

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
Education Committee February 18, 2025

**MURMAN:** Welcome to the Education Committee. I'm Senator Dave Murman from Glenvil, Nebraska, represent 38th District. I serve as chair of this committee. This public hearing is your opportunity to be part of the legislative process and to express your position on the proposed legislation before us. The committee will take up agenda items in the order posted. If you wish to testify on the mic today, please fill out a green testifier sheet. The forms can be found at the entrances of the hearing room. Be sure to print clearly and provide all requested information. If you will testify on more than one agenda item, you will need to fill out another green testifier sheet each time you come forward to speak on the mic. When it is your turn to come forward, please give the testifier sheet and any handouts you might have to the page as you are seated. If you have handouts, we request that you provide 12 copies for distribution. If you do-- if you do not have 12 copies, please alert the page when you come forward. At the microphone, please begin by stating your name and spelling both your first and last names to ensure we get an accurate record. Observers, if you do not wish to testify but would like to indicate your position on an agenda item, there are yellow sign-in sheets in notebooks at the entrances. The sign-in sheets will be included in the official hearing record. We will begin with the introducer giving an opening statement at the mic, followed by proponents, opponents, and those wanting to speak in a neutral capacity. The introducer will then have an opportunity to give a closing statement if they wish. We will be using a five-minute light system for all testifiers. When you begin your testimony, the light on the table will be green. When the yellow light comes on, you will have one minute to wrap up your thoughts. And the red light indicates that you have reached the end of your lim-- your time limit. Questions from the committee may follow off the clock. A few final items to facilitate today's hearing. Please mute your cell phones or any other electronic devices. Verbal outbursts or applause are not permitted. Such behavior may cause for you to be asked to leave the hearing room. Know that committee members may need to come and go during the afternoon for other hearings. I will now ask committee members with us today to introduce themselves starting on my far right.

**SANDERS:** Good afternoon. I'm Rita Sanders, representing District 45, which is the Bellevue-Offutt community.

**HUGHES:** Good afternoon. Jana Hughes, District 24, Seward, York, Polk, and a little bit of Butler County.

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**MEYER:** Good afternoon, I'm Glen Meyer, District 17, Dakota, Thurston, Wayne and the southern part of Dixon County.

**HUNT:** Hi, I'm Megan Hunt and I represent the northern part of midtown Omaha.

**LONOWSKI:** Hello. I'm Dan Lonowski, District 33, which is Adams County, Kearney County, and a rural Phelps County.

**JUAREZ:** Hi. Good afternoon. I'm Margo Juarez and I represent District 5 in south Omaha.

**MURMAN:** And staff with us today are to my immediate right legal counsel Kevin Langevin, and to my far right is committee clerk Diane Johnson. The pages who serve with us today, the pa-- no, the pages could stand up and introduce yourselves and tell us a little bit about yourselves.

**JESSICA VIHSTADT:** Hi, my name is Jessica, I'm from Omaha, Nebraska. I'm a sophomore at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and I'm studying political science and criminal justice.

**SYDNEY COCHRAN:** My name is Sydney Cochran, I'm from Lincoln, I'm a freshman at UNL, and I'm studying U.S. History [INAUDIBLE].

**MURMAN:** And we thank you for your help today. And with that, we will begin today's hearing with LB417. Welcome, Senator Bostar.

**BOSTAR:** Good afternoon. Chairman Murman, Members of the Education Committee, for the record, my name is Eliot Bostar, that's E-l-i-o-t B-o-s-t-a-r, representing Legislative District 29. I'm here today to present LB417, a bill designed to expand access to higher education and enhance career readiness for Nebraska students. LB417 codifies the Nebraska Promise program established by the Board of Regents to provide tuition remission for eligible Nebraska resident students attending the University of Nebraska. Additionally, LB417 establishes the College Promise program, which mirrors the Nebraska Promise program, removing barriers for low-income Nebraskans seeking to gain new skills or further their education by attending a community or state college. The program provides students with a family income of, of less than \$65,000 a tuition waiver for up to two years at a community college or four years at a state college. Eligibility for this program starts once the student applies for and receives the tuition waiver for the first time. The student must maintain at least a 2.5 GPA and fulfill the requirements for attendance. If a student qualifies for the waiver, their remaining tuition costs at a community

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or state college, after applying awarded federal financial aid grants and state scholarships, will be covered. Each year, the Coordinating Commission for Post-Secondary Education will certify the total amount of tuition waived each year. Based on the certification, the State Treasurer will allocate corresponding funds from the General Fund into the College Promise Fund. These funds will then be distributed to community colleges and state colleges to reimburse colleges for the tuition waivers granted. LB417 also recognizes that a four year degree is not the only pathway to success. The bill offers an opportunity for high school seniors to either retake the national college admission exam, increasing their eligibility for scholarships with improved scores, or taking nationally recognized career readiness assessment leading to a national career readiness certificate. This certificate signals to employers that a student possesses a-- possesses essential workforce skills, thereby enhancing student employability in high demand industries. The credential can also be leveraged by Nebraska communities as a key national metric used to-- used by site selectors to help attract and retain businesses locally. Nebraska faces an ongoing challenge retaining its top students and meeting the workforce demands of a rapidly evolving economy. Other states have already implemented similar programs with great success. Wyoming and Tennessee have funded college admission exam retakes, unlocking millions in additional scholarship funds for students. Missouri, which funds career readiness credentials, has the second highest number of apprenticeship completers in the nation. LB417 represents a critical investment in Nebraska's workforce and future economic growth by ensuring that every student, regardless of financial background, has the opportunity to succeed. I thank you for your time and attention. I'd urge your supporter for LB417. I'd be happy to answer any initial questions.

**MURMAN:** Thank you. Any questions for Senator Bostar at this time?  
Senator Hughes.

**HUGHES:** Thank you. Chairman Murman. Thanks for bringing this, Senator Bostar. Was the-- I just want clarification on what was there before. The Nebraska Promise program existed prior with the regents, just with the UBO system, or the UNL-- University of Nebraska system?

**BOSTAR:** Yes. So the Nebraska Promise program exists today.

**HUGHES:** OK.

**BOSTAR:** It was created by the regents--

**HUGHES:** OK.

**BOSTAR:** --for the university system.

**HUGHES:** So I guess-- and you're just-- you want to expand it to state colleges and community colleges.

**BOSTAR:** We want to codify that program, the Nebraska Promise program that that the university uses, and then create the College Promise Program, which mirrors it for state colleges--

**HUGHES:** OK.

**BOSTAR:** --and community colleges.

**HUGHES:** And is there-- right now, is there a risk that the university system is not going to-- I mean, you want to codify it. Is there a risk that they're not going to keep doing it? Or I guess why are we having to codify?

**BOSTAR:** That's a really good question.

**HUGHES:** OK.

**BOSTAR:** I think it's a great program. I think that what the regents did and what the university is doing is really fantastic on this front. And I think that-- I think there are, there are risks within the university for the future of all programs, anything that costs money. And I would really hate to see this go away. I hope that answers your question.

**HUGHES:** Yeah. Yes, it does. Thank you.

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

**LONOWSKI:** Thank you, Chair. And thank you, Senator Bostar. Where did you come up with the \$65,000?

**BOSTAR:** That, that, that's so, again, it's mirroring the Nebraska Promise program that the, that the regents and the university created. So we didn't, we just-- to be honest with you, this bill-- so I, I introduced something similar last year. The-- where this bill came from is I had a constituent who called my office and said that, you know. Asked, Why doesn't the Nebraska Promise program extend to other state colleges and community colleges? They, they have a child that wasn't a good fit for the university, which is, is common. And their,

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their point when they made their call was you know if the university was the right fit for their child, they could go for free. They wouldn't get charged tuition. But it's not the right fit. And a community college is probably a better fit for them. But they have to pay tuition and-- or state college. And so is that really-- is that the right thing for us to be doing from a policy perspective? And, and I thought about it and I thought, no, it's not the right thing for us to be doing from a policy perspective. We should have those levels that exist for tuition remission that the university put in place applied to, at the very least, state college and community colleges as well, because it's, it's totally fair for students to find that to be a more suitable fit for their higher education needs.

**LONOWSKI:** OK. I, I just found out online, as of this month, the average family makes \$54,000, \$53,600, and the top 75th percentile is \$67,000. So we're really talking about everybody almost that's below that top quarter. Because I'm just curious. I'm trying to--

**BOSTAR:** Sure.

**LONOWSKI:** See if the numbers make sense in my head. Thank you.

**BOSTAR:** Yeah, absolutely.

**MURMAN:** Any other questions for Senator Bostar? If not, I assume you'll be here to close.

**BOSTAR:** I will be here. Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Thank you. Proponents for LB417. Good afternoon.

**MARY LeFEBVRE:** Good afternoon. For the record, my name is Mary LeFebvre, spelled M-a-r-y L-e-F-e-b-v-r-e, and I represent ACT. Thank you, Chairman, members of the committee, for the opportunity to provide testimony as a supporter of LB417, which would provide seniors in Nebraska with the opportunity, the fall of their senior year, to retake college readiness assessments to improve their readiness to succeed in a degree program, or the opportunity to take and earn a national career readiness certificate to have clear information about their readiness for any career pathway after high school. ACT, as you know, is a national testing organization grounded in more than 65 years of education and workforce research. Our learning resources, assessments, research, and work ready credentials are trusted by students, jobseekers, educators, schools, and employers as effective, valid and reliable solutions to help individuals of any age to achieve education and workplace success. As previously stated, far too many

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Nebraska students that are the top achievers in the state, those earning a 32 or higher in the ACT, are leaving the state's borders to attend college in a bordering state. 66% to be exact. This bill would provide a solution to allow more of those students to qualify for expanded scholarship opportunities in this state to increase their score and, again, hopefully to stay and retain, again, that college admissions that, that, that experience within the state of Nebraska. Similarly, communities in the state are struggling. They're struggling to attract employers to expand job opportunities and often struggle to align the skills and the interests of their local students with local employer needs. This bill would actually provide a solution that would address both needs, to create that tie between the two E's, as I call it, education and economic development. Providing more Nebraska seniors with an ACT retake opportunity would ultimately increase the number of students attending post-secondary institutions in the state, and as we've already said, expanding those eligible for scholarships. And then also increase the number enrolling in credit bearing courses. Providing, again, more students with career readiness information can only help and enhance existing career technical education programs. Far too many students think that there's a career pathway ready for them after high school that doesn't really take much math or reading skill to succeed in, not understanding that those courses are often and those exams for industries, very technical and very complicated indeed. Career readiness credentials and assessments like WorkKeys can help kind of provide kind of a strength and conditioning program for a lot of those industry specific career training programs in schools, providing that robust level of support that's needed to succeed and to complete, again, those more industry specific programs. And I know that you all might have a lot of questions, so I'll sum up by just saying that we really do appreciate your consideration just of these issues and the bill itself, both in how it enhances both education and economic development in the state. And we want to assure you that our company is committed to improve efforts, not just in Nebraska, but in all states to improve education and economic success. So thank you for your time.

**MURMAN:** Thank you. Any questions for Mary? Senator Hughes?

**HUGHES:** Thank you, Chair Murman. Thanks for coming in today. Can you answer-- I, and I've, I've read this real quick.

**MARY LeFEBVRE:** Yeah.

**HUGHES:** On that-- on the retake program, and you've got a couple of states that are doing that, retake [INAUDIBLE] during the senior year.

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Is it just any student that wants to come back as a senior to retake? Because right now in Nebraska, all the juniors take it. So anybody that wants to come back and retake can for free basically. Is that right?

**MARY LeFEBVRE:** They could. But the percentage of students in these states that take advantage of their retake opportunity, it's not 100%. So right now, the grade 11 testing for ACTs, pretty darn close to 100% of the ele-- grade level.

**HUGHES:** Do you have stats on that at all, about?

**MARY LeFEBVRE:** I do.

**HUGHES:** OK.

**MARY LeFEBVRE:** Thank you for the question, Senator. We were able to break down some of the percentages of the students in some of these other states that take advantage of the testing opportunity afforded to them. And also, interestingly enough, a breakdown of family income--

**HUGHES:** Yes, [INAUDIBLE].

**MARY LeFEBVRE:** --I think, in terms of who's taking advantage. Because the first question you might have is, well, why don't students just retest on their own? There are students in Nebraska that are already retaking the ACT on their own. And in Nebraska, that's about roughly 7,500 students in Nebraska took this test more than once in the last grad class. And half of those students reported family income of over \$100,000. Only 11% recorded a family income of less than \$50,000. Compare that to Kentucky. 41% of their students participated in a senior retest last year.

**HUGHES:** 41%?

**MARY LeFEBVRE:** Mm-hmm.

**HUGHES:** OK

**MARY LeFEBVRE:** The family income breakdown, just those same two categories, 23% recorded a family income of more than \$100,000, 21%, double the percentage of Nebraska, recorded a family income of less than \$50,000. So what is-- that is to say is that when Kentucky provided a state funded retake, you had double the number of low-income students that were taking advantage of that extra test to,

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again, maybe get to that extra score bump to qualify for maybe a full tuition scholarship in state.

**HUGHES:** Thank you. Appreciate that.

**MARY LeFEBVRE:** Thank you. Thanks for the question, Senator.

**MURMAN:** Any other questions? I have one. In your testimony, you said 66% of ACT scoring students in Nebraska leave the state?

**MARY LeFEBVRE:** Of the top scoring students, so those-- Sorry if I misspoke in my testimony.

**MURMAN:** About 32? Is that--

**MARY LeFEBVRE:** Yeah, those scoring-- thank you for the question, Chairman. Of those scoring 32 or higher on the ACT composite, 66% of those students are leaving to go to a bordering state for college. And we know that is a good statistic because we have so many of the students taking the ACT their junior year. We're able to use the data to connect with the National Student Clearinghouse to find out where they go on to enroll that first semester after co-- high school graduation.

**MURMAN:** OK. I'm surprised by that number. I didn't realize it was that high. And then the, I think it's the keys test?

**MARY LeFEBVRE:** WorkKeys, yes.

**MURMAN:** WorkKeys? So, so you're advocating for that test to be paid for from the Department of Education also, correct?

**MARY LeFEBVRE:** Only for students that want to take advantage of that tool. I am a parent and I know that my kids change their mind on a fairly regular basis, you know, while they're in high school about what they want to do. And one of the things that I personally feel very strongly about is that students, while they're in high school, have information to make a decision and then to be able to use that information to maybe change their minds before they graduate high school, affording themselves of all the training and education available to them before they leave the school grounds. WorkKeys provides students with information that can confirm those career choices, whether it's college or a different trade. But it could also be a wake up call for students who think that they're ready for something maybe beyond college or different from college, but in fact, find out, no, actually, they should have-- they should be taking math

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a little bit more seriously and buckling down in their reading. So I do feel that for students who I think could take advantage of some of that data and information in their senior year, that it would be a good investment for the state to provide that as a tool for the students. For those that choose to take advantage of it.

**MURMAN:** Yes, we, we do need more students in the trade and in community colleges in Nebraska. If you provided this information, I probably missed it. But in the states where the keys program, test, is paid for, what percent of students take it or how many take it?

**MARY LeFEBVRE:** So the most recent example is Missouri. So they offer kind of a lump sum amount of money to just provide WorkKeys testing in the high schools. I believe it's like \$1 million. And that funding started in September this last year. They've almost ran through all of the money. And we're not e-- we're just now halfway through the school year. It's been very popular in that state. They have done a lot of investment on apprenticeship programs. And what they're finding is that by using that kind of strength and conditioning analogy that I was talking about of WorkKeys to help prepare students before they go into apprenticeship and work-based learning opportunities, it actually helps their success rates. And Missouri does have the second highest number of apprenticeship completers in the U.S., only beat by California by virtue of just the size of the California population. So it's a, it's a huge testament, I think, to the strength of, of the program for Missouri at least. And that's the most recent example I have to give.

**MURMAN:** And I think you said how much funding Missouri provides, but I missed that. How much money--

**MARY LeFEBVRE:** They put-- it was a pilot of \$1 million.

**MURMAN:** OK. Thank you.

**MARY LeFEBVRE:** Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Any other questions? If not, thanks. Appreciate you coming and testifying.

**MURMAN:** Thank you so much, Chairman. Thank you, members of the committee. Good afternoon.

**SHAVONNA HOLMAN:** Hi. Good afternoon, Chairperson Murman and members of the Education Committee. My name is Dr. Shavonna Holman, S-h-a-v-o-n-n-a H-o-l-m-a-n, and I am a member of the Board of

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Education for the Omaha Public Schools. I'm a proud graduate of OPS and a parent of an OPS student and a former teacher and assistant principal for the district. I serve as a P-12 school leadership coordinator in the Educational Administration department locally within the Nebraska Higher Education system. As you are aware, Omaha Public Schools is the largest school district in the state, serving more than 52,000 students. The vast majority of our students are eligible to participate in the federal government's free and reduced price lunch program. I note this particular fact to highlight why we as a district support LB417. LB417 will provide a full tuition waiver to any Nebraska resident full time undergraduate student whose family income is less than \$65,000, or who is eligible for a federal Pell Grant. These criteria apply to tens of thousands of students in our district. In order to maintain eligibility, LB417 requires that students attend the University of Nebraska system, a Nebraska State College, or Nebraska Community College, take at least 12 credit hours per semester, and maintain a 2.5 GPA. As a parent of a soon to be high school student, I am already thinking about the prospect of paying for college and thinking about all of the parents in our district that do not have the same options that my family has. The programs proposed in LB417 have the potential to make the idea of college a reality for many of the students that we serve. This program would also have the added benefit of likely keeping some of our best and brightest students here in Nebraska to join our workforce. There is no greater investment you can make in the future of the state. We thank Senator Bostar for introducing this legislation. We would encourage you to advance LB417. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

**MURMAN:** Thank you. Any questions for Dr. Holman? Senator Lonowski.

**LONOWSKI:** I have one. Thank you, Chair. And thank you for being here, Ms. Holman, And good luck with that high school student.

**SHAVONNA HOLMAN:** We'll see. It hurts to read that.

**LONOWSKI:** Do you have a GPA minimum from your high school to college? Like, if they would be awarded this grant, would there be some sort of requirement from high school or as long as they have a high enough ACT. and a 2.0 they could go on?

**SHAVONNA HOLMAN:** To go to the university? Or what--

**LONOWSKI:** Right. I mean, so, so if they apply for this, do they ha-- we have a minimum of a 2.5 GPA at the college to keep the grant. But

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is there a minimum that you can foresee from your school district that allows them to even apply for it?

**SHAVONNA HOLMAN:** I'm not certain I would know the answer to that question.

**LONOWSKI:** Yeah.

**SHAVONNA HOLMAN:** I certainly check into that for you.

**LONOWSKI:** OK.

**SHAVONNA HOLMAN:** I wouldn't want to give you any wrong information.

**LONOWSKI:** OK. Thank you.

**SHAVONNA HOLMAN:** Of course.

**MURMAN:** Senator Hughes.

**HUGHES:** Thank you, Chairman Murman. Thanks for coming in.

**SHAVONNA HOLMAN:** Sure.

**HUGHES:** Do you have any-- you didn't speak to the other piece of the bill, which was the ACT, the retake as seniors-- Do you have any, just since you're on the OPS board and have familiarity with teaching and stuff, do you have any comment on that or--

**SHAVONNA HOLMAN:** I think--

**HUGHES:** --does OPS do anything like that that they've ever done before?

**SHAVONNA HOLMAN:** I think that it would definitely expand the opportunities for our students to be able to retake the assessment if they so choose to do so. Yes, I think any extra opportunity would be great for any of our students who-- to be able to do.

**HUGHES:** And right now OPS does just--

**SHAVONNA HOLMAN:** We do the 11th grade, yes.

**HUGHES:** --one test per year.

**SHAVONNA HOLMAN:** Yes.

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**HUGHES:** OK. I know where in Seward Public Schools they did twice, but they used some ESSER funds and stuff to allow the kids to, to take it twice. But kids do typically increase their percentage, you know, their score taking it a second time. Thank you.

**SHAVONNA HOLMAN:** Of course.

**MURMAN:** Any other questions for Dr. Holman? If not, thank you for testifying.

**SHAVONNA HOLMAN:** Thank you so much for the opportunity.

**MURMAN:** Other proponents for LB417.

**COURTNEY WITTSTRUCK:** Hi there. Good afternoon, Chairman Murman and members of the Education Committee. My name is Courtney Wittstruck, C-o-u-r-t-n-e-y W-i-t-t-s-t-r-u-c-k. I am the executive director of the Nebraska Community College Association, and I'm here to testify in support of LB417. Our community colleges support any and all efforts that would increase access to the life changing benefits of higher education. So we appreciate Senator Bostar bringing this bill which would make higher education more accessible and affordable for Nebraskans. The transformative education and training that students receive at community colleges and our other instate higher education partners prepares them for productive professional careers. And as you heard from some of the previous testifiers, this bill, it's about educating Nebraskans, but it's also about keeping them in our state. Students who attend Nebraska, Nebraska community college sorry, Nebraska colleges are more likely to remain in Nebraska after graduation. And at community colleges in particular, around 90% of our students stay in Nebraska and then go on to lead fulfilling lives, being active in their communities and contributing taxpayers. So furthermore, community colleges have a statewide reach. We serve every corner of the state north to south, east to west, rural and urban. So a bill that supports community colleges supports the entire state. And like I mentioned, we support anything that will open the doors to higher education for more, for more folks. So with that, I won't repeat any of the-- anything else you've already heard, and I'll be happy to take any questions.

**MURMAN:** Thank you. Any questions for Courtney? If not, thank you for testifying. Other proponents for LB417? Any opponents for LB417? Any neutral testifiers for LB417? If not, Senator-- Oh. Are you a proponent?

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**PAUL TURMAN:** Neutral testifier.

**MURMAN:** Neutral. OK.

**PAUL TURMAN:** Get up here faster for you. Chair Murman, members of the Education Committee. My name is Paul Turman. That's spelled P-a-u-l T-u-r-m-a-n. I'm the chancellor of the Nebraska State College system. I certainly appreciate Senator Bostar bringing this piece of legislation. I think it clearly does highlight the, the impact that low-income students, Pell eligible students in this state have an inability to go on to post-secondary, I think partly because the cost is there. I think when we talk about free college, I think it's important to really reinforce that tuition makes up a sizable piece of, of that equation for a lot of low-income families, while at the same time we have fees and room and board that continues to add to that as well. I think it's important to note that, yes, the university system does have a Nebraska Promise program. That was actually a program that was retitled or renamed from a Collegebound Nebraska program that J.B. Milliken had put in place more than a decade before Ted Carter arrived here in the state. State colleges have had a very similar program. It used to be called the Nebraska Advantage. And now our equivalent program is called the Nebraska Guarantee. We actually have students who are at \$70,000 for their family income, are eligible for that program. It allows students who are transfers. And we also provide the opportunity for nonresident students in our system as well. And so clearly, as we've looked at the opportunity for some state funds to be able to support this, this program, I would advocate for putting this in place and allowing our institutions to leverage their dollars even further than what we can. I think the only distinction that's a little bit different than what the senator is bringing forward is that right now we don't have a GPA minimum of at least the 2.5 GPA requirement. Right now, a student who remains in good academic standing can continue to receive the dollars that are available to them. But again, a very worthwhile program, one that continues to evolve, and I think recognition from the state certainly is warranted. And I'd be happy to answer any questions you might have.

**MURMAN:** Thank you. Any questions for Dr. Turman? Senator Juarez.

**JUAREZ:** So did you just make a comment about nonresidents being able to get a scholarship? Is that what I heard you say?

**PAUL TURMAN:** Yes. Right now, we-- at least the program, our Nebraska Guarantee program, allows nonresidents to be eligible for the same

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equation that we use for the resident students in, in Nebraska as well.

**JUAREZ:** So I'm curious, with-- for the nonresident students, do you find them staying in our state or do they go back home?

**PAUL TURMAN:** I, I would say the--

**JUAREZ:** Do you have any data on that?

**PAUL TURMAN:** We do. Our nonresident students certainly don't stay in the state at the same level that a resident student does. Our resident students, our data is about 79% of them are employed in Nebraska one year after graduation. And it depends on which institution. But on average, it's probably about 48% for our system of nonresidents who end up in Nebraska. Part of that is we also don't charge a differential when it comes to the nonresident tuition. And so that distinction, this-- they get the same scholarship value, whether they were a resident or nonresident. And that ends up being very different for the university system that has about 150% of in-state tuition for the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I think the only-- UNK has a Collegebound Nebraska program that's makes that differential a little bit lower for them.

**JUAREZ:** OK. Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Any other questions? If not, I have one. Now, the bill expands the Nebraska Promise program from the university system to include state colleges, correct?

**PAUL TURMAN:** Correct. We, we have an equivalent. I mean, we have the Nebraska Guaran-- or the Tuition Guarantee program aligns exactly with what the-- Senator Bostar is bringing forward, other than our threshold is that 60-- or \$70,000 for families, as well as we don't have a 2.5 GPA requirement, it's at 2.0, which is the equivalent standard for maintaining ongoing eligibility for federal financial aid as well.

**MURMAN:** And your scholarship program is funded by the state colleges, correct?

**PAUL TURMAN:** It's supported through either tuition waivers from our institution or institutional dollars that the campus gets from their foundations.

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**MURMAN:** OK. And the Nebraska Promise program is funded through the-- well, how is it funded I guess?

**PAUL TURMAN:** My understanding is the university system funds it in a very similar way. It's, it's either waivers or the foundation dollars from the University of Nebraska. I would also add that there's a capacity to be able to use NOG dollars, the Nebraska Opportunity Grant money that is distributed to our institution. We have the capacity to leverage it in that way. I think when I was asked to put together the fiscal note, we subtracted NOG from the total calculation trying to determine what the impact would be fiscally for the state if the state was funding the closing the gap of tuition revenue.

**MURMAN:** So the reason for being a neutral testifier is because you, you have a similar program.

**PAUL TURMAN:** We have similar, and it's also there are two criteria or two requirements that don't align with what we have right now. And so our decision would be, do we have two parallel ones, the College Promise and our Nebraska Guarantee, or we align them together and then we develop guidelines that basically our board would have to enact because it is in board, board policy, that we would put a threshold for GPA and we would change the 70-- \$70,000 to \$65,000 to align with what the other institutions or sectors are doing.

**MURMAN:** Thank you. Any other questions? If not, thanks for your testimony. Any other neutral testifiers for LB417? If not, Senator Bostar, you're welcome to close.

**BOSTAR:** Chairman Murman and members of the Education Committee, thank you for your time and attention to this bill. It is an attempt to provide some consistency and enhancement of opportunities of-- for our students looking to go to college in Nebraska or looking to pursue careers outside of that. And just to make things easier and help people stay here and support our state. With that, I'd be happy to answer any other questions.

**MURMAN:** Thank you. Any questions for Senator Bostar? Senator Hughes.

**HUGHES:** Thank you, Chairman Murman. Thank you, Senator Bostar. I have two questions on the two different pieces. So on-- I read through this again, on the retake of the ACT as a senior, or the work, whatever the one, work one is, anybody can choose to do it, right? Would it-- In my opinion, it might make more sense if the state only pays for it if you're like a free or reduced lunch, you know, of low-income.

**BOSTAR:** That's actually already covered.

**HUGHES:** Oh that's already covered right now, today.

**BOSTAR:** I believe so.

**HUGHES:** OK. In some--

**BOSTAR:** So congratulations, that policy is--

**HUGHES:** Oh, well done. OK. So my second question is, so with the state colleges having the Nebraska Guarantee with some different parameters, the university systems already has the Promise Program. We're kind of looking at the community colleges is the one that doesn't have something similar. Would you-- would-- if we would go through with this bill, would we also look at then reducing the amounts we give those colleges equivalently? Or this is on top of? Do you see what I'm saying? Because they're already paying for this. I'll make up a number. Let's say they do \$500,000 a year. That just-- would we reduce what, maybe the university system gets \$500,000 if we went with this.

**BOSTAR:** So this bill will not give more money to the university.

**HUGHES:** It gives-- it goes direct to the-- But right now, the university, the university system is paying for their program and the state's paying for theirs.

**BOSTAR:** So I just want to be clear. Under this bill, the university would still be paying for their program. No additional money would come from-- This, this--

**HUGHES:** It, it would come from the General.

**BOSTAR:** No, it would not. So this bill codifies the existing Nebraska Promise program that exists for the universities.

**HUGHES:** OK.

**BOSTAR:** In its, in its, in its current form. It does not--

**HUGHES:** It does not, it does not appropriate the money.

**BOSTAR:** It does not fund the money for that.

**HUGHES:** Gotcha.

**BOSTAR:** It does appropriate money for the Nebraska college.

**HUGHES:** The community college part.

**BOSTAR:** So-- and the state, state college, community college. Interestingly, so when this bill, like I said before in the opening, this bill is not new. And when it was originally written, the constituent that I had mentioned had contacted me, wanted to be able to send their kid to community college. And so the bill was originally written specifically for community college. The state college system asked to be included. So we did.

**HUGHES:** Gotcha.

**BOSTAR:** And that's how they got in there. So, you know, I understand that they have some parallel programs. They can figure that out. They, they requested now over a year ago to be included in the bill, so that's, that's why they're there. So it would provide general funds allocation for the community and state college system because that's sort of new. There's-- that's the reason for that. But not the university system because it's just codifying that existing program.

**HUGHES:** Thank you.

**BOSTAR:** Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Any other questions? If-- Yes, Senator Conrad.

**CONRAD:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Senator Bostar. I'm sorry if you covered this in your opening. I was running back and forth with a childcare issue. But I am proud to be a co-sponsor of this because I think I understand where you're headed here, and that's trying to make college more accessible to Nebraskans, whether that's at the community college level, state colleges, or the university. And you're looking at some of the existing programs that are out there and trying to figure out perhaps how to raise awareness, bring harmony to, to some of those efforts. So the, the one question, though, that I did want to ask, because I'm very supportive of the Nebraska Promise program that's been developed at our university that helps more Nebraska working families attend. But I, I do worry about just some of the technical aspects herein where if we codify this, does that restrict the university's ability to be nimble with making program changes, as they have in recent years where they've adjusted the income levels or, or things of that based on budgetary or community needs. So that's just one piece-- did you have a chance to talk with them about that and think through any of that?

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**BOSTAR:** Yeah, absolutely. And so that-- I mean, that's absolutely the right kind of question because we've had numerous conversations with university about this. It would-- they can, they could still be nimble, they can still make adjustments. They just can't--

**CONRAD:** Fall below a certain--

**BOSTAR:** They can't make the program worse. And you know, I'm editorializing a little bit there, but, but I truly-- you know--

**CONRAD:** Yeah, .

**BOSTAR:** --by, by-- if they made it more restrictive, in my mind that would make it worse. So if they wanted to change the income threshold and say we, you know, we now want to cover everyone up to \$80,000, they could do that. They have the total flexibility to do that. Or to say, you know, we want to-- we don't want to require the 2.5 GPA any more. We want to go down to 2, similar to what the state colleges do, they can do that. They just, they couldn't say, you're only eligible if your family incomes under \$15,000. Right? They can't, they can't go that direction if we codified it.

**HUGHES:** OK. No. That, that's really helpful. And then my, you know, generally related question would be just if we need to maybe do some vetting about whether or not there is an Exon problem here with us dictating policy to the university, or is it distinguishable based on our creating career pathways or scholarships in other instances. So I, I haven't seen any analysis on that and just want to kind of put that on the record to think through it. The other piece, I just wanted to know if you wanted to just lift up was it seems like there's the establishment of the college access program, which is great and codification thereof. But then there's perhaps changed admissions standards, and then also some changes in regards to student testing. And it-- I guess under the broad umbrella of education, those things can be related, but they almost seem like three separate parts to me. Maybe not. Could you just help me understand how you put these pieces together?

**BOSTAR:** Yeah. I mean, I think that the overall bill is designed to enhance access to opportunities for essentially graduating high school seniors in Nebraska. And again, so, you know, I know that that, that takes a couple of different forms, but that is the objective of the bill.

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

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**MURMAN:** Any other questions? I have one. Could you explain the fiscal note from the university is over \$7 million.

**BOSTAR:** So--

**MURMAN:** Is that because it codifies it and the university is already paying for the scholarships and now it's codified? Is that the reason for it?

**BOSTAR:** You know, I would say that-- I mean, I can ask them. We, you know, we haven't had the fiscal note for long. What I-- I'm going to take a guess. I think that this is representing sort of the expenditure that the university spends on this program, which, of course, through appropriations from the state, as you know, as one of the main components of funding for the university, right? Does indirectly kind of come from, from the General Fund. So I think this is representative of this. This, this wouldn't add this number, so I think it is a little confusing. But I will get with them and, and clarify exactly what they say. But my, my, my guess at the moment is this is just sort of illuminating the amount that the university currently spends on these-- this category of tuition remission.

**MURMAN:** And if that's the case, does it take into consideration that some of the students would, would probably not go to the university and go to state colleges instead, or, or community colleges?

**BOSTAR:** That's a good question. I don't know the answer to that. My, my assumption is this is just their current spend on this program. But it's a, it's a, it's a valid, it's a valid question. And honestly, the, the objective isn't to certainly take any students away from the university. The objective is to enhance opportunities for all Nebraska students.

**MURMAN:** Keep more in our state, hopefully.

**BOSTAR:** That, too.

**MURMAN:** Yeah. If we could get further clarification on that, that would really be helpful, I think, for the committee.

**BOSTAR:** Absolutely.

**MURMAN:** Any other questions? If not, thank you for this bill.

**BOSTAR:** Thank you very much.

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**MURMAN:** And there are online three proponents, one opponent, and one neutral testifier. And that will close the hearing on the LB417, and we'll open the hearing on LB517. Senator Juarez.

**JUAREZ:** Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Welcome.

**JUAREZ:** Thank you. Thank you, Chairman Murman and members of the Education Committee. My name is Margo Juarez, that's M-a-r-g-o J-u-a-r-e-z, and I represent Legislative District 5 in south Omaha. Today I'm excited to introduce LB517, which is one of the key elements in protecting our children as they learn, making sure doors and locks are maintained appropriately in our schools. The bill provides in statute that all public schools have a door safety protocol, ensuring doors open, close and lock appropriately, and that inspections are conducted by qualified inspectors to ensure worn out hinges, locks, and assemblies are serviced when appropriate. The state school security director is assigned to verify the annual inspection of door assemblies and maintain records of those inspections, as they also do for school buses. In 2024, this committee advanced and the Legislature approved the appropriation of \$10 million for school districts to apply for grants, upgrading facilities for school safety concerns. After our continued blight of school shootings, it was a critical policy decision. All of that money has been distributed and in your handout is a list of schools who used those dollars as the Legislature intended. 97% of those grant dollars were used to upgrade doors and locks in 112 school districts. LB517 ensures that those investments are maintained, and students, teachers and faculty are protected should the unimaginable happen again. Moreover, LB517 comes at no additional cost to the state. There are efforts all across the country to make sure we are all held to a high standard when keeping students safe in their school buildings. This bill implements that high standard in Nebraska through annual inspections conducted by qualified inspectors. I believe it is well worth the effort. Thank you. And I am available for questions and there are testifiers behind me, that, of course, I always recommend that can answer any technical questions as well.

**MURMAN:** Thank you. Any questions for Senator Juarez? Senator Lonowski.

**LONOWSKI:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Senator Juarez. Good to see you back. Could these inspectors just be somebody on staff that maybe goes through some sort of training, or is that a question better to wait behind you?

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**JUAREZ:** I would say better for those behind me.

**LONOWSKI:** OK. OK. I'll ask. Thank you.

**JUAREZ:** Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Any other questions for Senator Juarez? If not, thank you for your open and we'll ask for proponents for LB517?

**FELICIA HILTON:** Good afternoon, Chairman. Excuse me. Good afternoon, Chairman Murman and members of the Education Committee. My name is Felicia Hilton, F-e-l-c-i-a-- F-e-l-i-c-i-a H-i-l-t-o-n. I'm the government affairs director for the North Central States Regional Council of Carpenters, and I'm here today to speak in favor of LB517, the school door safety inspection legislation brought by Senator Juarez. The LB517 requires protective door assemblies in school buildings to comply with the state standard of the 2012 National Life Safety Code, NFPA, NFPA 101, developed by the National Fire Protection Association or similar standards in effect at the time that the protective door assembly was installed. This legislation requires school governing authorities, in this case the state school security director, to verify compliance of those protective door assemblies by causing an annual inspection to be conduc-- conducted by qualified inspectors. It-- this bill requires school governing authorities to maintain records of those inspections and requires the authority having jurisdiction to annually inspect those records to monitor compliance with the bill's requirements. The bill-- the doors will need to be updated to code at the time the building was built and the inspector would refer to code, to that code when inspecting the door. It is of the utmost importance to inspect school doors to ensure that the ingress and egress doors, the doors that students and faculty enter and exit work properly, according to the state's adopted NFPA 80-101 standards. And as we've learned from past school shootings, most intruders have entered through defective doors. The-- a New York Post article from December of 2022 states that after seven months from the Uvalde shooting, a Texas safety inspector posing as an intruder was able to stroll unchallenged into another Uvalde school during a safety audit. The inspector was even able to enter through a back door that did not latch, eerily similar to how 18-year-old Salvador Ramos got into the Robb elementary school, killing 19 fourth graders and two teachers. In December of 2019, ABC News found in a draft report on the Parkland, Florida, shooting at the Marjory Stoneman Douglas School, the Public Safety Commission highlighted failures such as routinely unlocked doors and gates, which allowed nine-- a 19-year-old suspect, Nikolas Cruz, to access the school's campus. An article in 2018 from

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The Standard Advocate in Connecticut reported that a parent at Roxbury Elementary School alerted school board members about issues with the front doors which were installed when the building was constructed in 1955. The parent said that the doors did not close properly. They popped open and had a gap in between them. So that's one issue around the doors and making sure that all of the doors open and close and lock properly. The other issue of concern, especially in rural school districts, is the amount of time that it would take for emergency responders to get to a school in case of emergency. And an analysis reported by the North Platte Telegraph in October of '24, 2024 found that 28 counties in western and central Nebraska, 50 out of 58 school districts fell under the 5,000 population limit. And of those, 17 were more than 15 minutes away from the nearest police station is what-- or a sheriff's office is what the, the Telegraph reported. The analysis gave an example of Cherry County, which is 6,006 square miles, and Cherry County's Cody-Kilgore Public Schools is one of the furthest. It's about 40 minutes, roughly 38 miles from law enforcement. So I think for us to know that the state undoubtedly invested \$10 million in doors and doors assemblies, we believe that the best and most effective way to get a significant return on that investment is to inspect these doors annually. The NFPA 80-101, the code that was adopted by the state in two-- 2012's NFPA 80 code requires annual inspections of doors. And so we believe that annual inspections and keeping records of those inspections are well worth the investment. Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Thank you. Any questions for Ms. Hilton? Just a sec. Yes, Senator Meyer.

**MEYER:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I looked at the list of expenditures. There's quite a variance from the \$2,000 in quite a number of schools, especially smaller schools, to \$5,000, \$7,000, \$100,000, \$500,000, \$1.5 million. Was this federal, federal funds provided?

**FELICIA HILTON:** These were state funds.

**MEYER:** State?

**FELICIA HILTON:** From the state of Nebraska.

**MEYER:** I thought I, I thought I heard \$2 million was spent.

**FELICIA HILTON:** \$10 million.

**MEYER:** \$10 million.

**FELICIA HILTON:** Yep.

**MEYER:** OK.

**FELICIA HILTON:** Was invested.

**MEYER:** Once again hearing aids are--

**FELICIA HILTON:** No. \$10 million the state invested in, in school security.

**MEYER:** OK. Thank you.

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

**HUGHES:** Thank you, Chair Murman. I'm going to ask the same question that Senator Lonowski asked. So are you recommending that a outside entity has to come and check all these doors, or is it something-- because I would imagine some school districts, it's kind of on their maintenance protocol to do these things.

**FELICIA HILTON:** Yep. So what we're, what we're recommending is that anyone that is able to take the door safety inspection training, that could be school staff, but there's tons of door safety inspection training out there. Part of what I handed you was a 13 point checklist that folks that are inspecting doors can use to inspect doors. But anyone that is, you know, taken the training or wants to be trained on inspecting the doors, that's what we would consider a qualified door inspector or assembly inspector. What we want is to make sure that the person inspecting the door can really inspect the door properly to make sure that it opens, closes, locks the way it's supposed to. The propped doors, the doors that don't close properly, have seemed to be-- if you're in the school, you know all the broken doors as a student. And so we want to make sure that these doors are working properly. But anyone that is trained to do it, it could be school staff, but there's tons of door safety inspection training out there. And we recommend that, that folks that have taken that training would be qualified to inspect the doors.

**HUGHES:** Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Any other questions for Ms. Hilton? If not, thank you for your testimony.

**FELICIA HILTON:** Thank you.

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**MURMAN:** Other proponents for LB517?

**JAYSON KARAS:** Good afternoon. Good afternoon, Chairperson Murman, Vice Chairperson Hughes, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Jayson Karas. That's spelled J-a-y-s-o-n K-a-r-a-s. And I'm here today to express my strong support for LB517, which seeks to enhance school safety and security by mandating the annual inspection of protective door assemblies in all school buildings across Nebraska. I have over 27 years of experience installing, maintaining, and inspecting various door assemblies and their related hardware components. Primarily my background was in health care and secondary education. I also serve on the National Fire Protection Association's NFPA 80, which is the standard for fire doors and other opening protective's as well as the NFPA 105, which is the standard for smoke doors and other opening protective's. I bring this forward to you to provide and prove my expertise in this field. And for the record, I am not here on behalf of the NFPA or any of its entities, but I'm very passionate about this subject. As an advocate for student and staff safety, I firmly believe that implementing standardized inspections for these critical safety components is essential to ensuring our schools remain secure environments for learning. Protective door assemblies, including fire doors, electronically controlled egress doors, and door locking systems, serve as a crucial element in school safety. They are designed to facilitate secure entry, safe evacuation, and fire protection. According to the National Fire Protection Association, properly maintained doors with panic hardware, exiting closures and delayed egress features can significantly reduce the risks associated with emergencies such as fires, intrusions, and other threats. LB517 addresses a critical gap in our school security framework by requiring annual inspections of protective door assemblies by trained inspectors with appropriate knowledge and expertise. Currently without a structured and enforceable inspection protocol, school doors may become nonfunctional due to wear and tear, improper modifications, or lack of maintenance, ultimately putting students, faculty and staff at risk in emergencies. By implementing these mandatory inspections, Nebraska will align with best practices and national safety standards, such as the NFPA 80 and the NFPA 101, the NFPA 101 being the Life Safety Code, which emphasize the importance of regular maintenance and performance verification of life safety components. These inspections will ensure that all protective door assemblies remain operable, close properly and retain their intended safety and security functions. In addition to improving emergency preparedness, LB517 strengthens everyday school security by ensuring locking mechanisms and access control systems function properly. This will help mitigate

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unauthorized access to school buildings, protecting students and staff, again, from potential threats. Additionally, preventive inspections reduce long term maintenance costs and liability risks for school districts. Identifying and addressing deficiencies early prevents costly repairs and minimizes disruptions to school operations. Recognizing the importance of protective door assembly inspections, the state of Ohio enacted the Ohio Childhood Safety Act on October 24th, 2024, implementing similar policies to uphold school safety standards. Nebraska has an opportunity to lead in this area by taking proactive steps to protect students and educators through this vital legislation. I respectfully urge this committee to advance LB517 to ensure that Nebraska schools uphold the highest safety standards. And I want to thank Senator Juarez for introducing this bill, and thank you for your time and consideration. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

**Speaker 1:** Thank you. Any questions for Mr. Karas, Karas? If not, I've got one. So you're advocating inspecting the doors, but you don't have the method to fix the doors that-- I mean, that, that would be left up to the local school district?

**JAYSON KARAS:** Sure, Senator. Chairperson Murman. So I advocate the inspections, but I also advo-- advocate for maintaining those investments, maintaining-- It's like-- I like to simplify it. It's like maintaining your car. Are you going to change the oil, are you going to rotate your tires. Or are you going to just wait and spend another \$50,000 on a vehicle when you could have maintain it properly? So the inspection process, and there's a lot of things that staff can do, faculty members can do, make some visuals. You know, the handle jiggles or the hinges are loose and the door is sagging. That's stuff that can be brought up to the maintenance guy onsite, an outside contractor, another tradesperson to fix those. But the actual inspection process kind of keeps the maintenance program in check, if you will, to make sure that they're being maintained properly. So as we go down the line with inspections, the deficiencies are really greatly minimized.

**MURMAN:** Thank you. Senator Meyer.

**MEYER:** Thank you, Chairman Murman. So funds have been expended and securities have been enhanced. So now we inspect and we find deficiencies. There's, there's no fiscal note on this. It's up to the school districts to fix those--

**JAYSON KARAS:** That's right.

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**MEYER:** --deficiencies in security?

**JAYSON KARAS:** Yes, Senator, that's--

**MEYER:** And so there'll be some additional training for people to know what to look for. I, I guess where I'm going, I guess, it's a-- no fiscal note. Well, not to the state, probably. Certainly an unfunded mandate to the schools. I'm not saying it shouldn't be done, certainly security is tremendously important. But once again, and you're probably not in a position to answer this, but when I look at funds expended. \$2,000 for a number, a great number of schools, up to \$1.5 million for others, there seems to be a tremendous disparity there. So the ones that only spent \$2,000, by inference, they're much less secure now than the ones that spent \$500,000, or \$700,000 or \$1.5 million?

**JAYSON KARAS:** I wouldn't, I wouldn't look at it that way, with all due respect. I would look at possibly the size of the facility, what its arrangements are. One thing I like to always emphasize when I talk to organizations about this is they have to have an active life safety plan. And basically what that is, it's a floor plan of the property and it lists all your fire barriers or smoke barriers, ingress, egress, special locking features on doors are all highlighted. It's great for EMS, it's great for fire, it's great for the police department, so they know what they're getting into, what's functionally what's not. So I guess to answer your question, you know, it might be a school with 25 doors that need special attention for security, fire, smoke, and in case of emergency for emergency exiting. And then you got into large camp-- larger campuses, they probably require a little more funding because they're larger and they might have more deficiencies. But I wouldn't say that it's reflective of what's damaged on site.

**MEYER:** There seems to be a minimum entry level with a great number of schools at \$2,000 for a variety of things. Surveillance equipment, cameras, intercoms, locks and fobs and everything, so there just appears there was a mass application for security funds and you could determine how you wanted to spend those funds in your school. It just appears that initially there's not a lot of uniformity as far as security. So probably not in the form of a question, but it just seems like there's a great deal of disparity in funds expended. And I'm not sure that that adds to a great deal of security in some cases. So I apologize, it's not a question.

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**JAYSON KARAS:** No, that's, that's OK, Senator, I appreciate it. That may also reflect who was the party representing that organization or that, that school doing the walkthrough to determine what they needed. They may not be familiar with--

**MEYER:** Yeah.

**JAYSON KARAS:** You know what I mean.

**MEYER:** OK. All right. Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Any other questions for Mr. Karas. If not, thank you for your testimony.

**JAYSON KARAS:** Thank you so much.

**MURMAN:** Other proponents for LB517?

**JOHN TORCHIA:** Good afternoon, Chairman Murman. Senator Juarez stepped out, I know this is her bill. Members of the Education Committee. My name is John Torchia. It's T-o-r-c-h-i-a. Excuse me. I live--

**MURMAN:** Sorry, you'll have to spell your first and last name.

**JOHN TORCHIA:** Oh, first, I'm sorry. J-o-h-n T-o-r-c-h-i-a.

**MURMAN:** Thank you.

**JOHN TORCHIA:** You bet. I live and work here in Nebraska. I currently reside in Valley, Nebraska. I've worked as an end user consultant for the last nine and a half years, working with K through 12, universities, health care systems, as a physical security expert in the door hardware and access control industry. My background. I was an anti-terrorist force protection specialist in the military. I've also been a active threat instructor, firearms instructor, active threat instructor in the-- in law enforcement. I've been, excuse me, I've been asked by the Security Industry Association or the SIA and the Door Hardware Industry [SIC], DHI to speak on their behalf today. SIA is the leading trade association for global Security Solution providers, which is comprised of over 1,500 innovative member companies. These companies, excuse me, these companies represent thousands of safety and security leaders in Nebraska and throughout the United States, including the leading providers of security products and services to K through 12 schools. The Door Hardware Institute, DHI, has credentialed over 2,000 door security and safety professionals worldwide. These include architectural hardware

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consultants, electrified hardware consultants, and certified fire door assembly inspectors. These credentials are well-recognized throughout the construction industry and are valued by building owners, architects, contractors, and code officials for our experience in building codes, technical knowledge and community-- I'm sorry, commitment to life, safety, and security. I'm here today to express our support in principle for LB517. We back the idea of annual door inspections in light of findings from the Sandy Hook Advisory Commission, the Department of Justice findings on Robb Elementary, and many, many other incidents where deficiencies created vulnerabilities that were exploited. However, I want to bring to your attention a concern regarding the language in LB517. The current language defining the door assemblies require, requiring annual inspection does not include classroom doors or locks sets, unintendedly it seems. We know these doors play a critical role in keeping students safe and could quite possibly be the last layer of defense from an active threat. So it's important to voice this concern. Excuse me. Our members have the ex-- I'm sorry, our members have the experience needed to mitigate the risk of future incidents by addressing past failure points. Our members have a deep understanding of door security and life safety codes, and we would like to offer our assistance in achieving the objectives of LB517. We are eager to share our insight to ensure school door inspections address the most important doors, and incorporate all lessons learned from previous school shootings. Thank you to Senator Juarez, who's not here, for introducing this bill. And thank you to Chairman, Chairman Murman and the Education Committee for allowing me to share my comments today. And I am open for questions if you have any.

**MEYER:** Thank you. Questions for Mr. Torchia. Senator Hughes.

**HUGHES:** Thank you, Chairman Murman. Thank you for coming in, Mr. Torchia?

**JOHN TORCHIA:** Torchia.

**HUGHES:** Torchia. It's kind of fun name to say. So you're here representing Door Hardware Institute and the SIA. Do-- I guess one, does one if-- does the institute do training for like maintenance people to do like these door checks?

**JOHN TORCHIA:** The Door Hardware Institute, they, they have certified training that they provide.

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**HUGHES:** And what, what do they charge? Like so I'm a school, I am Lincoln Public Schools, and I'm going to send five maintenance guys--

**JOHN TORCHIA:** In this, in this, there's no fee.

**HUGHES:** There's no fee to get trained.

**JOHN TORCHIA:** No.

**HUGHES:** OK. So your maintenance people can go there and get that training free.

**JOHN TORCHIA:** Yes.

**HUGHES:** OK. And then do these institutes, or do they also come-- could a school have you come and do the door?

**JOHN TORCHIA:** Absolutely.

**HUGHES:** Check.

**JOHN TORCHIA:** Yes.

**HUGHES:** That probably would get charged then.

**JOHN TORCHIA:** No.

**HUGHES:** They're free also.

**JOHN TORCHIA:** Yes.

**HUGHES:** OK. Thank you.

**JOHN TORCHIA:** You're welcome.

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

**MEYER:** Thank you, Chair. If you're not charging for this how do you make a living, I guess?

**JOHN TORCHIA:** So I represent door hardware manufacturers. I'm a consultant. I'm basically a manufacturer consultant.

**MEYER:** You make your money when you sell the door.

**JOHN TORCHIA:** We sell, we manufacture doors and hardware. But as far as the-- my position, I, I do everything from training, to door inspections, to troubleshooting, to punch lists. And it's all free.

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**MEYER:** But it just seemed like there is no money trail here, I was curious. Thank you.

**JOHN TORCHIA:** You're welcome.

**MURMAN:** Any other questions? If not, thank you for your testimony.

**JOHN TORCHIA:** Yep. You're welcome. You bet. Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Other proponents for LB517? Any opponents for LB517.

**COLBY COASH:** Good afternoon, Senator Murman, members of the Education Committee. My name is Colby Coash, C-o-l-b-y C-o-a-s-h. I represent the Nebraska Association of School Boards and we are here in opposition to LB517. We do appreciate what Senator Juarez is trying to do. My comments aren't on her intent, but really about the practical application of this. So at the heart of this, what we see in this bill is an unnecessary bill, but also an unfunded mandate. You did hear the word mandate from a few of the proponents here. These are from the industry who are saying that this is a mandate. Senator Meyer, you mentioned that there was no cost to the state in the fiscal note, but we certainly anticipate a cost to local districts. If, as the previous testifier indicated, these are free inspections, then my testimony changes. But I really suspect these are not free. And if they are going to be free and you write that in the law that there will be no charge for these inspections certainly would change our, our view on this. We're just not exactly sure what's broken at this point that this bill is seeking, seeking to correct. There's this-- there is a currently a state school safety director who's not here today, but he can add per statutory, he can request plans, he can make recommendations, he can put these types of inspections in hi-- it's within his statutory authority already to put these types of recommendations, inspections within the plans that are already under law forced to be submitted to him. But it-- so, again, that's why I say this is probably unnecessary. The state school safety director can do these things. Adding inspection, of course, annually is something that he can do, he does do. And certainly if, if that was put down from his office, schools would comply with that. We do see this as kind of duplicative in a, in a few different ways. There are lots of already established inspections that happen at the sch-- at the district level, everything from fire inspections to code inspections, the annual inspections that the safety director has to review. There are insurance inspections that your insurance provider forces you to do that. So we, we see, we see that in that light and encourage you to, to look at it that way. If these inspections were mandated

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annually, I'm not sure there's enough people out there that would do all the buildings, all the locks across the state. So I'm not sure about the wor-- the workforce in, in that, in that vein. To Senator Lonowski's question earlier, if it were okay for staff to do this, which they do as part of their daily duties or as maintenance staff, one of those internal inspections, checking logs is part of that, we, we would we be OK with that. But I don't think that's the intent of the proponents of this bill. I think the intent is different. That would mandate some, some outside entities to come in. So with that, we'd encourage you keep, keep those comments in mind as you, as you debate this bill. And, and we'd also encourage you to call districts in your own legislative districts and see if-- get their thoughts as to what inspections are already happening, how those are occurring, if they feel these things are, are necessary, and let that color your perspective as well. I'll leave it at that.

**MURMAN:** Any questions for Mr. Coash? If not, thank you.

**COLBY COASH:** Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Any other opponents for LB517? Any neutral testifiers for LB517?

**MICHEAL DWYER:** I said good morning. Good afternoon, Chairman Murman. My name is Micheal Dwyer, M-i-c-h-e-a-l D-w-y-e-r, and I'll cut my testimony very brief. I'm here on another bill, but wanted at least the opportunity to weigh in. Incredibly, I'm kind of the EM-- excuse me, I'm kind of the EMS guy in the Legislature, 40 years as a volunteer firefighter and responder, and thank God, have never had to respond to anything like this bill references. But I would stress a couple of things. Incredibly important. This would hope to prevent, both the initial door locks and the inspections, the unthinkable, particularly in rural areas this is the unthinkable before us. So certainly encourage and support. However, as a former school board member and president, to Senator Meyer's point, I have concerns that it's-- this is an unfunded mandate. As a former county emergency management director, I support the general idea, but the underlying statute and the underlying, underlying bill doesn't specifically mention fire and EMS. So as this is working through the process and perhaps the bill itself later, I would encourage you to consider at least amending it so that it includes fire and EMS, which we do anyway. But having that little bit of extra in statute I think would encourage that. I'll end my testimony. I'd be happy to take any questions.

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**MURMAN:** Thank you. Any questions for Mr. Dwyer? If not, thanks for your testimony.

**MICHEAL DWYER:** See you later. Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Any other neutral testifiers for LB517? If not, on LB517 we had six proponents, zero opponents, and one neutral. And Senator Juarez had to leave for another bill introduction, so she waives closing. And that will close the hearing on LB517, and we'll open the hearing on LB631. Senator Hansen. Good afternoon.

**HANSEN:** Good afternoon. Chairman Murman and members of the Education Committee, my name is Senator Ben Hansen. That's B-e-n- H-a-n-s-e-n, and I appreciate the opportunity to be here today to testify on LB631, a follow-up to the successes of LB673 from last session, in an effort to provide the additional support needed to expand its impact. I originally introduced LB673 in 2023 to establish a grant program for schools to develop consistent, accurate, and accessible school mapping systems to enhance emergency response. The School Emergency Response Mapping Fund was created to support this initiative. The bill was backed by the Nebraska State Volunteer Firefighter Association. Arlington Fire and Rescue, Nebraska Emergency Medical Services Association. Nebraska Association of School Boards. Nebraska Rural Community School Association and Nebraska Counsel School Administrators. It was passed in 2024 as part of the Education Committee's Priority Bill, LB1329, with an initial allocation of \$525,000, just a fraction of the \$4.5 million needed to map every school in Nebraska. The bill sets guidelines for maps that schools are to create with the grants. They are to be detailed true north orientated maps with specific labels and features overlaid on current aerial imagery with X-Y coordinates. These maps must be verified annually with onsite verification and made available in both electronic and printable formats, ensuring capability with the technologies used by schools and first responders at no additional cost. These maps are essential for effective emergency response. To date, 16 states have passed school mapping legislation with unanimous support, and 20 more are in the process of enacting similar standards. The Nebraska Department of Education developed the initial grant application released this fall with a deadline of January 31st, 2025. A total of 85 applicants requested \$719,210.28 in funding, exceeding the available \$525,000. Many larger districts where mapping costs would be more than \$100,000 opted not to apply because they knew the request would deplete most of the funds. Additionally, some schools were unaware of the grant until late in application process and lacked sufficient time to apply. With over 1,500 schools in Nebraska ranging

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from large ever changing urban campuses in our metro areas, to rural schools where first responders may have to travel significant distances, we have taken the first steps towards ensuring the safety of students and staff in emergencies. Whether responding to a medical crisis such as a seizure or heart attack, or in the unfortunate event of an active shooter situation requiring coordination between multiple law enforcement agencies, having a single accurate point of reference is critical for accurate communication response. With this one time investment, our schools and first responders will have the tools to communicate effectively under stress, access exact time saving information, and protect our students and faculty members when every second counts. Today, I urge the Education Committee to continue supporting this program. Supporting LB631 and investing additional funds makes sure more schools can participate and first responders can access life saving data in an emergency. My colleagues, most of you probably know a lot of the bills that I introduce have-- I tend to prioritize property tax relief, the freedoms and liberties of our Nebraska citizens, and trying to make government more efficient and cost effective. This is the only bill I think I'll bring this year out of 14 that actually asks for money. And so I think it's that important, and I think it's proven itself, and a lot of people are looking forward to helping access more funds so we can keep our kids safe. I think that's one of our roles as a state government, along with coordinating with local government to make sure our kids can be safe and first responders can do their job efficiently, effectively in every school in Nebraska, so. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**MURMAN:** Thank you. Any questions for Senator Hansen at this time?  
Senator Meyer.

**MEYER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. We had 85 applications for \$525,000 and would have eaten up about \$700,000 and change. With 1,500 school buildings in the state, \$4 million doesn't hardly seem adequate to be sufficient to do the mapping.

**HANSEN:** Should I ask for more?

**MEYER:** How thorough do you want to be?

**HANSEN:** But I, I--

**MEYER:** And once again, I, I, I'm not, I'm not pushing back on the need for in fact, I think it's probably critical that we do something like this, quite frankly. It just seems that given the numbers, that's probably not enough to go around. Might be a good start.

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**HANSEN:** I, I think it would provide a lot of schools at least with the ability to start the project. I think in times of questionable revenue sources, I don't want to ask for too much.

**MEYER:** Understood.

**HANSEN:** And I think right now, we're on, we're on a good start and a good trajectory to make sure all these schools can start making its maps.

**MEYER:** And I'm not advocating for you to ask for more money. Please understand that.

**HANSEN:** I'd get a phone call from Senator Clements right away if I tried that.

**MEYER:** That's, that's, that's not what I'm, that's not what I'm implying. But given the magnitude of the job, the number of school buildings, and the number of districts and the initial pilot program, we will have to be very judicious of where we use those funds initially, I think.

**HANSEN:** I agree.

**MEYER:** Only, only an observation, so. Thank you.

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

**HUGHES:** So I'm going to-- Thank you, Chair Murman. And thanks for bringing this, Senator Hansen. I'm going to go a little bit more in detail, I guess. How did you come up with the \$4 million? And you said 85 applicants. I'm assuming an applicant would be a school district? Or--

**HANSEN:** Yes.

**HUGHES:** OK.

**HANSEN:** I believe so, or--

**HUGHES:** So one school district could have 10 buildings, I mean, or 20 or 3 or whatever. So the 1,500 school buildings, is that out of the 245 school districts that we have?

**HANSEN:** Yes, I believe so. I can, I can make sure by closing [INAUDIBLE].

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**HUGHES:** Ok. Well. So I guess those are some of my questions.

**HANSEN:** We did have an average of how much it will average cost I think per school.

**HUGHES:** Yeah, do you remember that?

**HANSEN:** It was like \$4,500, maybe?

**HUGHES:** Per school district?

**HANSEN:** Yes.

**HUGHES:** \$4,500 per school district? And then--

**HANSEN:** Some requiring more, some less.

**HUGHES:** Yeah, of course. That's average. Did-- is this in the governor's budget? Part of this? Do you know?

**HANSEN:** I don't know.

**HUGHES:** Probably not. OK. We'll make it a part of his budget.

**HUGHES:** Well, we do get to set the budget. That is our duty. I think that is it. OK. Thank you.

**HANSEN:** Yep.

**MURMAN:** Any other questions? Se-- Se--Senator Conrad is, is calculating. But if you're ready, go ahead.

**CONRAD:** All right. Thank you. Thank you, Senator Murman. Thank you. Senator Hansen, always good to see you. I remember this effort from the last go around when we were serving on the Education Committee together. And I've had a chance to touch base with some of the schools that have utilized this and some of the vendors that share expertise with them to advance our shared goal of school safety. I just want to give you an opportunity to weigh in, because this is something that I think we're all continually struggling with as we all care deeply about school safety is this feels like a very downstream kind of solution to me, that rather than addressing root causes of school violence, mental health, proliferation of guns, lack of safe storage, lack of safety training, I mean, the list could go on and on and on. Isn't there a better investment in terms of policy collaboration to prevent school violence rather than just focusing or conceding that

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school violence will happen, and then we just want to figure out a way to improve res-- response?

**HANSEN:** Sure, there could be. I think, like you just mentioned, the approach that we have is a downstream. Still proactive, I think, in its aspect that we're actually trying to get ahead of the problem before it's started. There's a lot different ways we can spend money when it comes to school safety, when it comes to being-- other kinds of being proactive like you might be talking about. This bill does not address any of that. We're just trying to address the schools and the first responders ability to be there on time in case there's-- And it's not so much about like we might be thinking about a school shooter incident. But a lot of times we might get a phone call from the school saying a teacher is having a heart attack in the teacher's lounge and you get a first responder right away who's like, which door do I go in? Where's the teacher's lounge? This right away provides that, that information to the first responder right away. So it's not so much a school shooter that we're talking about that we might be alluding to with a question as it is more even about a whole bunch of other instances where seizures or heart attacks or other kinds of ailments.

**CONRAD:** OK. I, I appreciate that. And I remember some of that discussion from the prior committee hearings. And I guess the other piece that I just wanted to weave in here, and it came up in Senator Juarez's bill, and I know maybe other newer committee members didn't have the context, but I think it was Senator Walz led a multi year, perhaps, task force looking at school safety issues that had public schools and private schools and law enforcement and all of the stakeholders at the table. And they kind of listed different solutions, created a funding program that we saw some of, of the recipients there, too. Was this kind of mapping technology recommended by the school safety task force as, as something the state should invest in? Do you remember?

**HANSEN:** I'm unsure, but I don't--

**CONRAD:** I don't remember off the top of my head.

**HANSEN:** But I know this, they did--

**CONRAD:** OK.

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**HANSEN:** --under the topics of that, because we were actually looking at that quite a bit too, it fit under that topic. But we just wanted to kind of create this separate fund, so-- I don't know. Maybe not.

**CONRAD:** Very good.

**HANSEN:** Create a lot of gray area so then we can figure out where to distribute the funds easier.

**CONRAD:** OK. Thanks very much. Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Any other questions for Senator Hansen? Senator Meyer.

**MEYER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I know we talk about the active shooters and those types of things. Would you say that simply having the floor plan laid out properly for fire and rescue, emphasis on fire so that you know, the layout of the building as opposed to just the WAG, which I don't think I'll say what that is. It's a guess.

**HANSEN:** Yeah, I, I think it would be extremely helpful. I'm sure some of the testifiers behind me will mention that. Because I think in some of these maps they also layout where fire extinguishers are at, where--

**MEYER:** Exits.

**HANSEN:** --defibrillators are and all that kind of stuff. So then they can access those as well as staff, maybe, in the school a little bit easier.

**MEYER:** Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Any other questions? If not, thanks for the open.

**HANSEN:** Yes.

**MURMAN:** And we'll ask for oppo-- or excuse me, proponents for LB631.

**ANTHONY RAMAEKER:** Good afternoon, Chairman, ladies and gentlemen of the committee. My name is Tony Ramaeker. I'm a deputy with the Douglas County Sheriff's Office. I've been there for 22 years. Prior to that, I was in the Marine Corps, I worked for the DEA, I worked counterterrorism, I was a team leader for the SWAT team at Fort Meade, which was the NSA compound. I have a master's degree in disaster preparedness and emergency management and a septet instructor, crime prevention through environmental design. I did--

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**MURMAN:** Sorry, could you spell--

**ANTHONY RAMAEKER:** --my name. I was-- I was so excited. Tony Ramaeker, it's T-o-n-y R-a-m-a-e-k-e-r. Apologies. I'm also a school shield site assessor. I'm one of two in the state. And I have a unique ability today to address you both as a representative of the Douglas County Sheriff's Office and NASRO, the National Association of School Resource Officers. I am a master SRO through NASRO and I'm also an instructor for NASRO. So I teach street cops how to work in schools and how to be better at working in schools. My understanding of the bill is that every school in Nebraska is supposed to be mapped. When I ran the numbers, when I learned that I was going to be speaking today, I found that my count was probably a little bit off. I had a total of 1,851 school buildings in Nebraska. If we divide 525,000 by those buildings, that comes out to \$283.63 per building. So on its face, the bill was considerably underfunded. The, the problem that we're facing from the law enforcement side is wayfinding. Because I'm a site assessor and an instructor for NASRO I've been in buildings all across Nebraska and all across the nation, and I see the same problem. As a matter of fact, when I walked into this building today, I saw the exact same problems. There is no wayfinding. I had to look for this room because there's no maps on how to get there. I had no idea how to get into this room. But what I see is inconsistencies, inconsistencies in districts, even inconsistencies in schools in the same districts. Some hall, hallways are color coded. Some have striping on the floor. Some have overhead pylons directing you where to go. Some have maps at the entrances to the schools. I don't personally like that, I think that's a safety issue. Some have wayfinding points at intersections. Some have none at all. What this bill fixes is the problem for law enforcement and emergency medical staff, firefighters to get where they need to go. So when I'm talking about all of the wayfinding, of course, the first thing that comes to mind is the school shooter. I will tell you that our schools are still the safest place for our kids, Monday through Friday, we have a 1 in 740,000,000 chance of being involved in a school shooter as it resets every day. Our kids die on Friday and Saturday nights. However, we also have a responsibility through the T.L.O. decision from the Supreme Court to protect our kids from bell to bell. We have the obligation of in loco parentis, so we act as their parents. So I appreciate this, this bill, but I would also add my hat in to ask for increased funding. There's, there's three reasons, mostly, why organizations lose lawsuits in critical incidents like school shootings. There's failure to plan. Every school in Nebraska is required to have an emergency operations plan. I've written several of them myself, so we have that covered.

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Failure to prepare. That is when we have to train our people. And failure to respond. This is where we're, we're lacking. When police go into a building, we have to know where to go into. We have to have an accurate floor plan. Because the time that we spend wasting trying to find it, that capital is lives. Every second that we delay, that can be another life lost. How many times can you do this in one minute? That's what, that's what I'm talking about. I live school safety five, six, sometimes seven days a week. So this is my passion. Thank you. It appears as though my time is up. I would love to keep talking, but I understand.

**MURMAN:** Thank you. If you have anything else to add fairly quickly, go ahead.

**ANTHONY RAMAEKER:** Yes, sir. Thank you. So the, the accuracy of the maps, these maps are in formats that will preload into our cruiser computers and be able to be disseminated onto our phones themselves. Can you imagine being a first responder having your wayfinding on your phone in front of you as you're trying to get to where you need to go? I'm running. And as we go into those buildings, as I also teach armed assailant response, and I can tell you from my experience and my training that your eyesight is narrowed. The wayfinding that is provided in the schools, the painted hallways, the striped hallways, the overhead pylons, you don't see them. What you can do is you can open up your field of vision and relieve that panic response by pre-loading information before you get there. That helps over, overpower that stress response, response, the cortisol mixed with adrenaline. It helps overpower that and send you to the right place. And with that, I'll close. Thank you, sir.

**MURMAN:** Thank you. Any questions for Mr. Ramaeker? Senator Conrad.

**CONRAD:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you for being here. Really appreciate your service and sharing the expertise. I think that's very illuminating for the committee and helps to-- helps us get a better understanding about how these tools are utilized by first responders on the front lines.

**ANTHONY RAMAEKER:** Yes ma'am.

**CONRAD:** I just had an additional point of curiosity listening to your biography in the opening, and as you rightly should, you take great pride in your work as an SRO and training other law enforcement officers how to serve as SROs. I know we have some other bills before the committee on this topic this year, so I just wanted to touch base.

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I mean, it's my understanding that that does require additional and specialized training to be really effective in that role of connecting with young people and keeping them safe. Would you generally agree with that?

**ANTHONY RAMAEKER:** Yes, ma'am.

**CONRAD:** OK. I figured you might, but--

**ANTHONY RAMAEKER:** Absolutely do.

**CONRAD:** Because I, I, I know that the SROs that I've connected with take a, a great deal of pride in availing themselves to that additional training so that they can work with a different population, which is young people on their beat and, and have different outcomes than maybe your counterparts who are on a traditional patrol.

**ANTHONY RAMAEKER:** Yes, ma'am. We, we see direct results of what we do on the road. You may spend as little as three minutes with somebody or as much as three hours, but then you'll never see them again. I get to track all with my kids, and I see them being the knucklehead freshmen into the graduating seniors that you couldn't be more proud of. It's the best job in law enforcement.

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

**ANTHONY RAMAEKER:** Yes, ma'am.

**MURMAN:** Thank you. Any other questions for Mr. Ramaeker? Senator Lonowski.

**LONOWSKI:** Thank you, Chair Murman. Thank you, sir, for your testi-- testifying, and thanks for your service. Is-- so is this mapping any way integrated as a state mapping system or does it stay purely with that school district?

**ANTHONY RAMAEKER:** My understanding is that it will be entered in as a state resource.

**LONOWSKI:** OK.

**ANTHONY RAMAEKER:** I don't know for sure, but we already have the state resource of NCJIS, the Nebraska Criminal Justice Information System. Then my understanding is that it would, it would be integrated into that because it's already an existing system and we wouldn't have to pay anything for it. So the integration is uniform across the state.

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So, for example, I was the fourth one through the door at the Von Maur shooting. When I came out, I saw cruisers from Des Moines, I saw cruisers from Ames, I saw cruisers from Council Bluffs. We will be able to disseminate that into a law enforcement accessible file like a PDF, for example, to anybody that responds.

**LONOWSKI:** Okay. I'm thinking like a SWAT situation, I guess. And in Hastings, Nebraska, we might have to call SWAT from Grand Island or somewhere, but they would have access to--

**ANTHONY RAMAEKER:** Yes, sir.

**LONOWSKI:** --that as far as you know.

**ANTHONY RAMAEKER:** Ye, sir.

**LONOWSKI:** Ok. Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Any other questions? If not, I have one. What are the risks that someone that might want to do harm would have access to the maps that could use them in the wrong way?

**ANTHONY RAMAEKER:** We-- the only people that have access to it, exactly like NCJIS, are certified credentialed law enforcement. This would be a little bit different because our 911 operators would also have it because it would push through the 911 center into our cruiser computers. So the possibility of somebody getting a hold of that mapping system would be pretty difficult. You can never say there's no risk because the cybersecurity is continually flawed. We have data breaches on a regular basis. However, NCJIS has never been breached. So I would feel pretty confident that it would stay within us.

**MURMAN:** OK. Thank you. Any other questions? If not, thank you for your service and thanks for testifying. Other proponents for LB631.

**MICHEAL DWYER:** Good afternoon, Chairman Murman and members of the Education Committee. My name is Micheal Dwyer, M-i-c-h-e-a-l D-w-y-e-r, and I am here to testify in support of LB631. I'm a 40 year veteran of a volunteer fire and EMS service with a resumé of over 2,800 calls. I'm co-author of The Future of EMS Report, that's in its fourth version and I cochair the Nebraska EMS task force. I'm also a 12 year-- was, excuse me, a 12 year member of the Arlington School Board, serving two years as president. In 2023, I testified in support of LB673, the original bill that we're attempting to fund more stringently, for lack of a better word, now. That bill created the School Emergency Response Mapping Fund, and at that time I related my

experience in responding to fire and EMS calls inside Arlington Public Schools, and the struggles with the call comes in for someone down or injured in the gym. Well, we have three gyms. So which gym is it and which door are we going to enter and who else is there? And if I need to contact mutual aid, which is a big deal during staffing shortages, they're going to have even less understanding of that building that I do-- did, excuse me, as a school board president. The point is that emergency response is never a perfect clinical world. In the case of, God forbid, a big ugly, by its very nature it is chaos. Our job, our job is to structure that chaos through planning, drills, great communication, and technology into a safe and effective response. And we skip a paragraph because most of that was covered. I have reviewed samples of the emergency response data mapping, and the information is excellent, proven, and very practical. The data would give responders an invaluable tool in the case of a big ugly, but also for more routine events similar to the ones that were talked about earlier. Arlington Public Schools has applied for this, and I know there's somewhere in that process it was my understanding they just didn't quite get in before they ran out of money, the \$500,000 initially. But I wasn't able to confirm that with Superintendent Lewis today, so I apologize if I'm inconsistent. Again, I would encourage your support. Like to address just a couple of questions and whatever time I have left. Senator Meyer, you alluded to fire and EMS response and completely agree. In a fire situation, typically we go in the front door, go to the panel, go to the fire alarm panel, and that'll tell us a little bit about where we're going. But even that is a little bit-- two-- the point I would make is the two of those together, this mapping software and being able to look at that panel would be literally invaluable. Senator Conrad, my friend, you make even as a strong conservative and a Second Amendment advocate, you make a great point. And I will tell you, as animated as I can get over the Second Amendment, those conversations are much more difficult when it comes to school safety. And, and any time you watch a response to something like that, it's-- they're harder conversations to have. My only comment to this is that they're not mutually exclusive. This is, in my opinion, that conversation about prevention is, is much more complicated, much harder to have. This is a safe and effective step that's relatively easy to accomplish. My encouragement is to certainly consider both. My encouragement as a responder would be to do the mapping software first while we continue the other conversation. I hope that helps, sort of? The point that Senator Hansen made concerning the fiscal, obviously the fiscal's an issue, and to kind of wear those same hats as a strong conservative, as a taxpayer that whines about his property taxes all the time, I can do that. But as a

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conservative, I strongly believe that there are some essential functions of government. And the first one for me as someone who lived that is that we need to protect our citizens first. And certainly that starts with our kids. With that, I would be happy to answer any of the questions and thank you for your support.

**MURMAN:** Thank you. Any questions for Mr. Dwyer? Senator Hughes.

**HUGHES:** Thank you. Chairman Murman. Thanks for speaking again, Mr. Dwyer. I'm just-- on the map. I'm just curious how it works. Because you said you've seen how that works. But in your example you said, OK, you get called Arlington, a kid's down in the gym, which gym? Your map is going to show three gyms, how is that-- is that going to help you, though, with that? I mean, you're still not going to know necessarily which gym unless the person calling--

**MICHEAL DWYER:** Sure.

**HUGHES:** --knows what the maps show for which gym.

**MICHEAL DWYER:** Yeah, and, and you make a good point. And I would say that the situation I specifically described is a little bit antiquated, and the Arlington public schools have done a lot of work to make sure that they're telling us the answer to that question.

**HUGHES:** Yeah, it's the high school gym, or it's the--

**MICHEAL DWYER:** Exactly. Or the elementary or the new gym or whatever else it is. It's my understanding, though, with the mapping software, it gives us so much more detail and it's in color. So if I-- again, in the mutual aid example, if I need to have Fremont, that we regularly mutual aid for advanced life support with, I can tell them it's in the red gym on the west side and they're going to be able to go, oh, right there.

**HUGHES:** Yeah.

**MICHEAL DWYER:** The communication, especially in the event of a God forbid--

**HUGHES:** Where you have multiple--

**MICHEAL DWYER:** Where you have more-- not only a, a shooting, God-- again, God forbid, but I was part of an exercise that sort of simulated a bleacher collapse, which is-- that's a, that's a pretty big ugly. In, in that case, mutual aid agencies from five, six, seven,

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eight departments before we get to law enforcement and before emergency management tries to be able to do any kind of relocation stuff. To me, this is a communication tool to get everybody on the same page. I hope that--

**HUGHES:** No, that does. Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Any other questions for Mr. Dwyer? If not, thank you for your testimony. Other proponents for LB631?

**ALEX CARNEY:** Good afternoon. Excuse me. Good afternoon, Chairman, committee. My name is Alex Carney, A-l-e-x C-a-r-n-e-y, and I'm testifying in support of, of LB631. I also represent a company called Critical Response Group. My background is I'm a former special operations officer in the Marine Corps, so I've spent probably, I don't know, a few thousand days of my life using maps under stress to communicate. And since leaving the Marine Corps, I've spent a lot of time or most of my time helping first responders and schools communicate better using maps. Obviously, like Deputy Ramaeker, I'm a Marine, so I'm like rarely the smartest person in the room. But what I do know really well is tactics. And one of-- a few things that I point out for the conversation around maps is, one, is a map is used in probably every stage of emergency response. So it's one of the few school safety technologies that actually doesn't involve just one section of response. So a map is used to plan and prepare for an incident. It's used in the early stages of an incident if a school has a panic button or a camera management system that they're sharing with public safety. It's used by 911 professionals to locate the location of an incident. It's used by initial law enforcement officers to locate and navigate inside a structure. It's used to evacuate injured people, when you're trying to balance the nuances of dealing with the tactical situation with evacuating people. It's used to plan reunification. It's used to help criminal, criminal investigations after the fact. So a map is like one of the simplest things or simplest tools out there that public safety in schools can use to improve the safety of kids. Second, I would say that maps have been called out in almost every after action report from big school safety events that have happened over the last 20 years. So during Columbine, the principal was drawing the map out on the command post for public safety for the duration of that event. During Uvalde, probably most recently, the floor plans at the command post were inaccurate, which caused poor decision making from the part of kind of leadership on how they could make alternate entry into that room. If you look at Sandy Hook, the floor plans were inaccessible for the duration of that particular event. And the after action from Sandy Hook from the

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Connecticut State Police was make digital maps available to law enforcement responding to events. So I, I would say that maps have really been called out as kind of a simple thing that has been lacking in a lot of these big events. The other thing that I would note as, as someone who's probably watched a few hundred active shooter drills, watching public safety try to communicate in big tactical nightmare buildings like schools. There's really like three ingredients that someone like Deputy Ramaeker or someone in an incident command role really needs to be successful during that event. The first thing is, is guts or courage to take command and say you're in charge, and that's a tough thing to legislate, so I'm not really sure how to do that particular one. But that's obviously the most important thing. And we see guts and courage to take command lacking in a lot of these events. The second thing is obviously a radio. So if you can't communicate with the people inside the building and can't communicate with all the different public safety agencies responding, you're probably going to be behind the curve. And then the third thing is a map. And if you don't have a map accessible to you to help you visualize the interior of these big buildings while you're sweating outside on the hood of a car, trying to understand radio traffic from inside a really big building where you have a lot of law enforcement officers running through with, you know, firearms, you really-- it's one of those things that's kind of an integral part of being able to communicate. The last thing that I point out is that 16 states have established legislation when it comes to school mapping. It's probably the most widespread school safety legislation that's out there. There was a-- unfortunately, there was a shooting in Wisconsin a couple of months back, Abundant Life Christian School. Wisconsin was one of the first states to establish school mapping legislation. That school did get mapped in the first round of funding for that school safety legislation. And one of the after actions that came out immediately in the press conference right after that event was that the maps that were created as part of that program were assessable to the public safety agencies that were responding and made a difference on how quickly they could respond to that school. That's all I have. And. I'm happy to answer any questions you might have.

**MURMAN:** Thank you. Any questions for Mr. Carney? If not, thanks a lot--.

**ALEX CARNEY:** Thank you.

**MURMAN:** --for coming and testifying. Other proponents for LB631? Any opponents for LB631? Any neutral testifiers for LB631? If not, Senator

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Hansen, you're welcome to close. While he's coming up, we had three proponents, four opponents, and zero neutral online.

**HANSEN:** Thank you, Chairman. I did get some of that information that Senator Hughes was asking about. This is from last year's fiscal note. Emergency response mapping is estimated to cost between \$3,500 and \$5,000. So if, if all the public schools, we're talking a 1,427 school buildings, the cost would be as much as \$4.9 million. So Senator Meyer was correct. We could ask for more money. So--

**MEYER:** Don't lay that on me.

**HANSEN:** Oh, no, wait. No, man, we got \$500,000 last year, so now we have-- We're right on track, actually. So that [INAUDIBLE] \$4.9 million. So that's where, that's where that number came from. I know you guys were kind of curious about that, so. And I do appreciate the testifiers that came in and testified in support. Again, important, important, bill, I think. There's some things we want to prioritize in the state of Nebraska. One of them is the children that go to our schools, so.

**MURMAN:** Any questions for Senator Hansen? Senator Conrad.

**CONRAD:** Thank you. Thank you, Senator. Hansen. And just because I think maybe it got missed in this year's hearing, I did just want to clarify that there were other schools that have utilized their own resources to conduct mapping already, So there might be a lot more facilities that are-- we don't know the exact number, but that are taking care of beyond just what the initial appropriation provided for. And we heard about that in the last biennium, how some schools had utilized their own resources.

**HANSEN:** Correct.

**CONRAD:** Yeah. I just wanted to, to kind of connect the dot on that. You know, and that strikes me as perhaps maybe a creative way to go about this without a state appropriation. You'll remember during the special session, we put some lids on local government spending to try and rein in property taxes, but we attempted to provide a carve-out to, not exempt or ca-- or to not cap our, our public safety considerations that happen on the local level, recognizing our shared values and importance there. Is that a better way to go about it, to figure out if there's some lids in place on school districts, if we somehow provide an exemption for public safety expenditures like this?

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**HANSEN:** You could. However, I think because of the importance of making sure these schools are mapped, you know, because seconds count in situations like this, and we can never predict when something might happen. If we leave it up to that, in that direction, I think it's less likely to happen in a timely fashion. Because now they have to go to the taxpayer, they have to increase levies or change levies. When, when you start talking about the state, you know, paying for something like this, I think it's much more likely to happen in a timely fashion.

**CONRAD:** OK. Thank you very much. Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Senator Hughes.

**HUGHES:** Thank you, Chairman Murman. Thank you, Senator Hansen. So just to clarify, \$3,500 to \$4,500 per school building, not district. And then I just had a question because I wasn't sitting on this committee, was it last year? It could have been. Two years ago?

**HANSEN:** Two years ago, yes.

**HUGHES:** How many vendors, how many vendor choices does a school have to do this kind of mapping?

**HANSEN:** I believe there are at least 11 companies doing this work in some capacity.

**HUGHES:** 11?

**HANSEN:** There's, there's two main ones I know that a lot of schools throughout the country kind of go to.

**HUGHES:** But like, so when a school says they-- we want to do this kind of mapping, they've got a choice of--

**HANSEN:** They've got options, yes.

**HUGHES:** So the ones like of that-- of the schools that did this with the 500 some thousand, they probably, maybe probably picked between two or whatever options.

**HANSEN:** I don't know exact numbers, but yes, that's what I would assume.

**HUGHES:** And then there's just, it's a standard type of map that those companies help provide and [INAUDIBLE].

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**HANSEN:** Yes, and we have it laid out in the original bill about how they have to be laid out, what they have to include, all that kind of stuff so the, the company does have to provide that service.

**HUGHES:** Have to meet those criteria.

**HANSEN:** Yes, in order to get that funding.

**HUGHES:** But there's more-- yeah, there's several that they have to choose from.

**HANSEN:** Yeah.

**HUGHES:** Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Any other questions? Just a quick clarification. You said there's 11 vendors, but the maps are all very--

**HUGHES:** The same.

**HANSEN:** They all have to be the same. And that's, that's the key, right? Because whether you're going to go to Arlington Public Schools, you have to go to Blair for an emergency situation, you want the mapping to look the same. I mean, that's what they're true north orientated, they have X, Y coordinates. And so they kind of can respond to this-- you know, both schools similarly and they know what they're kind of looking at.

**MURMAN:** OK. And the Department of Education would do the mapping, is that correct? I can't remember for sure.

**MURMAN:** No, these companies would do the mapping.

**MURMAN:** The pardon? Well, but, but I mean, choose the vendor to do the mapping. I guess I should have said.

**HANSEN:** The school, the school would.

**MURMAN:** So it's up to the individual school.

**HANSEN:** Yeah, up to the, up to the individual school district and the school board to determine who they want to go through. I would assume they would put it out for bids and see which one they like the best.

**MURMAN:** OK. Thank you. With that, if there's no further questions, we'll close the hearing on LB631.

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**HANSEN:** Thank you.

**MURMAN:** And we're gonna take a quick 5 to 10 minute break.

[BREAK]

**MURMAN:** Well, welcome back to the Education Committee. And we will open the hearing on LB685, Senator Lonowski.

**LONOWSKI:** Good afternoon, Chairman Murman and members of the Education Committee. Thank you for this hearing. For the record, my name is Senator Dan Lonowski. That's D-a-n L-o-n-o-w-s-k-i, and I represent the 33rd Legislative District. I am here today to introduce LB685, a bill designed to enhance the safety of our educational institutions across Nebraska. This legislation requires the installation of a secure master keybox at each school building. These boxes ensure that law enforcement and fire departments can swiftly access school premises during emergencies, potentially saving lives. As a retired teacher, a coach, and a retired Army Nebraska National Guard member, I have dedicated my life to serving our community and safeguarding our youth. The safety of our students is paramount, and it is our duty to implement measures that protect them from potential threats. The tragic events of Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas and other school shootings highlight the critical need for improved school safety and security. Delays in law enforcement access to the classroom where the shooter was located contributed to the devastated outcome. Secure master keyboxes are secure storage devices mounted on the exterior of buildings, containing keys and access cards for emergency responders. They are widely used across the United States to provide rapid, nondestructive access to buildings during emergencies. Fire departments have been utilizing these secure boxes for years. Both the Omaha Fire Department and Lincoln Fire and Rescue, for instance, utilize secure master keyboxes known as Knox Boxes to ensure quick entry during critical situations. Educational institutions are installing more and more of them. All area schools in Lincoln, both Lincoln public schools and private schools, are in the evaluation process to develop a plan for the installation of such a secure box at each facility. Lincoln Fire and Rescue secured a federal grant to provide funding for all LPS buildings. And I believe all the high schools have them at this time and the, and the middle schools are, are in the process. Several states have recognized the importance of such measures. Texas and North Carolina require the installation of lockboxes in schools to facilitate emergency access for public safety officials. LB685 requires the installation of these secure master keyboxes. Importantly, it also allocates \$1 million in funding--

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sufficient to cover the cost of these boxes at all Nebraska public and private schools. With each box costing approximately \$800 and around 1,200 schools across state, the investment will fully fund this critical safety measure without burdening local school districts. By collaborating with local law enforcement to determine the optimal placement of these keyboxes, we ensure the optimal pla-- excuse me-- we ensure that emergency responders can act swiftly, potentially preventing tragedies. LB685 is a necessary step toward fortifying the safety of our schools. It reflects our commitment to protecting our children and providing a secure environment conducive to learning. I urge you all to support this bill and take decisive action to enhance the security of our educational institutions. Thank you, Chairman Murman and members of the committee for your consideration of LB685. And I will try to answer any questions you have. I will be followed by expert testimony.

**MURMAN:** Thank you. Any questions for Senator Lonowski at this time? Senator Meyer.

**MEYER:** Thank you, Chairman Murman. Looking at the fiscal note-- no general funds, but money transferred from the Cash Fund. Is that the--

**LONOWSKI:** Well, yes, it's-- and there's also a, a federal grant for this.

**MEYER:** OK. But nothing out of the General.

**LONOWSKI:** I'll let someone answer that behind me.

**MEYER:** OK. All right.

**MURMAN:** Senator Hughes.

**HUGHES:** Thank you, Chairman Murman. Thank you, Senator Lonowski. How many vendors or companies manufacture this specific type of box?

**LONOWSKI:** I have spoken with two. I, I am sure that there are several other vendors out there.

**HUGHES:** OK. I might-- I'll ask somebody behind you. Thank you.

**LONOWSKI:** OK.

**MURMAN:** Any other questions? You did say there was a federal grant. How much of the cost would be covered by the grant? Do, do you--

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**LONOWSKI:** I believe at this point it's a million-dollar grant. And I'm not, I'm not for sure, so I'll let someone behind me answer that correctly.

**MURMAN:** OK. Any other questions? If not, thank you for your open. Proponents for LB685.

**NEAL ZIPSER:** Good afternoon, and thank you for your time today. My name is Neal Zipser. That's N-e-a-l Z-i-p-s-e-r. And I'm the industry affairs manager for the Knox Company. We're a woman-owned small business based in Phoenix, Arizona. And since 1975, we've worked with approximately 16,000 first responder agencies, including 88 agencies in Nebraska. There are currently Knox Boxes on more than 300 schools in the state for fire use. As one of the companies offering the type of boxes required under LB685, ours is referred to as a Knox Box. And we're testifying in support of the bill to provide additional information about these important safety resources. Many schools in Nebraska, like I said, are already using Knox Boxes for fire safety purposes in conjunction with their local fire departments. The fire departments use the box to gain entry typically to the building in middle of the night when there's no-- nobody there and the alarm goes off. Fire departments and schools have partnered to place the box at the front door, generally, and in an emergency use a jurisdiction's Knox key to open the box to find a master key to the building inside. The predictable and trustworthy method of entry speeds response time and reduces the loss of property. Based on the success of this model, law enfornts-- law enforcement has begun using their own Knox Boxes or other locksbo-- lockboxes for access to locked schools at critical moments. The U.S. Department of Justice report following the Uvalde, Texas shooting also recommends keyboxes on schools for law enforcement needs. Two national organizations, the I Love U Guys Foundation and the Partnership Alliance for Safer Schools also support keyboxes for law enforcement. In states where these boxes are already required of schools or districts like Lincoln Public Schools where the boxes are being installed with the help of federal grant dollars, law enforcement works with the school district to install the box in a strategic location to allow for the best tactical response. As I said before, fire departments generally like the box in a convenient location, but it's not that smart to-- for law enforcement to run up to the front door with all that adrenaline going trying to fumble with a lockbox. Public schools in Nashville, Tennessee, for example, have boxes for law enforcement at the gym entrance, which is generally at the back of the school or side of the school. So it doesn't matter if law enforcement's never done a school safety drill before; they know to go to the gym to get access. Law enforcement spe-- specific boxes

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also allow for different needs for what's inside the box. Generally, fire departments want that external master key. Sometimes they have more than that. But the schools that we work with typically include master external keys, internal keys, access cards, school layouts-- we talk about the importance of maps-- and even tourniquets. Law enforcement will not have to carry around a box with various access cards, mechanical keys, et cetera, and try to find the right one when seconds matter. Instead, cruisers will be sent with one single key that can be used for any lock-- any lockbox to get into the buildings in the entire school district. One key for the whole school district. Access is a critical shortcoming in school safety. LB685 is intended to provide a solution to this emerging threat that is easy and quick to implement and not nearly at the high cost of many other safety devices. All the cameras, AI software, and panic alarms are useless if the good guys can't quickly gain access and mitigate the incident. Please note that we are not the only company offering lockboxes. I'll be happy to name several of them for you. But we happen to be one that thousands of first responder agencies have trust and faith in. Another note, the lockbox-- the Knox Box is listed to several Underwriter Laboratory standards, including UL 1037, which is UL's antitheft protection standard. This should give schools confidence that students cannot vandalize or gain entry to the box. If you've ever seen a Knox Box, trust me, it's easier to break into the school than the box. These boxes do not require bu-- power, batteries, and very little maintenance. This ensures the box would still operate if the shooter shuts down the school's power. So thank you again for your time and thanks for your work to keep schools safe. I'd be happy to answer any questions.

**MURMAN:** Thank you. Any questions for Neal? Senator Meyer.

**MEYER:** Thank you, Chairman Murman. Multiple locations or-- I, I can't get in my mind one lockbox for access. Multiple locations on, on a, on a school property on a school building?

**NEAL ZIPSER:** You'll hear next how Lincoln does it, but we've seen it done different ways. Like I said, Nashville has one at the gym. A school district out of Denver, they have their box next to the marquee of the school because you always have to come up to the marquee of school, basically, to get in. So they keep it up there. So it's very strategic where it's placed, and, and it's really something the school law enforcement should talk about.

**MEYER:** And it's generally just one on a-- one per building?

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**NEAL ZIPSER:** Yes. Again, it, it depends on the school. If it's a large campus where law enforcement might be coming in from a couple different ways, you may want to consider one on both sides.

**MEYER:** Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Any other questions?

**HUGHES:** I have one.

**MURMAN:** Do you have one? Senator Hughes.

**HUGHES:** Thank you, Chairman Murman. Thank you for coming in. Mr. Zipser?

**NEAL ZIPSER:** Yeah.

**HUGHES:** OK.

**NEAL ZIPSER:** Very good.

**HUGHES:** That's a fu-- that's another fun name today, Zipser. OK. So I'm just trying to get my head around-- like, I've got a county that's got three different school districts in it but one sheriff for the whole county. Would each of those schools have a different key? So you've got this school district has this key and the sheriff just has three different keys, or would you-- and then how does it work if you've got another-- let's say you call in backup and they're fro-- and maybe you're already in so it doesn't matter then? Sorry. I'm answering my own question, but maybe work through that.

**NEAL ZIPSER:** No, that's a good question. It could be set up different ways. It could be by school district. It could be by county. Theoretically, the entire state could be on one key. We don't think that's the best idea in case somebody decides to do something bad with the key, but I would recommend that the sheriff has three keys in that-- one for each school district.

**HUGHES:** OK. Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Any other questions? So I-- I'm not sure-- have we talked about the cost of the lockbox yet? So the lockbox wi-- and on-- the key is priced separately, right? So--

**NEAL ZIPSER:** Sure. Sure. So we, we have two different sized boxes. The fire department uses a smaller box at about \$500, but the only thing

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you can really get in there is a couple keys. The, the bigger box we recommend for schools is \$800, and that you can put up to 50 keys, access cards, school layout, tourniquets, like I said.

**MURMAN:** So the box with 50 keys would be--

**NEAL ZIPSER:** \$800.

**MURMAN:** \$800?

**NEAL ZIPSER:** Yeah.

**MURMAN:** OK.

**NEAL ZIPSER:** The keys are free to the law enforcement, with the exception if they go to the electronic key product, which Lincoln has gone to. But basically, the, the mechanical key solution is free.

**MURMAN:** OK. Any other questions?

**JUAREZ:** Yeah. I have a quick one.

**MURMAN:** Senator Juarez.

**JUAREZ:** So you mentioned an electronic key. So is that, like, a card that you're passing?

**NEAL ZIPSER:** No, it's actually literally a, a, a fob with an-- code on it. And there's no power needed to the box. It's getting a little technical here, but it makes electromagnetic connection to the core. And when it does do that, it records the information of who used the key and what they opened. So it provides a full audit trail. The other advantage-- well, there's a couple more advantages. If you lose that key, you could time it to go dead as quick as two minutes. So if somebody mis-- loses one or, or go-- you know, just misplaces it, you don't have to worry about that. The other thing is if you have two counties, let's say, or two school districts on the electronic key, the two counties or districts can share access with each other. So before when Senator Hughes was asking a question about, does the sheriff have to carry three keys-- theoretically, if they had the electronic key, they would only need that one e-key.

**JUAREZ:** So I'm curious, though, like in beautiful weather like we're having today, it doesn't harm the key's functioning at all?

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**NEAL ZIPSER:** No, we, we tested it in Edmonton, Canada. And Edmonton's pretty cold. I don't, I don't know. After today, I don't know if I've seen anything as cold as Lincoln, Nebraska. But we've had, we've had no problems with it. The box also has a, a cover over the lock cord to protect it from ice or snow.

**JUAREZ:** I, I-- so to your knowledge, there hasn't been any that's failed due to the weather extremes, then, as far as you know?

**NEAL ZIPSER:** As far as I know, no.

**JUAREZ:** OK. Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Any other questions? If not, thanks for your testimony.

**NEAL ZIPSER:** Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Other proponents for LB685? Good afternoon.

**ROBERT MATTHEW TREASURE:** Good afternoon, Chairman, members of the Education Committee. My name is Robert Matthew Treasure, R-o-b-e-r-t M-a-t-t-h-e-w; last name, Treasure, T-r-e-a-s-u-r-e, just like the island. I'm a battalion chief with Lincoln Fire Rescue, or LFR for short. I'm currently assigned to the Information Technology and Geographic Information Services branch within LFR. One of my roles is program manager for the LFR Knox Box program. The LFR Knox Box program has been in place since 1984 and has a proven record of secure and consistent emergency accessibility for all of our crews. Currently, there are over 700 businesses, apartment buildings, private dwellings, and schools throughout the city of Lincoln that utilize the Knox Box system to allow timely emergency access to LFR. In January 2022, my supervisor asked me to investigate in a new product from Knox called the Knox eLock System, or eLock for short. I was intrigued by how the new system offered a high level of accountability and traceability compared to our current mechanical key system that we had in place. But what really sparked my interest and creativity was how the key could work between two different agencies or share lock codes between agencies. I obtained a quote from the Knox Corporation to upgrade our current system, and I was advised after speaking with my supervisor that I needed to go out and look for grant opportunities. One thing that I have learned throughout my 25 years in the fire service is the power of teamwork and collaboration. I immediately reached out to meet with leadership from Lincoln Public Schools, the Lincoln Police Department, and the Lancaster County Sheriff's Office to discuss a concept of collaborating towards an all-emergenc-- emergency access

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plan that utilizes the Knox eLock system. I identified a federal grant called the Fire Prevention and Safety Grant through FEMA as a grant to make this concept a reality. After several meetings, all agencies were in accord, and the plan to, to submit the grant came together. The grant was submitted in March of '23. And six months later, the grant was awarded to LFR. Since being awarded the grant, LFR has fully transitioned to eLock. LFR also began to meet monthly with LPS, LPD, and LSO. And we have created a task force to determine the strategic locations of Knox Box that benefit both fire as well as law enforcement strategies when responding to an incident at a school, whether it be an active assailant or a standard medical emergency recurring at a school. The task force has continued to meet monthly to determine the location of over 345 Knox Boxes just for LPS alone. These boxes are currently being installed throughout the entire school district. As of recent, every single Lincoln high school has multiple boxes. LPS operations is currently in the process of installing boxes on all the middle schools. And eventually-- I just placed the order for LPS last week for the remainder of the boxes to be installed on the elementary schools, with the goal to have them installed by the end of August 2025. Recently, LPD was able to be integrated into the LFR eLock system with a plan to equip an e-key to every on-duty sergeant via the, the e-key at their desk, thus completing the collaboration of fire and law enforcement emergency access to all LPS buildings. The success of this program continues to gain momentum and is being extended to all area private and parochial schools throughout the city of Lincoln to create a uniform emergency access plan for all schools in Lincoln. A plan to provide electronic mapping, consistent door numbering and labeling, and emergency access for all first responders responding to an incident at a school via the Knox eLock system. That, in my opinion, is the true power of teamwork and collaboration coming together to work towards a common goal. With that, I'd like to say thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of LB685. And let's make it safer together. And with that, I'll take any of your questions.

**MURMAN:** Thank you. Any questions for Mr. Treasurer? If not, thank you for testifying.

**ROBERT MATTHEW TREASURE:** Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Other proponents for LB685? Any opponents for LB685?

**COLBY COASH:** Thank you, Chairman Murman, members of the Education Committee. My name is Colby Coash, C-o-a-s-h-- C-o-l-b-y C-o-a-s-h. Cold. And I represent the Nebraska Association of School Boards. We

are here in opposition for the bi-- to the bill, but much like the last bill, it's not about the intent here; it's really about the application. What-- as we looked at this bill, the thing that struck our members the most is this really seems like a one-size-fits-all approach and that this is the way to do school safety, through a mandate of every, every building in, in the district having to have these boxes on there. Schools really value their law enforcement relationship. Every district, every building has a relationship, sometimes-- and a long-standing relationship with the first responders, the law enforcement entities in that district. But what we'd ask you to consider is that districts may already have arrangements like this that work for them, right? Whether it's a key exchange, key cards, other arrangements that work one way for a large district, a different way for a very small district. And what I would ask the committee to do is to-- again, reach out to your, to your district and say, what protocols do you have in place? What you'll find is a wide variety. You'll find districts as large as LPS-- which you just heard from which have these devices-- and they're not getting reimbursed for them because they've already made that decision-- to very different types of arrangements in smaller districts across-- across the state. So as we look at this, we, we see-- see this as maybe forcing a district to change what they feel is already working for them and their district. And much like the last bill, these-- if the state school safety director said this is the way, schools would comply with it, because he could-- or, that position can through his statutory authority mandate these things. So we'd ask you to consider that. We appreciate what Senator Lonowski did in putting some dollars into this-- you know, a, a Cash Fund transfer of \$1 million. Maybe that's enough. Or, Cash Reserve transfer, I should say. Maybe that's enough. Certainly enough to get the initial boxes covered if-- but maybe not for the ongoing costs. I certainly wouldn't count on federal dollars in the current situation, any federal grants to supplement this, particularly if they're coming through the, the federal Department of Education. I don't think that's a reliable source-- at least, that's been our recent experience with what's happening in that department. I'll just close by saying, you know, some districts may want to do this. Some districts are doing this. If, if you wanted to expand-- in the previous bill, you talked about the \$10 million that the-- this committee moved through in, in school safety. That was incredibly helpful. Di-- you-- and what you saw-- and I think you were looking at the report, Senator Meyer-- was there's a wide variety of the things that districts wanted to do with those money. Some of them were kind of in this lockbox, others were in locks, some were in cameras, some were in hallway monitors, those kinds of-- there's just

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a variety of different things that schools felt they needed. And it's that kind of flexibility that our members really appreciate. So with that, I will just kind of close by saying, you know, this is a one-size-fits-all that might not be the best solution for every district.

**MURMAN:** Thank you. Senator Hughes.

**HUGHES:** Thank you, Chair Murman. Thank you for coming in, Mr. Coash. Yeah, I have issue with the "shall" as well. I just think there's-- like, explaining how LPS uses makes a lot of sense to me with so many buildings all across the city, even Lancaster County, maybe. But then I just think of, like, a very, very small district. Their sheriff might have the key to the front door already and does-- why then force that school to put a box on the outside? It just doesn't make sense to do it, like you said, one-size-fits-all. So I appreciate you mentioning that. And I also appreciate just the local control, letting them make the decisions. And the \$10 million from two years ago-- you know, every school has probably benef-- like, things that they're doing really well for school safety and some things maybe that they need. And your school and my school could be completely separate. Like, we might be really good on, on certain aspects of it and not. So I think when we try to dictate funding so specific it, it lo-- it's, it's not as helpful. So. Anyway. I guess I'm not asking you a question, but I thank you for coming.

**COLBY COASH:** I would mention in the bill it says all buildings. And a district the size of LPS is a lot of buildings where there are no students.

**HUGHES:** Yeah. Do we need it on the equipment building--

**COLBY COASH:** Maintenance buildings, bus barns. I mean, for a fire-- for a, a fire prevention, maybe that makes sense; but for a student safety, maybe it doesn't, because there's a-- particularly in larger districts a lot of buildings where there are no students.

**HUGHES:** Yeah.

**COLBY COASH:** And that should be considered as well.

**HUGHES:** Thank you.

**MURMAN:** Any other questions for Mr. Coash? If not, thanks for testifying. Other opponents for LB685? Any neutral testifiers for

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LB685? If not, Senator Lonowski, you're welcome to close. And while he's coming up: online, we had 2 proponents, 0 opponents, 0 neutral.

**LONOWSKI:** Thank you, Chair Murman and the committee. So every school would decide where they put their box, whether they need it on a bus barn or whether they need it on a school. And to answer Senator Meyer's question, schools would use cash out of the General Fund, but there are federal grants available if a school wanted to write for that. I'd like to thank you all for listening to the people who testified today and thank them as well. I also invite any amendments to allow schools who may have their own solution to be accepted into the plan. An example would be in Juniata, Nebraska, they have one building, they have one principal, and I assume they have a system with the, with the fire department and the local sheriff that probably fulfills this desire. So with that, if you don't have any questions, I thank you for listening to this testimony.

**MURMAN:** Any questions for Senator Lonowski? If not, thank you.

**LONOWSKI:** Thank you.

**MURMAN:** And that will close the hearing on LB685. And I will turn the committee over to Senator Hughes because I have the next bill.

**HUGHES:** All right. Last bill.

Last, last but best. What do you say? Best, best but not last? Last but not.

What's the price of this? Same as the first one. See?

Saving the best for last thank you good board i think it was friday or something

I'm sorry.

It was a snow day. Yeah. It should be a snow day.

**HUGHES:** All right. Senator Murman, whenever you're ready to open.

**MURMAN:** Good afternoon, Vice Chair Hughes and members of the Education Committee. My name is Senator Dave Murman, D-a-v-e M-u-r-m-a-n. I represent the 38th District. Today, I have the privilege to introduce LB429, the Equal Access Act. This legislation ensures school boards do not pick winners and losers but instead ensures any educational professional employee association an equal opportunity. Under LB429,

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if a school board grants one professional employee association a certain privilege, such as access to school mailboxes, physical or electronic, access to bulletin boards, and the ability to attend meetings such as a new teacher orientation, they cannot deny those same privileges to another professional employee association. There are currently multiple organizations for our teachers and education staff that provide the valuable tools of professional development and liability protection. But rather because of high cost, disagreement due to political donations, or general disagreements of point of view, one organization is not necessarily the best fit for every teacher. But when a school administration allows one organization to set up a table at its new teacher orientation while prohibiting other organizations to do the same thing, teachers are blocked from seeing all of their options. In some cases, teachers may not even know about all of the organizations that are available to them. This often isn't for a lack of trying. You'll hear from proponents behind me from organizations who have been deliberately blocked from school board after school board. By giving this favoritism to one organization over another, we do our educators a disservice. Under LB429, we allow all of the options to be laid out in front of teachers to decide what works best for them. The more options, the more competition and the more information that we can lay in front of education-- endu-- educators means the better they can make that decision. This is not an attack on any one particular organization, because nothing in this bill takes away any of their powers. Instead, it is simply ensuring any professional organization has the same opportunities. If no teachers decide to join the organizations due to this legislation, that's fine, but they deserve the right to be informed about them. I also note that we did get this through committee last year on a 7-0-1 vote but ran out of time before we could get it to the floor. I'm happy to answer any questions.

**HUGHES:** Thank you, Senator Murman. Do we have any questions?

**JUAREZ:** I have one.

**HUGHES:** Yes. Go ahead, Senator Juarez.

**JUAREZ:** So do you foresee that you're basically going to be allowing the school board to make the decision on what organizations are allowed to participate? Who's, who's going to make the decision?

**MURMAN:** Thank you for the question. If the school board allows any organization access to the teachers through, you know, whatever electronic and-- or the new teacher orientation or, or bulletin

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boards, they have to offer that same access to any other professional organization that would ask for it.

**JUAREZ:** So I guess, basically, whoever's making the decision for the particular school district, it's just that they'll recognize others to be able to participate in-- again, still maintaining that local control, basically.

**MURMAN:** Yes. They would have to allow the, the same access to all professional organizations that provide liability protections also.

**JUAREZ:** OK. Thank you.

**HUGHES:** Other questions? Yes. Go ahead, Senator Hunt.

**HUNT:** Thank you. Would this affect private schools?

**MURMAN:** I don't think we clarified that in the bill. I-- I'd have to-- I could get back to you on that. I don't-- didn't notice that clarified in the bill either way, so.

**HUNT:** OK.

**HUGHES:** OK. I, I have a couple questions, and I think this might stem from me, again, not being here the last two years. And I think you said some are going to ta-- what specific-- can-- I mean, just give me a couple exam-- I guess I'm not-- I'm-- I can't get my head around what, what we're-- what am I missing? What, what does-- what group might come in that can't right now, I guess?

**MURMAN:** Yes. Well, there's the NSEA, of course.

**HUGHES:** Yes.

**MURMAN:** And then there's the association-- the American Association of Educators, AAE. And I-- there's another-- at least one other one that I know of. I think it's American Christian Educators or something like that. I think that's right.

**HUGHES:** And--

**MURMAN:** But I can get back to you. There's, there's more too, I believe.

**HUGHES:** OK. Like, the NSEA is a union. Is the American Association of Education a type of union also?

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**MURMAN:** They're a professional association. They don't do collective bargaining.

**HUGHES:** OK. And the American Christian one--

**MURMAN:** I don't know about them.

**HUGHES:** OK.

**MURMAN:** I don't think they do collective bargaining, as far as I know.

**HUGHES:** And I guess-- here's a quick-- what stops-- right now, you can go on a school district's website and get emails off the website of the staff and teachers and whatever. So is this that maybe one of these groups calls the school and says, I want, I want the, the list of all the teachers sent to me so then I can email them for the email access? Because you're, you're saying access in terms of email access, mailboxes, things like that. Is that kind of what you're thinking?

**MURMAN:** Whatever the school provides for one professional organization--

**HUGHES:** So if the NSA-- NSEA has provided a list of all the teachers and their emails, you want that if another group wants it they can have that?

**MURMAN:** Yes. They provide the NSEA the--

**HUGHES:** And then that leads me-- just for an example-- and I-- my husband's manufacturing company is unionized, and they-- I was texting him-- they do not supply that union the, the workers' emails, but they do have bullet-- like, union bulletin boards on-site that that union can put information on. So is that what you're thinking also-- like, on-site on the school campus, there would be an NSEA bulletin board and a American Association of Education bulletin board? Is that also--

**MURMAN:** Yes. If, if they-- if the school board would--

**HUGHES:** If the school board--

**MURMAN:** --would allow that for one organization, they would have to allow it for oth-- any others that would ask.

**HUGHES:** OK. So the thing that's missing-- but these-- you wa-- I don't know. Maybe I'll ask some more questions of the people coming up. I'm gonna still think on this. Any other questions? Senator Meyer.

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**MEYER:** And-- thank you, Vice Chair. Just to differentiate what Senator Hughes is saying-- and maybe you can't answer it; maybe somebody can-- coming after you can-- the difference between teachers, a teachers union, or a teachers professional group utilizing public funds as opposed to private funds of a private business. There may be different requirements labor law-wise or-- perhaps not labor law, but u-- utilizing public funds. It may be an opportunity to look at an alternative to NSEA or NEA. Maybe that's the differential between private and public funds and publicly funded as opposed to private. Just throwing that out there. And you, you probably don't have the answer to that-- nor do I right now, but--

**MURMAN:** Well, maybe it'll be further clarified by others, but otherwise--

**MEYER:** Or not.

**MURMAN:** --I'll, I'll--

**MEYER:** Or not.

**MURMAN:** --try and get back to you on that instead of-- either at the end or, or later.

**HUGHES:** OK. Any other questions? No. All right. Thank you. I'm assuming you're staying for closing.

**MURMAN:** Yes.

**HUGHES:** Perfect. First proponent, please. I have to have those too. I get it.

**CHARLES ZURCHER:** A year ago, I didn't have to do that.

**HUGHES:** Isn't it a sad day when that happens?

**CHARLES ZURCHER:** Good afternoon. My name is Charles Zurcher, C-h-a-r-l-e-s Z-u-r-c-h-e-r. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. Some background on myself. I have lived in Nebraska my whole life. I hold a teaching degree from UNL. My wife, Kim, has been a public school teacher for over 40 years. My oldest son and his wife have their teaching degree, as does my daughter. I was elected to serve on the Papillion-La Vista School Board. So as you can imagine, I have a, a vested interest and passion for the well-being and hardworking teachers of the state and the students they serve. I have been the regional membership director for the Association of American

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Educators in Nebraska for the last five years. We are the largest nonunion teachers association in the country, with tens of thousands of members nationwide, providing teacher liability, legal protection for workplace issues, along professional development, scholarship and grants for the classroom, and many other benefits. We are nonpartisan and nonpolitical. AAE has been serving teachers for the last 30 years. The reason I am compelled to speak today is to inform you that thousands of teachers throughout the state currently do not know they have options when it comes to joining a professional association and the ability to save tens of thousands of dollars over a career. How can this be? Because the ability to inform educators is restricted to mainly one organization: the NSEA. The NSEA has access to school districts teachers' emails, school presentation, teachers' mailboxes, and district bulletin boards in virtually every school in our state. Other professional associations are severely restricted. I would invite you to see the many examples which I have placed in front of you of where school districts have denied AAE and myself the ability to inform their school educators' valuable information at the same time giving the NSEA almost unlimited access. This is fundamentally wrong and creates a monopoly. In this country, we know that monopolies are not good and hurts the consumer-- or, in this case, our educators across Nebraska. I feel that, in many cases, superintendents and administrators in Nebraska feel intimidated by the NSEA and are hesitant to rock the boat by letting alternative information into their district. This pressure would be eliminated when this bill is passed. In, in the Omaha School District, only 49% of its educators are member of the union, according to the president of the Omaha School Board. That leaves 51% of teachers that have chosen not to join the NSEA. Those teachers need to know they have alternatives. But yet, after three years of asking the Omaha school administration for access to share information to its educators about options they have for other professional association, no response has been given. I spoke in front of the Omaha School Board asking once again if I could have the same access to educators that the NSEA has. No action or response was ever given. In Lincoln schools, I spoke to its school board requesting access, with the same results. Over the last five years, I have asked but yet am denied the opportunity to speak with new teachers in school districts throughout the state. Again, see the examples before you. That is why I'm here today asking you to do what is fair and right for the good, hardworking teachers of Nebraska. Please pass LB429. Thank you for your time.

**HUGHES:** Thank you, Mr. Zucher [SIC]. Do we have any questions?

**JUAREZ:** I do.

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**HUGHES:** Yes. Senator Juarez.

**JUAREZ:** OK. I just want to get clarification about the role of other associations. And I'm trying to envision who's going to be doing the collective bargaining on behalf of the teachers. So does your association do things like that for the teachers?

**CHARLES ZURCHER:** No. We, we do not do collective bargaining, Senator. Usually in Nebraska, the majority of the time it's the NSEA. This bill would have nothing to do with negotiations. But I would point out that there is districts looking and have pushed the NSEA out, and they joined-- or, started their own teachers organization to do their own negotiating for that district.

**JUAREZ:** Well, I guess-- you know, that's one of my biggest concerns, because I was on the OPS School Board, OK? So I'm trying to envision-- let's just say, hypothetically, there's three entities that want to represent teachers for collective bargaining. So if we pass this bill, does that mean that the school board-- the superintendent basically also is going to have to work with three entities to represent teachers? I'm trying to understand.

**CHARLES ZURCHER:** Yeah. Absolutely not, Senator. This actually has nothing to do with negotiations between a school board and, and a union or collective bargaining. Absolutely nothing.

**JUAREZ:** OK.

**CHARLES ZURCHER:** I, I would never ever get involved with negotiations as far as an organization. That would be-- the union itself would represent the teachers of that district or a, a teachers organization that would do that themselves for that district as well. So it can either be a union or a teachers organization, but that, that would be it.

**JUAREZ:** OK. So as, as far as-- I mean-- again, I have concerned about how many entities potentially can the school districts be dealing with.

**CHARLES ZURCHER:** Well--

**JUAREZ:** What, what would you say, like, in Nebraska?

**CHARLES ZURCHER:** Yeah. Well, in Nebraska, a state law-- and I was on the Papillion School Board, so I share your concern with that. But in Nebraska, there's one entity that the school board has to negotiate

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with. That would be either a teacher organization and/or the union. So it's only one. There wouldn't be multiple.

**JUAREZ:** But I, but I thought that what you guys were trying to achieve with this bill is that you didn't want organizations to be barred or blocked from having access to the teachers.

**CHARLES ZURCHER:** Right. Senator, I think, I think the, the differential deal here is you're combining the negotiations with liability and legal protection. OK? The union negotiates and they also give teachers legal liability, professional development. We do legal liability and professional development also. So that's what this bill would do, is let organizations like myself come into a district and tell the teachers, as far as legal liability, professional development, you have an option. Totally separate from negotiations. And just to give you an example, the average Nebraska teacher pays \$750 in union dues to the NSEA. We do the exact same thing. In fact, I-- I'm biased, but I, I think our coverage is better. We do that for \$234. So we save teachers almost \$500 a year by offering them this service with liability, legal protection, professional development. Same thing as the union. But we do not negotiate.

**JUAREZ:** OK.

**CHARLES ZURCHER:** So you-- that's the difference. You're-- you-- you're combining the two. They're not combined.

**JUAREZ:** OK. Thank you.

**CHARLES ZURCHER:** You bet.

**HUGHES:** Senator Meyer.

**MEYER:** Thank you, Vice Chair. Just kind of an operational question here. It says here in the Omaha School District, only 49% of the educators are members of the union, at least 51% that aren't.

**CHARLES ZURCHER:** Correct.

**MEYER:** They get paid the same?

**CHARLES ZURCHER:** Pardon me?

**MEYER:** They get paid the same as the union members?

**CHARLES ZURCHER:** I'm not going to answer that, I'm sorry.

**MEYER:** [INAUDIBLE].

**CHARLES ZURCHER:** Absolutely. Yeah.

**MEYER:** So I guess I'm trying to make a point that even if the other 51% were represented by an alternative group, perhaps for liability protection, it's pretty obvious right in here that it wouldn't affect the negotiations as far as--

**CHARLES ZURCHER:** It-- absolutely not. There--

**MURMAN:** I mean, it's pretty self-evident.

**CHARLES ZURCHER:** Yeah. Senator, there are districts in the state of Nebraska now that-- give you an example-- I won't name the district, but if you want me to tell you later, that's fine-- that there were actually two NSEA reps out of 40 teachers in that district. Those two NSEA reps-- by law, the school board has to negotiate with someone; they negotiate with those two NSEA reps.

**MEYER:** Thank you.

**CHARLES ZURCHER:** Yep.

**HUGHES:** Other questions? I just have one. So--

**CHARLES ZURCHER:** Yes.

**HUGHES:** --you used Omaha as an example, 49% were members of the union, 51% are not. How many, how many teachers across the state use you guys for their liability insurance?

**CHARLES ZURCHER:** I-- I'm sorry, Senator. I--

**HUGHES:** How many teachers across the state of Nebraska use your entity for their liability? How many are members?

**CHARLES ZURCHER:** How many members?

**HUGHES:** How many members?

**CHARLES ZURCHER:** Yeah. That's proprietary. I cannot tell you that--

**HUGHES:** OK.

**CHARLES ZURCHER:** --nor-- I'm sure the NSEA won't tell you that either. It's just proprietary information.

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**HUGHES:** OK.

**CHARLES ZURCHER:** Yup. But I, I-- I'll tell you this: between Kansas, Colorado, and Nebraska, we have over 5,000 members, so.

**HUGHES:** Thank you. Anything else? All right. Thanks for coming in.

**CHARLES ZURCHER:** Thank you. Thanks for your time today.

**HUGHES:** Next proponent. No more proponents. OK. Any opponents?

**TIM ROYERS:** Good afternoon, members of the Education Committee. For the record, my name is Tim, T-i-m; Royers, R-o-y-e-r-s. I am the president of the Nebraska State Education Association. And I am here today in opposition to LB429. I urge you to oppose LB429 because it undermines the work of our educators, is poorly written, contradicts existing state statute, and is blatantly unconstitutional. First, LB429 undermines the hard work of public school educators. Contrary to what you just heard, this is absolutely fundamentally linked to the right to collectively bargain. If a local affiliate has the right to attend meetings, utilize mailboxes, display information, that right is earned because they are what's called the recognized bargaining agent for those employees. That right comes as a result of membership-- and I'll be happy to clarify the Omaha numbers if you want to ask me that question-- and in many cases through what are called certification elections, where every single educator-- not just association members-- gets to vote on whether or not they want our NSEA local association to represent them. Allowing any organization to come in and gain equal access that isn't earned undermines the democratic will of the educators. Second, LB429 is poor-- is a poorly crafted bill that contradicts existing state statute. It attempts to provide a very narrow definition of professional organization when existing statute already establishes the rights and privileges of professional and labor organizations. It also implies, for example, that student teachers are employees of school districts, which is a contradiction of 79-875. The bill also references paraprofessionals, a class of employees that have no definition in state statute. And finally, it defines a professional organization as one that, quote, exists for the purpose of professional development or liability protection. I want to make sure this committee is very clear that, under that wording, this bill is quite literally toothless. Nowhere in our mission statement, goals, bylaws, or even our national constitution do we state that we exist to provide either professional development or liability protection. And finally, LB429 is blatantly unconstitutional. This bill is clearly special legislation in violation of Article III,

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Section 18. It targets a very narrow group of employees. It doesn't even just say public school employees. It, it, it carves it out to even narrower groups with no unique reason for doing so. For example, according to this bill, custodians are not school employees. Now, interestingly, custodians are represented by SEIU. Bus drivers, according to the bill, are not school employees. They are often represented by the Teamsters. So LB429 carves out other public school job classes that are quite clearly employed by public schools and denies them the special privileges of equal organization access without merit. I don't think it's a happy accident that this bill targets the one public school labor organization that just happened to spend the last two years checking the Legislature's abuse of power when this body passed LB753 and LB1402. Given the poor language that contradicts state statute, the obvious violation of the constitutional ban on special legislation, I would urge this committee to let LB429 die or, better yet, vote to indefinitely postpone LB429. I'm happy to answer any questions.

**HUGHES:** Thank you, Mr. Royers. Do we have questions? Senator Lonowski.

**LONOWSKI:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you for being here, Mr. Royers. In the third paragraph--

**TIM ROYERS:** Mm-hmm.

**LONOWSKI:** --you state that, we do not provide liability protection or we do not tell people because that's-- to me, that's one of the few reasons teachers join this--

**TIM ROYERS:** No, we-- the, the sta-- let me clarify, Senator. The, the statute says that it has to be the purpose of the organization. The purpose of our organization is not to provide liability insurance. So while we do offer-- certainly do offer liability protection, that is not the primary purpose of the our organization.

**LONOWSKI:** OK. Thank you.

**TIM ROYERS:** Yep.

**HUGHES:** Other questions for Mr. Royers? Good. You're getting off easy.

**TIM ROYERS:** Great. That's good.

**HUGHES:** Thanks for coming in. Nobody wants to go home. It's too cold. OK. Next opponent. Any neutral? All right. Senator Murman, you're here

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for the finish. While we're waiting, the online is 117 proponents, 9 opponents, and 2 neutral.

**MURMAN:** OK. I think the new teacher orientation is a very important time for other professional organizations to have access. And as far as democratic goes, when less than half of the teachers in Omaha are in the NSEA, I'm not sure that's democratic. And, and it was referenced that some school districts have as few as two teachers that are members of NSEA. So with that, I'll try and answer any questions you might have.

**HUGHES:** Thank you. Senator Juarez.

**JUAREZ:** So, you know, to me, in reality, we really don't know what's going to happen with the structure of the ed-- education in our state for the future. When you look at what's going on in Washington-- I mean, if they eliminate the Department of Education, right? I mean, we just have no idea where we're really headed down the road. So I think that, you know, we need to, I guess, be more-- to take a look at what all the options are that are out there for the teachers. I mean, I, I gue-- I heard the point about not all of the teachers on OPS are, are part of the union. Well, no matter what entity that you work at, not everybody belongs to the union, right? That-- I mean, that's just an option. So I think that-- that's why I was so concerned about-- what is the true intent of what we're trying to get with this bill? Is your intent just that you want teachers to have flexibility of who they can interact with as far as-- let's just say, for example, insurance?

**MURMAN:** Yes.

**JUAREZ:** I'm ju-- I'm just concerned about that collective bargaining aspect. And how are the school boards and the superintendents going to deal with something that's open-ended?

**MURMAN:** Yes. Well, the intention of the bill is to-- that teachers would have access to any professional organization, the same access as, as the NSEA, and it-- to have that access to liability protection also, so.

**JUAREZ:** But in reality, there's only going to be one representation for collective bargaining. Is that what the end result will be? This-- if we pass this bill, there still will be only one entity doing that?

**MURMAN:** Well, this bill doesn't change anything about that, about collective bargaining at all. Doesn't even reference collective bargaining, so. We did hear from-- hear that some school districts are

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at lea-- I'm not sure-- some-- or, at least one, the teachers do the collective bargaining on their own with the district. But this, this bill doesn't touch collective bargaining at all.

**JUAREZ:** OK. Thank you.

**HUGHES:** Other questions for Senator Murman? Thanks for bringing this in. I, I just want to mention at-- Nebraska's a right-to-work state, right? So you don't have to make-- you don't have to pay union dues even if your organization is unionized. So I don't, I don't know what the percentage is just across the state of, you know, how many employees could be unionized and how many are. Is that a 50/50? Who knows? But that is one of the things about Nebraska, is that it is a right-to-work state. So you don't have to pay union dues unless you choose to. Anyway, I think this gives us a lot of good things to think about. Thanks for bringing it and-- I don't know. Any other questions?

**MURMAN:** Yes. On-- only allows equal access, so.

**HUGHES:** All right. This concludes LB429 and also today's hearing.