and stuff like that. So a couple stories on statewide radio. We did receive one of the statewide radio kits. We've had no luck with it at all. We are in that dead zone. So we're short towers. We're supposed to test them monthly. So my monthly test consists of pulling my truck that I have the suitcase in outside because it won't go through the building. I call on the radio, to what they call the C-Rock channel, C-Rock one, to our dispatch in Hamilton County, 20 miles away. No response. And this is what I typically do. I get my cell phone out or I get my regular handheld out, which I can't-- the handheld goes from one of the towers in Central City to the tower in Hamilton County to Aurora. So I either do one or two things, I call the dispatch center, tell them I need to check my statewide-- my radios. So she turns on the radio, calls back, or I call here, the signal's good. It's good. But when we're done, then we turn, we all turn our radios back off. So that pretty well cuts out-- you know, if I'm going to get a hold of Hamilton County, I just as well call on the cell phone. It saves me a step. What Senator Lippincott said the other day was we had one of-- the county, the county is using statewide radios, which, in a nutshell, put the county sheriff's department out

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of contact with all the fire departments and the ambulances. We run over here. They run over there. So we had the incident where the deputy was going through, going the wrong direction. The only way we can get back with the deputy is to call Hamilton County on our radios, and then she has to call them, and then they have to switch their radios in order for us to communicate. So we lost a lot of viability in our system by trying this, so. I think part of the problem is the lack of towers, because we cannot-- I've got two towers I can hit, and for the most part we can't hit them with our-- with this system. So for Central City, stands right now, we don't need another set because they're not going to work for us. I've talked to a couple, not a lot of them, but a couple others, and they've had pretty well the same instance. They're, they're really expensive equipment. I can buy 10 radios for the cost of just that one set. And we've had them a long time, we keep upgrading. And there, again, the governing bodies keep the upgrades either for the towers, the towers, like Senator Lippincott said, about \$6,000 to replace the tower. They did replace the one on the-- for the police department. Our city police department uses the same frequency the fire department and the ambulance use. They replaced that, I think it was about \$8,000 for their repeater. A couple of villages need their repeaters upgraded as well. So that's my experience there. So I'm not going to turn down the money, but the more I've been studying it-- my kids have a towing and recovery business that they use push-to-talk radios, the Wave radio. It's cell phone based. And right now, if I wanted to call my daughter-in-law, who is in Arizona, I would push the button, ask her, and she would respond right back. It's seamless. Very clear reception. They've got about six or eight of those radios in their company. Everybody hears that. So one radio, I'm communicating with all their other radios. Those radios do have switches where you can turn to different channels as well. So you can have, like, talk groups and stuff like that. My vision was like in Custer County, if they had the cell phone based, because the cell phone based radio reaches every place, even places my cell phone is a little iffy, the radio will reach. And, like you said, with the cell phone side, my daughter-in-law usually uses her cell phone as a radio. It's got the app in it, so she actually uses her cell phone as a radio. Functions the same way. Their tow and recovery, it's a pretty dynamic business. Those radios stand up. They're good grade radios. They stand up as well as our other radios do, so. That's pretty well-- I think that's kind of my talk points, I guess, so.

**CLEMENTS:** All right. Are there questions from the committee? Senator Lippincott.

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**LIPPINCOTT:** So regarding the cost of your radios, one of them is 300 bucks, \$10,000 per year subscription, a \$900 radio, another \$10,000 radio with a \$25,000 case, a tower upgrade is \$6,000. Overall, \$46,200 a year, and you can't talk to the sheriff.

**BRAD WELLS:** In a nutshell, yes. I mean, the subscription on those, the cell phone based, the subscription is a hindrance. If I figured out if-- and I just talked to a couple of different vendors this last week and it's about, balanced out about \$10,000 a year, each year for the subscription. About \$300 for the radio. So, yeah, it's, you know, where our regular radios run off the towers. Of course, that's, that's all running off the government tower so you don't have that. But with my-- in my area, with my regular radios, I've been doing this, like, for 40 years. And we've, we've upgraded as we went, didn't let anything get too past, I'd say 10 years, you know, kept them upgraded with the governing bodies that kept those up. And I can reach any place in my county. A trip up I do have is Merrick County is on one frequency. We share that with Howard County, Nance County, Polk County. Hamilton County is a different frequency, so we have to have a different radio in order to talk to Hamilton County. Same with Hall County, different frequency. We have to have a different radio to talk to Hamilton County. Now part of the hole is, and I think they're working on doing that, maybe a little more training on these state radios would help us out. Some of it's our internal mechanisms on trying to get together there. And I've been trying to get with our emergency managers and stuff like that. There seems to be a really trip up of getting everybody together to try to make-- I'd like to make these things work. They cost a lot of money. But right now, I'm not sure-- pretty well convinced myself that's not the best method of spending our money. The cell phone based are looking a lot better to me all the time.

**LIPPINCOTT:** Brad, is there some kind of organization where all the states talk to each other? I mean, we've got different topography, and different states, mountains, all that stuff. I mean, somebody has figured this out. I just don't understand why we're having problems with it.

**BRAD WELLS:** Well, for the cell phone based, and, like, there's holes there, I don't know how we would work that with our dispatchers. But for the cell phone based, like I said, I can talk to my daughter-in-law in Arizona right now. One push, one push and I'm talking to her. Seamless, completely seamless and completely clear.

**CLEMENTS:** All right. Senator Dover.

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**DOVER:** I was just talking to LFO, and I believe there's-- this bill is, is for so much money, but I believe this bill gives everyone two kits in every fire district. But the overall cost to actually get everybody their radios is over \$200 million-plus.

**BRAD WELLS:** I would think so. I guess what I'm saying is one radio, two radios, it's not going to help Central City because we don't have the towers.

**DOVER:** Right.

**BRAD WELLS:** Yeah, that's not going to help us. And in our situation, we don't do a lot of beyond our community, our mutual aid groups and stuff like that, so we work within those. So I really don't see the advantage that these radios are given, especially the way, you know, given their current operation. And part of it is, yeah, we could use more training. Definitely. But the lack of towers, which is the problem we had with the other, the other radios, you know, we put in more repeaters that, you know, that helped that situation out there, so. That Verizon just put in a new upgrade in Central City for their cell phone towers, and that just dramatically improved our cell phone reception. So I can-- so in a nutshell.

**CLEMENTS:** All right. Any other questions? I would, I would hope that the statewide system, if they're aware of, of places where the system doesn't really work, that they'll prioritize those areas that the system does work and they'll award those first.

**BRAD WELLS:** I might even question the need for that dynamic of radio for the most of us. You know, I, I understand where they're coming from with the dynamics of the radio, but. The little radio is, to me, is just as dynamic as-- the \$300 radio seems almost as dynamic as the \$8,000 radio.

**CLEMENTS:** Right.

**BRAD WELLS:** And, for me, that's like-- and the, the sheet I handed around is the list of the, the different frequencies and stuff. So for most of my line guys, they're not going to be able to, unless they do it all the time, be able to go through and dial in and see where they're going. They want something they, you know, most of them you can turn them on. We got, I think, on the big radio 16 channels, but it's seamless to make those adjustments. So it's-- it makes our life a lot simpler, so.

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**CLEMENTS:** All right. Seeing no questions, thank you for coming. Thank you for your testimony.

**BRAD WELLS:** Thank you, all.

**CLEMENTS:** Are there additional neutral testifiers? Seeing none, do we have committee online comments? We have comments for the record: on LB25, seven proponents, no opponents, none neutral; LB62, seven proponents, zero opponents, zero neutral. Senator Brandt.

**BRANDT:** Well, it's good to see you came back alive from TNT. Did you find the money over there? Anyway, I want to give a big thank you to all the men and women that serve in the fire services in Nebraska. These people meet people for the first time, often on the worst days of their life. You know, it could be an accident. It could be a fire, a search and rescue. They're willing to do the things most of us are not willing to do. They run toward the danger. So I just want to say that right away. This need is real. We're asking the committee to approve this request for funding for public safety, recognizing there are going to be sections of the state where things don't work well. I'll use the example of my hometown of Plymouth. They just put up a cell phone tower. It really screwed up cell phones for the rest of us. You wouldn't think that, but it did because we all use Verizon in US cellular. And this was a Viaero tower. And so we, we know when you live in these communities, and I know you know where your dead spots are at, you know where your dead spots are at, you know where your dead spots are at because you're all rural people. I can tell you, when I drive a quarter mile west of Bacon, I lose cell phone coverage every fricking time. And this table is hillier than that. So you have these over 400 rural fire departments in this state with volunteers and mine are saying the exact opposite of what we're hearing from Central City. They do not want to be on cell phones. They want these radios. We had a very severe grass fire down at Rock Creek 2 years ago. It lasted for days. The incident commander is from Fairbury, we've got seven or eight different fire services there. They can't talk to each other. They can't see each other. This would help them tremendously. They are asking for this. If there are problems with this system, I would hope the warranty on the system, as expensive as these are, and I agree this is a terrible cost, but my sensors on the fire department, I would be a little leery of giving them a \$200 cell phone and say this is how you guys are going to communicate when they get into these fires. When these stubble fields catch fire, like what we saw a couple of years ago, because when Lancaster and Saline were burning-- or excuse me, Lancaster and Gage were burning, the same thing was going

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on in Saline. And these things move so fast, you literally cannot get in front of them. So you have to communicate. And in addition to these people, you've got a whole bunch of farmers out there with tractors and disks trying to help stop these things. Just look what happened in Los Angeles here 2 months ago, 10,000 people lost their homes. I mean, could you imagine something like that in this state? So I guess that's kind of all the points I wanted to make. If there's any questions, I'll try and answer them, although these guys behind me are smarter than I am about this.

**CLEMENTS:** Any questions? Senator Dover.

**DOVER:** I just wanted to say thank you for bringing this. I mean, really, volunteer fire are the best of-- I mean, the best of our communities are demonstrated by those guys and what they're willing to do. So thank you.

**BRANDT:** Absolutely.

**CLEMENTS:** Said Prokop.

**PROKOP:** Thank you, Senator Brandt, for bringing this bill. I just had a quick, kind of, technical question on your bill. So page 2 on line 13, it says: Eligibility for such program shall be based on the number and type of radios required for each volunteer department based upon, based upon such department's needs and size. But there's no specific, kind of, eligibility requirements then spelled out. So, to me, I guess that, kind of, reads like that there would be some prioritization, understanding, and huge amount of need. You're not asking for all of the money at once. Do you have a-- do you envision, kind of, how that might work or, or what you'd--

**BRANDT:** We'd have--

**PROKOP:** --what you'd hope to accomplish with that?

**BRANDT:** Yeah, I'd have to get back to you on what rules DAS is using on that. I can tell you I've got 23 volunteer departments just in Legislative District 32. They range in size from eight-man departments, where the average age of 75 years old, to departments that have 60 or 70 individuals, where we have a lot of young people in there, very different needs. Some of them are on fire and rescue. I know Senator Dorn has served on fire and rescue for many, many years. And theirs is broken up that there's two different services there. A lot of ours are on the same service. A lot of my smaller departments have had to give up their ambulance service. So I think the goal here

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is to get at least one radio in each department. So when, when-- and I, and I'm seeing range fires and grass fires and field fires because that's in my district what we see. But it's going to be very different incident-- incidences, and you urban, urban senators of what's going to happen there. But we have a lot of mutual aid. When you have anything big going on, you have six or seven different departments in the area go in there. When Bennington got wiped out, I'm sure there were seven or eight different departments trying to help in there. So we see that throughout the state. So I think the goal is to at least get one set to each department, and then the incident commander or the chief is the one that runs that radio. Not everybody in the department needs this radio, they only need one radio. One guy communicates with everybody else, and then he gets on another radio to tell his guys what's going on. So.

**CLEMENTS:** Very good.

**PROKOP:** Thank you.

**BRANDT:** Yep.

**CLEMENTS:** Other questions? Senator Dover.

**DOVER:** Yeah, I think-- I don't know if you're aware of the situation I helped resolve in Madison and Pierce, but I think-- I would hope that mutual aid agreements would be taken into consideration when deciding who's going to get the radios, because we've got someone that has to come in and you know more than I, but you got to come-- if they got a mutual aid agreement, they got to come back up and they can't even talk on the radio.

**BRANDT:** Right.

**DOVER:** Yeah.

**BRANDT:** Yeah.

**DOVER:** Thank you.

**BRANDT:** That's the problem we're trying to solve.

**CLEMENTS:** All right. Thank you, Senator Brandt.

**BRANDT:** Thank you.

**CLEMENTS:** Senator Ballard, would you like to close?

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Appropriations Committee March 4, 2025

**BALLARD:** I'll waive unless--

**CLEMENTS:** Are there any questions for Senator Ballard?

**BALLARD:** I'll come up just in case there's any questions.

**CLEMENTS:** All right.

**BALLARD:** I will, I will echo what Senator Brandt said, these are the best men and women in our communities. I, I brought a bill a few weeks ago, and it's-- we saved-- the state saved several hundred million dollars through volunteer firefighters just in economic that we don't have to pay for-- pay families for paid, for paid up fire services. And so this is just a, a small thank you for those services. And as the testifier said, it's-- the money that these departments spend in taxes, they go to helping others. So this is just a small thank you for their safety and their-- and ability to communicate with others. So with that, I would take any questions.

**CLEMENTS:** Seeing none,--

**BALLARD:** Thank you.

**CLEMENTS:** --thank you, Senator Ballard. And that will conclude the hearings for LB62 and LB25. And that concludes our session for the day.