

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Education Committee March 11, 2025

MURMAN: Welcome, welcome, welcome to the Education Committee. I'm Senator Dave Murman from Glenvil, Nebraska. I represent the 38th Legislative District and I serve as chair of the 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 to 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 a new 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 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 not-- 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 the 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 3-minute time limit system for all testifiers. When you begin your testimony, the light on the table will be green. When the light-- yellow light comes on, you'll have 1 minute to wrap up your thoughts, and the red light indicates that you have reached the end of your time limit. Questions from the committee may follow off the clock. A few 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 be 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 the committee members with us today to introduce themselves, starting at my far right.

SANDERS: Good afternoon. Rita Sanders, representing District 45, which is the Bellevue/Offutt community.

HUGHES: Hello. I'm Jana Hughes, District 24, Seward, York, Polk, and a little bit of Butler County.

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

HUNT: Hi, everyone. I'm Megan Hunt, and I represent District 8 in the northern part of midtown Omaha.

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

JUAREZ: Hi. I'm Margo Juarez. I represent District 5 in south Omaha.

MURMAN: Staff with us today are to my immediate right, the committee's legal counsel, Kevin Langevin, and to my far right is committee clerk, Diane Johnson. The pages who serve with us today, could please stand up and introduce yourselves and tell us a little bit about yourselves.

SYDNEY COCHRAN: I'm Sydney Cochran. I'm a first-year at the University of Lincoln [SIC], and I study business administrations and U.S. history.

JESSICA VIHSTADT: Hi. I'm Jessica Vihstadt. I'm a second-year student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and I'm studying political science and criminal justice.

RUBY KINZIE: Hello. I'm Ruby Kinzie. I'm a third-year political science major at UNL.

MURMAN: We appreciate your help today. With that, we'll begin today's hearing with LB599 and Senator DeBoer.

DeBOER: Thank you so much. Good afternoon, Chair Murman and members of the Education Committee. My name is Wendy DeBoer, W-e-n-d-y D-e-B-o-e-r, and I represent District 10 in beautiful northwest Omaha. I appear today to introduce LB599, as amended with AM484. I think I sent that amendment to the members of the committee in the past. It's also been introduced and on the website for a while. So LB599 seeks to address cybersecurity issues for public and private schools and educational service units in Nebraska with the aptly named HACKER Act. This stands for the Holistic Approach to Cybersecurity for K-12 Education Resources Act. Given the conversations that we've had this year regarding cybersecurity, I don't think I need to spend a whole lot of time discussing the broad need for rigorous cybersecurity defense, but I'd be remiss if I didn't highlight the acute need in our K-12 schools and how a cybersecurity attack not only risks data being stolen, but also hurts the quality of education of our students. Cyber

attacks and data breaches have become commonplace, posing a serious threat to every person and organization with internet access. Schools and educational service units, or ESUs, are not only not exempt from these malicious attacks, they're increasingly being targeted by domestic and international criminals due to the vast amount of privileged information they steward. This legislation seeks to forward our schools against these-- fortify our schools against these threats, ensuring a safe and secure digital environment for learning while preparing our students for the future. Our schools have a lot of data on our children, valuable and important information to be sure, but nonetheless, in the wrong hands it could be easily abused. Our schools-- our students schedules and specific whereabouts could be deduced from information seized in a cyber attack, their academic performance, health information, social security numbers and that of their parents, and more could be used against parents or our kids themselves. Beyond the misuse of that information, a cyber attack impedes operations of a school. Should there be attack-- an attack on a school's network causing an outage or disruption, the quality of the lessons being given to the students could decrease. Grading student work and providing feedback would be delayed, and such feedback is more effective the more immediately it can be de-- delivered. Parents' understanding of their students' performance and access to curriculum could be impeded, as well as resources students may rely on after hours for homework assistance. Inside the school, a network disruption hinders coordinating among staff to cover staff absences, to adjust schedules in a coordinated manner, and to communicate about needs students-- the needs of students effectively and efficiently. All of this to say, we do not want cyber attacks on our schools to be successful if we also want to have a high-quality education system in our state. Over the past few years, we have made historic investments in education. I believe the HACKER Act is an important, but perhaps previously overlooked aspect of that investment. The HACKER, HACKER Act establishes a systematic approach to protect all Nebraska schools against cybersecurity threats, and will hopefully help Nebraska have a strong cybersecurity posture in the future. It does this through a few different ways. Section 3 of AM484 creates a framework by which schools are able to upgrade their cybersecurity posture. Schools would be required to perform a cybersecurity readiness assessment, which would be created by the State Department of Education and the ESU Coordinating Council, to be eligible for funding provided through this act. The assessment would determine the needs of a school district. Meanwhile, Section 4 instructs the Department of Education, working with the ESU Coordinating Council and the OCIO to adopt model cybersecurity policy and framework for school districts to adopt if

they would like. This guide will-- this will guide what equipment or services are needed for schools and allows for these policies to adapt with the technological changes. Section 5 of the bill creates a dedicated team under the jurisdiction of the ESU Coordinating Council to assist schools with cybersecurity needs. The individuals will be spread across the state to help schools and ESUs with the implementation of new technology, train-- training provided as needed, and be able to assist schools who otherwise lack the resources to have their own dedicated cybersecurity teams. Section 6 instructs the State Department of Education to adopt digital citizenship standards, to have such standards and training provided to teachers, students, and their parents, ensuring consistent and high-quality cybersecurity practices. Section 7 is the eye to the future of cybersecurity in Nebraska. This section requires the development of a program to encourage students to enter or to consider technology careers, and particularly, to do so to better help our rural communities. You're likely familiar with the Rural Health Opportunities Program, commonly referred to as RHOP. It would be my hope that this technology career-focused program could model itself after the success we have seen with RHOP, but be focused on technology careers to ensure Nebraska has a homegrown technology and cybersecurity workforce protecting us for years to come. Obviously, we're having as much trouble filling positions in cybersecurity as we are in many other areas. LB599-- here's the kicker-- requests \$10 million for funding this year and each fiscal year thereafter. From estimates provided to me, this would allow for the full implementation of the HACKER Act, which would immediately help schools improve their cybersecurity preparedness. Luckily, we can scale the program as is needed in these difficult financial times. I understand that this is a large ask, but I firmly believe this is one of the wisest investments we can make to protect our kids and our state. To be clear, the HACKER Act does not mandate a specific technology, nor a specific vendor. It does not require the hiring of some outside consultant to evaluate our schools with a large consulting fee or anything like that. LB599 is not an unfunded mandate to schools, forcing them to otherwise-- to rely on property taxes. LB599 helps schools improve their cybersecurity posture. It provides funding and a mechanism to do so, and relies on our local experts to determine what would be the most advantageous and effective solutions for our schools. There are some of the-- some experts behind me who will be able to provide more specific and technical information about cybersecurity needs in the state, but I'm happy to answer any questions that you may have. I will say that the OCIO was intending to come in in support of this bill. They were called into another meeting, so they're unable to, but they will be

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sending a follow-up letter to the committee so that you all can see that they're very, very much in support of the bill. So I'm happy to answer any questions.

MURMAN: Well, thank you for that acronym. That fits--

HUGHES: It's the best.

MURMAN: --very well. The funding, does that fit the amendment, too? The, the amendment's [INAUDIBLE].

DeBOER: Yes. The funding, the funding--

MURMAN: Seems a lot bigger than the bill itself does.

DeBOER: So the, the funding would be the \$10 million. And that's for the amendment. We introduced a shell bill because we were still working on this. And this is the bill that we intended to introduce.

MURMAN: OK. Thank you.

DeBOER: There was a little mix up.

MURMAN: And, and I know that the ESUs and the schools are doing cybersecurity now. So is there more of a need? Not-- and I also know there's an education component to this, to your amendment.

DeBOER: Yeah.

MURMAN: So, so I guess-- yeah. You can address both of those-- what the need is. Yes. Thank you.

DeBOER: So I'll take the first piece, the need piece. And the folks behind me are going to be able to do much more technical job, because-- trying to figure out how to take a screenshot on my iPad yesterday, so not really the one who knows how to do all this stuff. But the, the schools, we have kind of a, a patchwork of what they have done and can do. And they don't always-- not every school district, some in, in your district may not have the expertise to do it. So--

MURMAN: Or yours.

DeBOER: Absolute.

MURMAN: Sorry. Just had to throw that in.

DeBOER: Oh. Absolutely.

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MURMAN: No problem.

DeBOER: I'm just saying.

MURMAN: Yeah, sure. Some, some schools.

DeBOER: So one of the things that we want to make sure is that everybody has the ability to do this. It's often done through the ESUs. So the ESUs have been sort of leading the forefront of the cybersecurity situation across the state. But it really does vary from school district to school district, and we have had some problems recently, and, and not so recently as well. But they'll tell you more about some specific events that have caused us to, to really be concerned about this. And, you know, I serve on the Nebraska Information Technology Council. I'm the senator member, and we talk about cybersecurity a lot and where we can improve in Nebraska. So some of it is also, as you say, the educational piece. We need more cybersecurity experts. It'd be great if we could raise them in Nebraska-- good jobs, well-paid, important, probably not going anywhere, so that's part of the bill, as well. And then, having some information that you can just give parents about it, so that as we're-- I mean, not just the students but now the parents, if we get more people in the state educated about cybersecurity, that's going to be a great thing for our state. Because there's a lot of issues that happen when, when people are not educated and they accept phishing emails or they, they do things they shouldn't in that way.

MURMAN: Thank you. Yeah, I've met a couple of prospective students this morning, and so, I, I know there's--

DeBOER: You may meet them again.

MURMAN: --some looking at what you're proposing. Any other questions? Senator Hughes.

HUGHES: Thank you, Chairman Murman. Thanks for bringing this, Senator DeBoer. Yes. HACKER is an amazing name. Did you come up with that all by yourself?

DeBOER: I did not.

HUGHES: It's really smart. It's really good. Just-- so did you-- after some of the things you saw, did you kind of come up with this concept, or did the ESUs kind of come to you and say, hey, let's work on this, or-- I'm just kind of-- I'm curious where the Phoenix rose from the ashes, if you will, for--

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DeBOER: So it was a little bit of a combination. The ESUs came up with the specifics, because, again--

HUGHES: Right.

DeBOER: --iPad, screenshot, don't know. So-- but I have had-- once we went through on the Coordinating Council or the NITC and I saw how many holes in cybersecurity--

HUGHES: How patchwork it was. Yeah.

DeBOER: Then, then I was very interested in doing this, and so we sort of met in the middle.

HUGHES: OK. Thank you.

DeBOER: Yeah.

MURMAN: Senator Meyer.

MEYER: Thank you, Chair Murman. If I heard you correctly-- I hope I did-- they're not recommending any specific cybersecurity firms specifically for-- you know, this is not a framework from the Nebraska Department of Education. They're not making recommendations as to-- perhaps how to go about doing it, which, which firms to possibly contract with, and do the, and do the schools contract under any usual basis for this cybersecurity?

DeBOER: So first, I'll say that that part of my opening was in there, in part, because I get really suspect of bills where somebody comes in and there's a certain project-- product that is going to solve all our problems, and then there's someone from that firm sitting behind, telling us how that product is going to solve all our problems. This is not a sales pitch, so it does not matter who we use to do this. We should figure out, you know, what products are the best for the various needs that we have. But it's not-- this is not a commercial for any particular project-- product. So that's the first part. The second part of your question--

MEYER: Is the Nebraska Department of Education, are they making-- there's no uniform requirements, no uniform framework?

DeBOER: So right now, I don't think we have a uniform requirement of any kind. And so, we might have something minute that I'm just not aware of. You can ask someone behind me. But this is to try and get a, a kind of a, a plan in place statewide. Individual school districts,

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of course, have something. And the ESUs are sort of what's been helping, particularly the smaller school districts, to develop those strategies. But this would be, look, guys, we need to get organized about this now, and trying to do it on a statewide basis.

MEYER: May I?

MURMAN: Yes. Senator Meyer.

MEYER: I noticed in the fiscal, which we always talk about, of course, and I see setting up the program, \$2 million, some various breakouts, and it adds up to about \$10 million-- looks like \$10 million a year. And is this in perpet--perpetuity? I mean, is this \$10 million every year? You know, we're looking at this biennium, but are we anticipating--

DeBOER: I mean--

MEYER: --this continuing forward with, with that type of financial exposure?

DeBOER: That would be the full implementation of this bill. As I said, it's [INAUDIBLE]. At some point, we probably need some full implementation, maybe not all of the aspects of it, but certainly some of them, so that we can get away from the patchwork that, that we have now. Yeah, it's a big number. But this is one of those need to have, not one of those want to have--like to have kind of situations, with respect to--

MEYER: If I may have--

MURMAN: Senator Meyer.

MEYER: --just one more. I have some experience with this at the county level. And the Department of Homeland Security has facilitated, has, has worked with the counties, certainly, and probably with school districts, also. I think they would do an analysis generally at no charge, but maybe on the scale of all the schools as opposed to 93 counties. That might be different-- and then had recommendations of contractors, and so we did our contract at the county level for cybersecurity. It's very, very serious and it's something we absolutely need to be aware of and taking precautions of, so I, I, I was just curious about going forward how this would look. We initiate through the-- the state provided some funds, over a period of a couple years, to initiate our contractors in our cybersecurity at the county level, and then it's on us. So I would hope it would be on the

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responsibility of the school districts once it was established that their financial responsibility, their-- they should be able to handle that themselves, without state money coming in at every instance.

DeBOER: Well-- so I have a couple of things to say to that. One is the schools' money is property tax money.

MEYER: The school what?

DeBOER: The schools' money is property tax money.

MEYER: Isn't it all?

DeBOER: No, I mean there's income and sales tax.

MEYER: Well, state money isn't--

DeBOER: Income and sales.

MEYER: --property tax money. It--

DeBOER: Yeah. So--

MEYER: --comes from the federal government or, or--

DeBOER: It comes from income and sales taxes--

MEYER: Yeah.

DeBOER: --too. So--

MEYER: It's [INAUDIBLE].

DeBOER: So that's, so that's what I'm saying. Like, I am reluctant to say school districts, you take over this re-- this responsibility, because that seems like an unfunded mandate to me. And I would be reluctant to push that off on them. Additionally, it is going to be far more efficient for us to do this through the ESUs for those areas of the state where there are many, many school districts that sort of are under one ESU, so that if they are working together and the ESU can kind of oversee this, that's going to-- I think that will make the implementation less expensive.

MEYER: I don't disagree with that. I-- no, I--

DeBOER: So that's, that's why I would want to do it through them. In terms of the money going forward, if at some point we didn't need to

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try and support kids going into cybersecurity, we could cut off that portion. I mean, essentially, I'm giving you a, a menu of what is going to be the healthiest for the state, and you all are going to have to look at it and figure out what you think we should adopt and whatnot.

MEYER: I don't disagree with the premise at all. No, I'm-- that's not where I was going with that, so.

DeBOER: Thank you very much, Senator Meyer.

MURMAN: Any other questions? If not, thank you for the opening, and--

DeBOER: So I am going to run away, but if I can get back here-- because I have an exec I'm supposed to be in right now. If I can get back here, then I will close. And if not, I'm sorry. I will have to waive closing if I can't get back.

MURMAN: OK. Thank you.

DeBOER: Thank you.

MURMAN: Hope you can make it back. So, proponents for LB599.

LARIANNE POLK: Good afternoon, Chair Murman and members of the Education Committee. My name is Larianne Polk, L-a-r-i-a-n-n-e P-o-l-k, and I serve as the CEO of the ESU Coordinating Council. On behalf of the ESUs across Nebraska. I'm here today to offer our strong support of LB599 and AM484. The growing threat of cyber attacks on schools has made it clear that our K-12 educational systems need enhanced cybersecurity measures. These are the ways LB599 does that. (1) It is not an unfunded mandate. The bill will provide equitable and direct funding to help schools not only acquire essential cybersecurity products and services, but also to supplement what they're already doing to maintain and sustain. (2) ESUs are directly-- are directed by the Legislature to provide educational resources equitably and efficiently. We do this in many ways already. Our Nebraska co-op, for example, provides a marketplace of supplies from pencils to school roofs at the lowest possible price, last year saving Nebraska \$10 million. This bill for cybersecurity will formalize a consortia at the lowest possible price in order to procure cybersecurity products. ESUs already have the role of facilitating consortia for schools and other projects. This is not new work. (3) The cybersecurity readiness assessment will ensure that all schools not only are aware of their current cybersecurity position, but they're able to continuously improve them. (4) Gone are the days when

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a tech school as-- a school tech person can solve problems by telling teachers to restart their computers. The networks and technology are so sophisticated and so are the bad guys that are trying to get into the school systems. However, there is not a need for every district or every ESU to have additional people to assist with implementing cybersecurity products, to do the trainings, to support deployment, or even to assist with recovery should a breach occur. ESUs do this already. We are equipped and prepared to deploy these teams tailored to the specific needs of each school and ESU. (5) We heard on the floor of this Legislature, by Senator Hunt, when she was speaking on LB504 earlier in this session, that there is a need for digital literacy for Nebraskans so they can protect themselves online. This bill does that. The work is in the wheelhouse of the ESUs right now. We have networks and platforms to house the curriculum and provide to public, nonpublic, and homeschooled students at no cost. Finally, this bill encourages Nebraska students to stay in Nebraska by providing them a scholarship program for tuition for dual credit courses in high school, to community colleges and our state colleges and universities with a Pipeline to Technology and Careers Program. Senator DeBoer spoke to that. It's similar to the RHOP program. There is a pri-- s price tag to this bill, but it is a good bill. Every school in Nebraska would have access to some part of it. Every student in Nebraska would have opportunities to-- as a result of it, of it. It is good legislation. The ESUs strongly supports this bill because it recognizes the importance of cybersecurity in K-12 education and provides the necessary resources to ensure that all schools, regardless of size and location, are equipped to protect their students. ESUs work at the pleasure of the Legislature. You tell us what to do. We do it in the most equitable and efficient manner. Let us help you elevate the cybersecurity posture of our schools by leveraging the regional and statewide work the ESUs do. We are ready to take this on. I'm happy to answer any questions you have.

MURMAN: Thank you. The-- I, I know the ESUs are providing cybersecurity for schools now. Does that include the whole state is-- do the ESUs provide it for the whole state, all schools, I guess I should say?

LARIANNE POLK: Thank you, Senator. I would say that every school distri-- every ESU provides some kind of help in the area of cybersecurity, but it is not consistent across the state. It depends on the resources that the ESUs have and the varying degrees of need that the E-- that the districts have. The reality is, is they're just not-- the funding just is not there to provide the schools with the necessary products to elevate the position that they need. What this

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bill would do, the, the framework, the assessment that's mentioned in this bill, it would identify where the schools are in cybersecurity posture. Say there's 5 tiers. It would identify what tier that school district is at. What is not able to happen right now is to say, all right, school, you're at tier 1 and we need to get you to tier 2. Here are some products and services that we could explore to help you move your district up. Those things don't exist yet.

MURMAN: OK. Thank you. Senator Lonowski.

LONOWSKI: Thank you, Chair Murman. And thank you for this-- for helping us out here, Ms. Polk. So the people, the technology people that are now at ESUs, is it a matter of retraining them or is it a matter that we need to bring in more personnel?

LARIANNE POLK: So the-- they're-- both would have to happen, actually, Senator.

LONOWSKI: OK.

LARIANNE POLK: This bill has up to 10 personnel that would be available to assist with implementation and training and-- because all of those potential products would be elevating the schools, the current staff would have-- would not be able to take all of that on and continue to do the work that they're doing currently in their ESUs, so additional support would be necessary.

LONOWSKI: OK. Thank you.

MURMAN: Any other questions? Senator Juarez.

JUAREZ: Thank you. So I wanted to know at the state level, just state government, I mean, isn't there somebody who already specializes in providing cybersecurity for our state government?

LARIANNE POLK: I'm glad you asked that question. So our Office of the Chief Information Officer in Nebraska really oversees a lot of what happens with our Internet and our protections and the services that, that we get. I know that the Office of the CIO is working on a joint security operations center. That would really work in a companion type of manner with this bill. Senator asked earlier about vendors. You know, those would be the sorts of things that the OCIO takes care of, vetting the right-- the proper products and services that would be necessary. This bill and the personnel in this bill would work in, in collaboration, maybe as a liaison to the OCIO's office, to get those

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products deployed out to the schools. They don't have enough people to do that on their own, either, trying to get it out to the ESUs.

JUAREZ: OK. Thank you.

MURMAN: Any other questions? Do you look at this as being kind of a one-time funding, or will it be a continuing funding in a like amount?

LARIANNE POLK: It's absolutely not a one-time funding. It would have to-- the only way I would say it is a one-time funding is if the bad guys stop. Right? So the bad guys aren't going to stop being creative on how to get into your phone right now, or how to get into the State Legislature and turn off the Internet. That's not going to stop happening, so we need to continue to keep our cybersecurity posture to a level that we can respond to that and hopefully prevent some of that. So I can't predict right now, Senator, if it's going to require \$10 million every year, forever and ever. But as Senator DeBoer said, full implementation would be a sizable amount at first. You know, if we can get everybody's position up to a higher level, that would be fantastic. But right now, I can't tell you how long that will take.

MURMAN: OK. Well, thank you. Senator Meyer.

MEYER: Thank you, Chairman Murman. And I just want to point out that along with putting in proper products and training, there is a continuum of monitoring those systems--

LARIANNE POLK: Right.

MEYER: --so-- and it upgrades all the time. So it is a-- you know, it, it is something that's going, going to have to be supported going into the future. And as people get more creative in their hacking, it's just going to take that much more surveillance by us to make sure they're not getting in. And they might not even be targeting the school. They might be trying to get it into the state and into the federal government. People think that the schools are the target. That-- that's not necessarily the case. They're looking for a back door into any-- it might be vendors that the schools are using. It can be the state's system. And so it's-- yes, the schools can be targeted, but, but there's much more to it than that. So, I, I appreciate your efforts. Thank you.

LARIANNE POLK: If I could speak to that for just a minute.

MEYER: Absolutely.

LARIANNE POLK: I think that, you know, local effort is always a, a piece of the conversation, and there are schools and there will continue to be schools that will need to put their own local effort in addition to the \$4 million that's outlined in this bill. It's not nearly enough money. So the ESU-- those ESUs and the school districts will need to do that anyway, so there will be an expectation of a local effort. The curriculum, I think, would be another area that if we can help teach our students, K-12, good cyber hygiene when they are little until they've graduated and become adults later, that will only help us later on. It's a, it's a long-term investment in something that we can, we can produce right now.

MEYER: It's not only the kids we have to teach, it's the adults.

LARIANNE POLK: That's right. Forgot about that. Yeah.

MURMAN: Any other questions? If not, thanks a lot--

LARIANNE POLK: Thank you.

MURMAN: --for your testimony. Other proponents for LB599.

ANDY BOELL: Good afternoon. My name is Andy Boell, A-n-d-y B-o-e-l-l. I am the cybersecurity director for the Nebraska Cybersecurity Network for Education. It's-- the Nebraska Cybersecurity Network for Education is a suborganization of the ESUCC funded through the Nebraska SLCGP, which provides cybersecurity assistance to member ESUs and their schools. In my time in this position, I have observed that Nebraska schools and ESUs have highly motivated, passionate, and skilled people working in technology roles. Being a former school of technology director, I also know how difficult it is to stay abreast of new topics, technologies, and threats. Even if our school technologists are able to stay current on these topics, there is normally the next hurdle of them selecting the next security item to focus on and then how to pay for it. This scenario plays out all over the state. Fortunately, LB599 aims to address these topics and more. The NCNE team consists of 3 members, and in the past year, we have demonstrated that we are able to make a dramatic difference to improved knowledge, foundation, and awareness, which will lead to safer schools. For example, we have developed a system that allows schools to find out where their weaknesses are. Many other companies offer a similar solution, but ours is available to schools at no cost, where others may cost \$3,000 to \$30,000 per test. At the time the NCNE started, just 16% of the schools and ESUs we surveyed reported that they had a test like this done. Now, all of our schools will have the option to

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have this done. I am a firm believer that all students are entitled to a safe and protected learning environment. Additionally, with our interconnectivity with Network Nebraska, any member school, public or nonpublic, can negatively impact another member's network. Therefore, I'm very much in support of ensuring that all schools within this state are eligible to receive access to resources that they are to, that they are to improve cybersecurity, because when the security of one network is improved, the security of the entire network is improved. I'd like to share a brief story of a 2014 graduate of West Point-Beemer High School, Cody Ernesti. Cody was a student of mine who was highly motivated and skilled in technology. After graduation, he began his cybersecurity program at UNO. Cody began as a part-time technology intern at ESU 2 in 2015, then he became a full-time employee by 2018, and the director of technology there at 2020. He is currently the technology analyst for the Northeast Nebraska Network Consortium, which assists 5 ESUs in 85 school districts in 2024. Cody's impressive skill set provides him the opportunity to literally work for any private company, which-- for easily double his salary. However, because of the internship opportunity and mentoring he was given, he made the decision to give back to the education community, and we are all in a better position because of him. Cody's story has the potential of being multiplied many times over with the Career Pipeline component of LB599. Ladies and gentlemen of the committee, I strongly encourage you to consider voting LB599 out of committee. Help us to do our best to protect all schools from Omaha to Ogallala. Thank you.

MURMAN: Thank you. Sounds like you're pretty proud of Cody Ernesti.

ANDY BOELL: I am, yes.

MURMAN: Well, appreciate your work and his, too. Any other questions? If not, appreciate your testimony.

ANDY BOELL: Thank you.

MURMAN: Other proponents for LB599.

RON CONE: Good afternoon, Senators. My name is Ron Cone, R-o-n C-o-n-e. I'm the network information services director at ESU 10 in Kearney. I'm here representing ESU 10, the Educational Services Unit Coordinating Council, and want to speak in favor of LB599 and AM484. I'll start with a few facts and then my position. There are 18 service units including ESU Coordinating Council are educating 328,000 students, about 24,000 teachers, and 244 public districts in the

state. That I know of, there are 6 dedicated cybersecurity professionals within those organizations. Lincoln and Omaha have their, their own. ESU 3 has one, serving 18 districts. And you just heard from Andy with the ESU Coordinating Council with 3 FTE serving 178 districts. These 6 dedicated individuals are not enough and we need more. Along with these 6, every administrator, technical support team is increasing their knowledge and awareness of cybersecurity risks and prevention practices, taking on those tasks in their areas assigned and responsibilities. But these 6 are likely the first in line to start a recovery protocol after an incident, and they're the primary ones researching and championing changes and best practices to prevent future incidences across their organization. Now budget priorities are not new, but districts annually are faced with prioritizing a general budget across mandated requirements and needs of their district. Often, implementing another cybersecurity initiative comes with cost for equipment, licensing, staff time to learn and implement the new systems and tools. LB599, what would it do to increase cybersecurity in Nebraska? Well, it would provide funding, people, policies and frameworks, and accountability. So if we work the bill backwards, you'll find in Section 8, it creates the Cybersecurity Education Resources Fund, with \$10 million annually. Section 5 establishes an implementation team of 10 individuals to prepare and assist districts and ESUs with their cybersecurity needs. Section 4 directs the Board of Education, ESU Coordinating Council, and the Office of the CIO to develop cybersecurity policies, a framework, a readiness assessment, and directs districts to adopt those similar, similar policies. Section 3 requires districts to complete a cybersecurity readiness assessment to be able to apply for funding for cybersecurity products and services. So while this is not all the contents of LB599, these sections establish products-- funding for products and services, the technical assistance for implementation, and create requirements to follow cybersecurity best practices. When completed, these steps put ESUs and districts in a better position to reduce the risk of future incidents with a holistic approach to cybersecurity, including funding, people, policies, frameworks, and accountability. So I urge your support on LB599 and thank you for your time and consideration.

MURMAN: Thank you.

RON CONE: Any questions?

MURMAN: Any questions?

JUAREZ: I have a question, please, Senator Murman.

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MURMAN: Yes, Senator Juarez.

JUAREZ: Thank you. So I just have a question in regards to what you said about providing policies with this bill. So like the policies, is that something that the Nebraska Department of Education would be overseeing? I'm not really sure because it's technology, if it falls under someone else.

RON CONE: Sure. Thanks for the question. As I understand it, they will create model policies that they can examine and use to implement. Some districts may already have some that they've adopted, but if they haven't, these would be some ideas that they can use to move their, their positions forward.

JUAREZ: So it would be policies of each of the school districts then? Is that--

RON CONE: Correct.

JUAREZ: OK.

RON CONE: That's how I understand it.

JUAREZ: Thank you.

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

RON CONE: Thank you.

MURMAN: Good afternoon.

ANDREW WIESE: Good afternoon. Hello. My name is Andrew Weise, A-n-d-r-e-w W-i-e-s-e, and I am a proponent of the LB599 bill. A little bit of something that you need to know about me is that I was raised around a lot of technology. At our school, we have an Esports program, and I have gone to state 6 separate times for that, one of which finally brought home a championship. So needless to say, I've had a little bit of skin in the tech game. With that being said, I am currently a student experiencing the benefits of a similar program that would be offered by schools through the passing of this bill. The program I am currently attending is called P2T, which stands for Pathways to Tomorrow. This program focuses on preparing students for real world careers with experiences in class. I am gifted to have the opportunity to attend such a program thanks to my school, Bancroft-Rosalie. Bancroft isn't the only school that participates in P2T, as it is made up of an assortment of many different schools. With

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there being so many different schools being involved, students are able to work together with like-minded people they have never met before. But that's not the only thing that P2T offers me as a student. I have been exposed to many different areas of IT that I found very interesting, one of which was coding. Along with the writing and ideas behind coding, I have also learned how to put together part by part a working PC. My favorite part of these different classes was how we got to do lots of hands-on assignments. To me, it's better to learn something through practice rather than just reading and doing book work over it. I have found that when learning through practice, I retain and use the information a lot better. But once again, that's not all P2T offers me. As a person who loves to talk, I worried that my talking habits would hinder other students' learning abilities. To my surprise, my ability to freely discuss my questions with fellow peers has had a tremendous effect on all of our learning experiences. With that being said, I believe that all Nebraska students should have the opportunity to experience such a great program, and I am a proud supporter of the LB599 bill. Thank you.

MURMAN: Thank you, Andrew. And I'm glad to hear that even though you do a lot of electronics, you still love to talk.

ANDREW WIESE: Yes. Absolutely.

MURMAN: Any questions? Senator Lonowski.

LONOWSKI: Thank you, Chair Murman. Thank you, Andrew. Appreciate it.

ANDREW WIESE: Of course.

LONOWSKI: Can you tell me a little bit about your background, like your-- are you a high school senior? Is P2T part of high school? Can you kind of frame that for me?

ANDREW WIESE: Yep. I'll piece it together for you.

LONOWSKI: OK.

ANDREW WIESE: So I am currently a senior at Bancroft-Rosalie, and the interesting thing that our school does is this program, P2T. So basically, 3 of the hours out of the normal 8 that we have in school are dedicated towards P2T, which is where we go to this building that's considered part of Northeast's campus, or sometimes we take Wayne classes, as well. Currently, in the coding one that I'm in, we do it through Wayne. But basically, you get to take these classes for college credit, and they will go towards something like what I'm

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doing. I kind of forgot to mention it, but I will be graduating with an associate's degree. Part of that associate's degree is from P2T and taking those dual-credit classes, and most of that is just offered through Bancroft-Rosalie.

LONOWSKI: OK. Thank you. So would you say you are gifted technologically with your peers at Bancroft-Rosalie or, or are there a bunch of Andrews out there?

ANDREW WIESE: There's not a whole lot of Andrews at Bancroft-Rosalie. I'm one of the, I'm one of the better techies--

LONOWSKI: OK. OK.

ANDREW WIESE: --as we call them. But through P2T, I've noticed that there is similar students like me that have taken like, similar classes and have a real liking to it. I guess-- I don't-- did I answer that properly?

LONOWSKI: Yes, you did. My, my last question, I promise. So you'll be getting 2 degrees in May? Is that correct?

ANDREW WIESE: Yes.

LONOWSKI: Amazing.

ANDREW WIESE: And I have 3 outfits to plan for: Prom, first graduation, second graduation.

LONOWSKI: Wow. Awesome. Thank you very much.

ANDREW WIESE: Yes. Of course.

MURMAN: Any other questions for Andrew? If not, thank you very much--

HUGHES: Thanks for coming.

MURMAN: --for your testimony.

ANDREW WIESE: Yes. Thank you guys so much.

MURMAN: Good afternoon.

GAVIN JOHNSON: Good afternoon. Good afternoon. I am Gavin Johnson, G-a-v-i-n J-o-h-n-s-o-n. I am a senior at West Point-Beemer High School, and I am a proponent of LB599. I am also a student of the P2T IT Pathway. P2T is a program designed, designed to offer high school

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students career and technical education opportunities for several trades, including information technology. To make P2T possible, it is facilitated by ESU 2 and a consortium of schools in northeast Nebraska. During my 2 years in the information technology pathway, I've come to the realization of the great opportunities the pathway provides. First and foremost, the current availability of in-depth informational technology electives is almost nonexistent, especially in rural schools. In a world of ever-evolving technology and ever-increasing IT jobs, Nebraska students are at a significant disadvantage without a head start to their careers. As it stands right now, students and future employees of cybersecurity have little incentive to stay in state. Without a structured pathway, financial encouragement, and career opportunities, many students, including myself, would seek out-of-state opportunities. However, the implementation of this bill will create in-state opportunities and encourage students to stay in-state. In the pathway, I have learned about how computers interact with the user and each other, what happens inside of the computer, and numerous concepts about cyber attacks and defense. The details of these interactions are mind-boggling. But these concepts I've learned-- these concepts I've learned about are extremely complicated, and the knowledge I've gained will be crucial for getting a job I'm interested in. In addition to the technical skills, I have had an extensive opportunity to develop strong non-tech-- non-technical skills, skills such as critical thinking, computer literacy, and improve-- and an improved perception of the world around me. These skills are just as useful as the technical skills, not just on the job, but throughout daily life. If this bill passes, the improvements to educational and in-state job opportunities will greatly benefit Nebraska. For these reasons, I support LB599.

MURMAN: Thank you. Any questions for Gavin? Senator Lonowski.

LONOWSKI: Thank you, Chair Murman. Thanks, Gavin. I can't pick on, on Andrew and not pick on you. So are, are you trying to say if the money weren't there, you wouldn't stay in West Point?

GAVIN JOHNSON: It's more of like, the opportunities for jobs here, like internships and just educational opportunities in-state.

LONOWSKI: OK. How many kids at West Point-Beemer are in T-- P2T?

GAVIN JOHNSON: This year, there's only one in my class, which is myself, but I know there are a couple in the junior class under me.

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LONOWSKI: Are you like Andrew as far as, like a couple hours a day--

GAVIN JOHNSON: Yeah.

LONOWSKI: --spend with-- doing it?

GAVIN JOHNSON: Pretty same structure.

LONOWSKI: OK. Thank you.

GAVIN JOHNSON: Yep.

MURMAN: Any other questions? Gavin, do, do you have-- you mentioned the northeast consortium. Is there other-- a lot of other schools around the state that do this? Do you happen to know?

GAVIN JOHNSON: I believe we are one of the only programs with this. There may be a couple others, but I don't have that answer.

MURMAN: OK. And I know there's some kind of competition that involved, I think, playing electronic games in the state. Is that part of what you do?

GAVIN JOHNSON: I don't personally participate it, simply because I have other obligations, but I know many students involved in this do partake, such as-- I know Andrew, he said that he's done it and-- yeah.

MURMAN: OK. Thank you. I, I think my home high school is competitive, Sandy Creek. But maybe-- oh, Andrew's nod-- nodding yes-- or not Andrew, but-- yeah, Andrew, nodding yes. So. Well thank you. And any other questions for Gavin? If not, thank you very much.

GAVIN JOHNSON: Thank you.

MURMAN: Other proponents?

JOSH FIELDS: Chair Murman and members of the Education Committee, good afternoon. My name is Dr. Josh Fields, J-o-s-h F-i-e-l-d-s, and I'm the superintendent of Seward Public Schools for the last 13 years in Seward and 8 as superintendent. I'm offering testimony today from STANCE. STANCE stands for Schools Taking Action for Nebraska Children's Education. We're offering proponent testimony for LB599 proposed by Senator DeBoer. As an organization, we appreciate Senator DeBoer's proposal to look at a centralized way to support the costs associated with having needed cybersecurity for schools across the

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state of Nebraska. Here are a few of the key components of why we support LB599. I want to start with the landscape of what it looks like for Seward Public Schools, which it looks like very similar for Class B and smaller schools. As a member of ESU 6 and the support from ESU 6 technology department is a huge part of our cybersecurity. In Seward, we have 2 technology people that would help us, and those technology people also wear many hats. Our main tech director is spending many times on the road and driving a bus for us. But lots of things that are happening in the cybersecurity world. ESU 6 supports Seward Public Schools, such as a Head-In Firewall, Isolated Networks, weekly public-facing vulnerability scans, hosting active directory servers off-site, DDoS attacks, 2-factor authentication for email, and grant writing for cybersecurity dollars. As a district, the main concern continues to be the cost of cybersecurity. For example, the Head wall Firewall will increase by 3-fold from what it was 5 years ago. Here are some of the key components, and we think this is a good program to think about. The assessment-- I think, using data to determine what are the needs. Each district is different, and so this assessment would allow you to determine which are the biggest needs that need to be within certain regions. Cybersecurity and readiness implementation: Looking at what are the best practices and policies for looking at cybersecurity and what would that look like across the state of Nebraska. The implementation team being able to have regional versus 3 people, I think would be a big support to have that regional supports, depending upon the needs of each of those districts. District citizenship and-- digital citizenship standards and training: The State Board of Education will develop digital citizen standards and integrate them into education content. Schools will provide digital citizen training for teachers and make resources available for parents. Technology Career Pipeline Program. You've heard a lot from that, and that-- that's a great opportunity for kids to get excited. I tell you, at Seward, we use a lot of the career pathway pieces, and so students can begin to look at what are the technology worlds that they have and can be able to integrate into our curriculum. Educational service unit coordinating council's role: This would include the coordinating cybersecurity initiatives alongside existing role in distant education. Thank you again to the Education Committee and to Senator DeBoer for bringing this forward and looking at a way to help support cybersecurity across the state of Nebraska for all of our schools. I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.

MURMAN: Thank you. Any questions for Dr. Fields? Surprise.

HUGHES: I have to, I have to ask a question on that. Thanks for coming in, Dr. Fields.

JOSH FIELDS: You're welcome.

HUGHES: So I, I, I don't have a, a kiddo there right now, but didn't Seward have the issue with the PowerSchool getting breached or whatever? And I guess my question is this. If there would have been-- I mean, you've already clearly have cybersecurity things in play. I mean, some of these things we probably can't avoid. But do you think-- I don't know. Would that have helped if something more would have been done? I just-- explain that a little bit.

JOSH FIELDS: Yeah, unfortunately I think with the PowerSchool incident, that was a vendor piece that happened on their site outside--

HUGHES: OK.

JOSH FIELDS: --the state of Nebraska. And that was one of the things I think is important to understand that none of the Nebraska networks were hit. It was off-site at, at their location.

HUGHES: [INAUDIBLE].

JOSH FIELDS: Unfortunately, they had the PowerSchool data from the information. And so, I, I would have-- unfortunately, I don't think that could have been avoided. But at the same time, I think, always hearing about the phishing emails-- I know that someone brought that up before. But thinking about, making sure we have that education, because talking to our tech director and to others, phishing emails is really one of the most vulnerability things that we have, when a staff member clicks on something they shouldn't have and they get into your network. And so having those systems in place, I think, are very important for us to consider as a state. And, and it's-- I know that money is tight and it's not an easy solution, but what, what are ways that we can do to hopefully help offset those costs?

HUGHES: OK. Thank you.

JOSH FIELDS: Yep.

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

JOSH FIELDS: Thank you.

MURMAN: Other proponents for LB599.

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TIM ROYERS: Good afternoon. It's, it's been so long since yesterday. I figured we would have to come back and have another conversation. But good afternoon, Chair Murman, 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'm here on behalf of our members to speak in support of LB599. I think you've heard a number of good perspectives, both from the 30,000-foot view, you know, as far as ESUs and the overall need. You also have heard some great perspectives from students. I want to also reiterate some of the points that were mentioned, especially about the ability to maintain-- ensure continuity of instruction on a, on a daily basis, given what this is attempting to do. You know, when I taught geography, we taught about the concept of infrastructure. And the way that I would try and get my 15-year-olds to understand infrastructure is, it's infrastructure if you-- if it's a really bad day, if it suddenly goes away and you don't think about it in any other circumstance. And I think, unfortunately, Internet and access to our, our digital devices is becoming more and more infrastructure in our schools. There is a particular school year where we had, we had a system-- our system go down during the day of parent-teacher conferences and we couldn't access our grade books. And the best recommendation was guess what the student's grades are when the parents come to see you, and that's not really something that we're in too great shape to do when you have over 100 students that you have parents coming in to talk with you about. Another thing I want to echo is, you know, the, the concern about phishing. I can't reiterate enough. And I don't know what you all see, but what we see as educators are incredibly sophisticated phishing attacks, where they will, they will scrape data, so that way it looks like you're getting an email from a colleague, or it looks like you're getting an email from someone you know, and it sounds like a very benign request. So it's not like the old I'm a prince from another country and I have these-- this money that you need to send them you know, all that-- like, that's, I think, the phishing that we think about often. But I will tell you, at least in the education space, phishing has evolved and become much-- it's caught me a couple times, where I've almost clicked on something because it looks like it's legitimate to me. So I just want to reiterate, you know, this is a bill that I would call a not very sexy bill, right? It's not something that really draws a lot of flash or headlines. But I can tell you, for educators, this is critical for us, not just for the great potential for expanding curriculum opportunities for the students that you heard, but also because, again, this is fundamentally infrastructure for us. And given how ingrained digital technology is to what we do with students on a

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daily basis, to have those things go down is fundamentally problematic to our ability to serve our kids and so anything we can do to get ahead of it is incredibly important. Happy to answer any questions, but I appreciate your support for this bill. Thank you very much.

MURMAN: Thank you. Any questions for Mr. Royers? If not, thank you, Mr. Royers.

TIM ROYERS: Thank you very much.

DAN SCHNOES: Good afternoon.

MURMAN: Good afternoon.

DAN SCHNOES: Hello. My name is Dan Schnoes, D-a-n S-c-h-n-o-e-s. I am the current CEO of ESU 3 in the La Vista area. Members of the Education Committee, thanks for the opportunity to speak with you today. Hopefully, you've heard a lot of good testimony already from all the people behind me. In today's digital age, our schools are more connected than ever before. Online learning platforms, student information systems to cloud-based resources, smart technology in the classrooms, technology has become a fundamental tool for education. In fact, in the Omaha area for ESU 3, at any given time, we can have over 120,000 devices hit our Internet network. And that's what-- that's, that's to the good of all of our schools doing great work in there right now. But with this increased reliance on digital tools becomes an urgent need for strong cybersecurity measures. Nebraska schools, like those across the country, are not immune to cyber threats. You'll see in my report here of the Great City Schools Council, said that in 2023, they were-- had a 40% increase in cyber attacks on many of the systems. And these are the biggest schools in the country. But small schools are getting hit, too. And you probably remember in the news the L.A. school district was hit, and they got a half a million kids, just this last year with a big cybersecurity attack. Closer to home, those little in Iowa, Nebraska, Missouri, the Dakotas, all of these school districts in those areas are all getting attacked, as well. So these are not isolated cases for the state of Nebraska, but they are warnings. It is here. It's coming faster and they're becoming much more sophisticated. On a personal note, I have a son who's a cybersecurity specialist for United States Navy, and he says attacks on the Navy are-- worldwide attacks are coming with a lot more, with a lot more higher numbers and the sophistication, and they always have to stay a couple steps ahead. That's what we're asking the state of Nebraska to do is to try to stick a couple steps ahead. The good news is Nebraska is not starting from scratch. ESUs have been providing

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some cybersecurity help across the state for a number of years now. We do cybersecurity assessments. We help with professional development. We help with network protections. However, as those threats, threats continue to evolve, we must ensure that every one of our schools, no matter how large or how small, are protected. The cost of anything, especially of inaction, is going to be expensive. Insurance coverage for our schools has been getting tougher and tougher to get, because of the costs associated with ransomware attacks and the amount they either have to pay or they have to replace all their equipment. And so that's getting huge. And our insurance companies are cutting back in their amount of their coverage. So more than ever, our kids, we need to keep them safe. They deserve to be safe. As a grandparent of 6 kids in Nebraska schools, I want them to be safe, cybersecurity-wise. You know, schools in Nebraska are the biggest users of broadband across the state. We put broadband in to connect kids, and now we need to make sure they're safe. So please urge you to support LB599 and all the strategies that are involved in that. I have a couple other examples I can share with you. If you have any questions, be glad to answer those as well.

MURMAN: Thank you. And I appreciate what your son does in the Navy. Now, don't give away any military secrets, but is he in the service or work independently?

DAN SCHNOES: So he actually was stationed on the U.S. George H.W. Bush aircraft carrier as a, as a cybersecurity specialist, got his training there, and now he works on the East Coast in their main headquarters. He's now a civilian working for the Navy. And so they monitor all the, the traffic for the Navy and the Marines on the entire East Coast connection. So he can't tell me what he does. He can just shake his head when things are really getting tough.

MURMAN: So it sounds like you know more about what he does than some people may know about what their sons do, so it's all good. That's good.

DAN SCHNOES: And you know what? There's a lot of bad actors out there, unfortunately, and they're making money off of people. And so when you bring them home to some of our schools, it doesn't matter if you're a large school or small school. Sometimes we play too nice and we try to keep our doors open to everything. And we really need to do a good job of protecting not only our staff, but parents' information, kids' information. We need, we need to provide that security for everybody.

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MURMAN: I should have probably asked this question earlier. I don't know if you're the best person to answer it, but if I remember from Senator DeBoer's opening, she said that this bill wasn't brought to her by the Coordinating Council or the ESUs or any school or the NDE, but I see there's a lot of support from all of those groups here. Could you-- could-- do you have any comment on that at all?

DAN SCHNOES: Well, I think it's safe to say that we've been talking about cybersecurity for a number of years and the importance, and we've talked with a number of different senators about, you know, bringing something forward. And we offered that if at any-- and, and anytime that a bill wanted to be moved forward, the ESUs would love to be a part of that. We already had the infrastructure network across the state of Nebraska. In fact, if you go back a whole bunch of years ago when they started doing-- using this thing called the Internet, they used, they used the ESUs to bring that entire network across, and so we're poised to help. And so when this bill was starting to be discussed, we said we'd be glad to be a part of it. So-- and you can see everybody else was chipping in, too, because-- I think somebody brought up it doesn't matter what branch of the government. You know, when you, when you look at those of you that have laptops in front of you, how do you know you're not being hacked right now? Because a lot of times, they're in the system for 6-9 months before anybody figures this out. It can happen with cell phones. It can happen with laptops. It can be iPads. But we don't want to take all those, we don't want to take all those items away. Because that's the world our kids are growing up in right now. In fact, if my phone buzzes a whole lot, it might be my 2-year-old granddaughter from Virginia video calling me, because she just learned how to do that, which is pretty amazing.

MURMAN: Seems a little early.

DAN SCHNOES: It's better than, than, probably better than Senator DeBoer could do. Nah, I'm just kidding.

MURMAN: They learn fast, don't they?

DAN SCHNOES: But they do learn fast. And it's here and we need to. And we need to embrace that. But we also at the same time need to protect.

MURMAN: Thank you. Any other questions? Senator Juarez.

JUAREZ: Thank you. So I just had one quick question. The student mentioned about taking the program at UNL. Are there other colleges who have cybersecurity degree programs in Nebraska?

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DAN SCHNOES: That's a great question. I think they all do. And I think a lot of our community colleges also offer 2-year programs in that. And if they, and if they don't, they all work together and get kids connected to those programs that they offer. I can look at that up and get back to you, but I believe they all do. It's a, it's a growing field and it's going to continue to grow.

JUAREZ: OK. Thank you.

DAN SCHNOES: Mm-hmm.

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

DAN SCHNOES: Thank you.

MURMAN: Other-- any other proponents for LB599? Any other proponents? Any opponents for LB599? Opponents? Any neutral testifiers for LB599? If not, Senator DeBoer waives clothing-- closing. And we will-- closing.

HUGHES: Wow. That could have been scandalous.

MURMAN: You gotta be careful in this room. Yeah. Before we close, electronically, there were 27 proponents, 2 opponents, and zero neutral online. And with that, we will close the hearing on LB599 and open the hearing for LB523, Senator Juarez.

JUAREZ: OK. Can I go ahead?

MURMAN: Yeah. Go for good afternoon.

JUAREZ: Thank you. Good afternoon, Chairman Murman and members of the Education Committee. My name is Margo Juarez, M-a-r-g-o J-u-a-r-e-z, and I represent District 5 in south Omaha. Today, I'm happy to introduce LB523, which would adopt the Student Teacher Compensation Act. This is brought to me by the NSEA and you'll hear from them and a couple student teachers about why this bill is so important. Recently, the Trump administration cut scholarship funding for 16 UNL students planning to teach in Nebraska's poorest and highest turnover schools. This is a massive loss for a state already facing a dire teacher shortage, but we must now find other ways to support future educators in our state. I believe LB523 is a strong step in the right direction by ensuring that student teachers are set up for success and continue their teaching careers in our state. LB523 would direct the Department of Education to establish a stipend program that provides eligible student teachers with a stipend of \$4,000 per student teaching

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semester. To be eligible, a student teacher must be enrolled in an accredited teacher education program and demonstrate a financial need, as determined by the Department of Education. Student teachers work long, hard hours to fulfill their practicum requirements. They spend their time lesson planning and sometimes even volunteering at school events or athletic events, which can leave no time to work other jobs and earn vital income. By financially supporting student teachers through the most demanding period of their training, LB523 ensures that Nebraska's future educators are starting on stable ground as they prepare to enter the workforce. With that, I'm happy to answer any questions you may have, and there are testifiers behind me that I can answer as well.

MURMAN: Thank you. Any questions for Senator Juarez at this time? If not, thanks for your open.

JUAREZ: Thank you.

MURMAN: And we'll call for proponents for LB523.

TIM ROYERS: Hello again, Senator Murman, members of the Education Committee. For the record, my name is Tim, T-i-m, Royers, R-o-y-e-r-s. I'm the president of the Nebraska State Education Association, and I am pleased to be able to testify in support of LB523 on behalf of our members. Student teaching is supposed to be the capstone experience where future educators bring all of their pedagogy and content knowledge together and apply them in an actual classroom setting. They are doing the role on a full-time basis. They are not just teaching the lessons, they're designing the lessons. They are in charge of the grading. They participate in the parent-teacher conferences. They attend the IEP meetings. They're expected to do all of the responsibilities of a contracted full-time teacher, so it is a full-time job. And in fact, in many respects, a student teacher actually has less time to complete the job because they're also being coached by their mentoring teacher and they have obligations to meet with their university supervisor on a frequent basis during the student teaching semester. Despite that fact, in most cases, the student teacher is not being paid for their work. There are some districts in Nebraska that pay them right now, but they are the exception to the rule. So having full-time responsibilities with zero compensation puts that student teacher in pretty profound financial hardship, especially when you consider the fact that student teaching itself is considered a college course that you have to pay tuition for, and not a 3-hour course, by the way. Most universities count it as a 10 credit hour or a 12 credit hour course. So I paid thousands of

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dollars to my university in my student teaching semester. So what I student taught, for example, on average, I worked 16 hours a day. I would be at the school by 7, I'd do all the normal teacher work, then I would go work the scoreboard, take tickets after school at games, and then I'd go work my retail, retail job until about 10 or 11 p.m.. So I can tell you firsthand it is exhausting to be a student teacher. And research shows that our emerging Gen Z folks are incredibly budget conscious about college. So many of them are turning away from education because of the burdens associated with student teaching. So we need to do something. There is a growing trend to compensate school teachers, and Nebraska has to keep up to avoid backsliding further. If you remember in our conversation yesterday, Senator Dungan pointed out the largest group of, of existing teachers are in, are in their years 15-plus; the smallest group of teachers is in their first 6 years. So last year, Kentucky, for example, passed a bill that provides \$5,000 for all student teachers in the state. In Colorado, right next door to us, they pay \$11,000 for completing a semester of student teaching. LB523 would ensure that no matter the district, our student teachers are being compensated. We feel this is an appropriate use of the Education Future Funds as described in 79-1201(2)(d) [SIC], and this bill would only utilize 2% of the intended appropriation into that fund this year. I feel it's important to point out that while one of our neighboring states, Colorado, is already doing this, the rest are not. So if we stay ahead of the curve, we're going to be able to strengthen our pipeline of future educators. And that's not just supposition on my part. Omaha, for example, is bringing in student teachers from Iowa because they act-- they are already paying their student teachers. This would be a great tool to help strengthen our investments in the future of education. For our student members, this is the number one issue they talk to me about. So I enthusiastically encourage you to support this, and I'm happy to answer any questions you might have.

MURMAN: Thank you. Any questions for Mr. Royers? Senator Lonowski.

LONOWSKI: Thank you, Chair Murman. Thank you, Mr. Royers. So is Omaha paying \$9,000 for student teachers?

TIM ROYERS: They are currently paying \$9,000. Yes.

LONOWSKI: Is that just out of their own budget?

TIM ROYERS: Correct. Out of their own budget? Yep.

LONOWSKI: OK. OK. That's all I have.

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MURMAN: Senator Meyer.

MEYER: And that's per semester or for--

TIM ROYERS: Per semester, yes. And, and for most teachers, it's a single semester. The most common case where it would be a full year student teaching is if it's a-- if you're pursuing special education.

MEYER: Thank you.

MURMAN: Any other questions? If not, appreciate the testimony.

TIM ROYERS: Thank you.

MURMAN: Other proponents for LB523.

TIM FREY: Good afternoon, Chair Murman and distinguished members of the Education Committee. My name is Tim Frey, spelled T-i-m F-r-e-y. I have the privilege to serve as the dean for the College of Education at Doane University. I am also a proud graduate of a Nebraska teacher education program. I can tell a little bit about me. I taught middle school special education. It was my area before becoming a teacher educator, so I'm here in support of LB523 on behalf of both Doane University and the Council of indebra-- Independent Nebraska Colleges. And just for reference, in the past 3 years, between 24 and 24 per-- 27% of all teacher education leaders in Nebraska have come from the private college and university educator preparation programs in the state. We appreciate your financial support for Nebraska students completing their student teaching experience, because it helps attract and retain aspiring teachers, helping alleviate the state's current teacher shortage. The Student Teacher Compensation Act creates a stipend program to pay our student teachers, and does so in a fiscally responsible and measured approach by only awarding the students or stipends to teacher candidates who demonstrate a financial need. The student's financial need will be determined by the State Department of Education. LB523 provides an important financial incentive which is currently missing for students considering the teaching profession because earning a teaching degree may not become more financially viable. Currently, many of our student teachers at Doane, of course, they're spending their full days in classrooms like a full-time job, but without pay. Some of our student teachers also commute nearly 2 hours to different sites, including from Crete, including Lincoln Public Schools and other rural districts. This leaves little to no time for them to have an additional job or find ways to pay for their food, fuel, and other expenses related to attending college. This can

be mentally and physically demanding, and creates a financial burden for our students, who are already navigating the taxing work of a PK-12 educator. LB523 provides for our student teachers who demonstrate financial need with the much needed financial support to dedicate their energy, talents, and passion to teaching Nebraska's students instead of worrying about making ends meet. There's also, at Doane, a retention risk, when student teachers have to discontinue their student teaching experience because they can't afford to lose a paid job in order to complete their teaching without compensation. LB523 opens the door to opportunity for more students to consider becoming teachers and successfully graduate from Nebraska's educator preparation programs. Thank you to the members of the committee for your support of our aspiring teachers and investment in Nebraska schools and students. I'd be happy to respond to any questions you might have.

MURMAN: Thank you. Any questions for Dr. Frey? If not, thank you for your testimony. Other proponents for LB523.

MARY PHILLIPS: Good afternoon, Education Chair and members of the Education Committee. My name is Mary Phillips, M-a-r-y P-h-i-l-l-i-p-s, and I am board president for the Arc of Nebraska. Normally, you see our executive director, Edison McDonald, sitting here, advocating on behalf of families with children with disabilities. But in his absence, I am happy to step in and share this story. So I am also a parent of an adult, of an individual with developmental and intellectual disabilities who was supported in schools from birth through-- she aged out at age 21. And I'm also a retired special education director, special education teacher, and spent my entire professional career in the public schools. The Arc of Nebraska is the state's largest membership organization for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We hear from parents all across the state. We want to ensure that our students with disabilities receive the education and services necessary to not just survive, but thrive. I'm here today to testify in strong support of LB523, in support of the stipend for student teachers. Nebraska schools are facing a growing demand in special education services. Student teachers, many of whom are under financial stress, as has been already described, are required to do the work of full-time educators, of course, without pay. Decades ago, it was very common for college students to take on unpaid in-- membership-- internships. However, over time, compensation has been added to many, maybe most professional programs, except for teaching and except for those districts that are being as creative as they can to get student teachers to come into their districts. The current funding and support

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in schools comes far short of ensuring adequate care and support for children with disabilities and their families. This bill will help alleviate some of these challenges, ensuring that students with disabilities receive some quality education and individualized support they need by enhancing the field to attract more future quality educators. Without supporting the growth of new teachers, as has been ex-- described, the significant shortage of teachers, especially in special education, means that students and teachers are placed into unsafe situations and students' needs are not being met as described in their individualized education plans. Teacher shortages are not a new problem, nor is it solely a Nebraska problem. I provided you a graph of shortages by departments over the last 20 years. And by the way, I apologize for that graph. This was printed from my home printer. It's not, it's not the best printer. But you can see-- you can get the gist that Nebraska is falling short, especially in the area of special education. And it's not going to be a short-term problem. So you can also see a, a, a, a map of where the worst issues of special education lie. And while it's not the best print job, you can see that the dark blue state of Nebraska is one of the worst in the states. LB523 provides one step in the process of ensuring we rebuild our capacity. So that's what I'm here to support on behalf of families who have raised children with disabilities. We need to ensure that we continue to have these quality teachers. I'm happy to answer any questions.

MURMAN: Thank you. And thank you for your service to people with disabilities through Arc.

MARY PHILLIPS: You bet. Yeah. It's been my, it's been my career.

MURMAN: The-- your graph there, where it says special education, 100%. Is that--

MARY PHILLIPS: That means over 20 years. We have always had a shortage in special education. Every one of those years, we've had a shortage in special education. It's-- way back when I was pursuing my degrees-- and by the way, my daughter is 36 and I taught special education or worked in the field of special education for 36 years. I retired 3 years ago as director of special education at ESU 6, and spent 25 years with the-- which, by the way, supports 14 rural districts. And I spent 25 years with a larger urban district here, in Lincoln, as a special ed supervisor for 16 years. So I am immersed into the world, and I live it every day. And while my daughter has made a successful transition into adult services, she needed those services, birth through 21.

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MURMAN: Sure. I've, I've actually got a daughter who's 37, that--

MARY PHILLIPS: OK.

MURMAN: --needed it, late birth through 21, so.

MARY PHILLIPS: We are kindred spirits. That's right.

MURMAN: Thank you. But the-- my question is, what does 100% mean?

MARY PHILLIPS: It means that we--

MURMAN: You're short 100%--

MARY PHILLIPS: Right. That means that--

MURMAN: --over a certain number of years--

MARY PHILLIPS: --every year-- right.

MURMAN: --its always been short.

MARY PHILLIPS: There was a shortage in special education.

MURMAN: OK. Thank you.

MARY PHILLIPS: Yeah. That's a 20-year graph.

MURMAN: Thanks. Any other questions? If not, appreciate your testimony.

MARY PHILLIPS: Great. Thank you.

CONRAD: Thank you.

MURMAN: Other proponents for LB523.

PENNY LARSON: Good afternoon, members of the committee. My name is Penny Larson, P-e-n-n-y L-a-r-s-o-n, and I'm here to express my strong support for LB523. As an aspire-- aspiring educator myself, as I am currently in school for my teaching degree, I'm deeply committed to getting that certificate and positively, positively impacting the lives of children in Nebraska. Student teaching is essential to the teacher preparation, requiring significant time and effort. However, the unpaid nature of the teaching practicum, along with having to also pay for potential college expenses, housing expenses, so on, places sub-- substantial financial burden on student teachers. This economic

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hardship makes it incredibly challenging, particularly for individuals like me, to support ourselves and our families while completing our practicum. I am a single parent with a child to support. The prospect of undertaking student teaching without financial compensation would devastate my-- would, would devastate my fin-- financial status. Sorry. I'm just nervous.

CONRAD: You're OK. You're doing great. Take your time.

PENNY LARSON: Without support during this crucial period, pursuing my dream since I was in third grade of becoming a teacher would be nearly impossible. The financial strain would pro-- potentially prevent me from completing my, my teacher preparation and entering the profession. I feel it would be prolonged. The bill proposes the stipend of the \$4,000 for the semester that I would need to complete that. The financial support would be-- significantly alleviate the economic strain on student teachers, allowing us to focus on professional development and academic success. By providing this assistance, the bill would enable more individuals to pursue teaching, helping to address the teacher shortage in Nebraska, particularly in high-need subject areas and rural regions. By investing in the preparation and support of future leg-- of future teachers, LB523 will contribute to the overall quality of education in Nebraska. Well-prepared and financially supported student teachers are more likely to become effective educators and positively impact student learning outcomes. This legislation is a crucial step towards supporting student teachers and addressing the teacher shortage, shortage in Nebraska. By, by providing financial stipends, this bill will help ensure our future ed-- educators have resources they need to succeed. I urge you to support this critical legislation. I thank you for your time and consideration, and happy to answer any questions.

MURMAN: Thank you. Any questions for Penny?

JUAREZ: Thank you.

CONRAD: You did a great job.

MURMAN: If not, really appreciate your personal testimony.

PENNY LARSON: Thank you.

MURMAN: Yes. Thank you. Any other proponents for LB523? Are there any other proponents for LB523? Any opponents for LB523? Any neutral testifiers for LB523? Senator Juarez, is she-- she is here. Oh, Senator Juarez, you're welcome to close.

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JUAREZ: First, I would like to thank all the testifiers who came to support this bill today. I appreciate those of you who may have taken time from your spring break to be here. Student teachers are the future of education in Nebraska and supporting-- and them supporting benefits us all in the long run. By fairly compensating student teachers we're ensuring that the next generation of Nebraska teachers are set up for financial success as they enter the workforce. With that, thank you for your time, and I'll take any other questions that you might have.

MURMAN: Thank you. Any questions for Senator Juarez? Do, do you happen to know how many schools are providing stipends for student teachers in the state?

JUAREZ: No, no. I don't know who, beyond OPS, does, and they were pretty innovative in that. I think maybe Westside might be doing it now. They started doing it after OPS did. Those are the only two that I'm familiar with.

MURMAN: OK. Thank you. Any other questions? If not, thank you for bringing the bill.

JUAREZ: Thank you. Do you know the stats on our online responses? Were there any?

MURMAN: Oh, yeah. I forget that every time. Online, there were 22 proponents, 22, 8 opponents, and zero neutral.

JUAREZ: OK. Thank you.

MURMAN: And with that, we will close the hearing on LB523 and open the hearing on LB524, also Senator Juarez.

JUAREZ: Thank you, again, everyone. My name is Margo Juarez, M-a-r-g-o J-u-a-r-e-z. And I-- again, I represent District 5 in south Omaha. I am also happy to introduce LB524 today, which would provide retention grants for paraeducators and remove the application requirement for all retention grants. This was also brought to my attention by the NSEA, and you'll hear from them, as well as a handful of paras, about the work they do and what these grants would mean to them. Just like student teachers, paraeducators play a vital, vital role, but unsupported in the Nebraska education system. As Nebraska reckons with the shortage of teachers across the state, paras are indispensable for helping teachers with daily classroom operations. Unfortunately, Nebraska's brain drain issue affects paras the same as teachers. I saw firsthand how much paras do for our students with my own experience as

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a para. I not only assisted the teacher, but I supported the students as I could and built relationships with them while keeping them engaged in lessons and tasks. LB524 expands Educator Retention Grants to include paras by providing grants of \$1,000 for paras that work an average of 28 hours a week or more during the school year, and proportional grants for paras that work less than 28 hours per week during the school year. Additionally, this bill directs the Department of Education to automatically distribute the grants to all school districts with eligible teachers and paraeducators. This change makes it easier for teachers and paras to acquire the retention grants they've rightfully earned by removing the unnecessary red tape and paperwork associated with applying for the grants. Nebraska needs to support all the workers in the public education system, from teachers to paraeducators to student teachers, and this bill works towards accomplishing that goal. Thank you, and I'm happy to take any questions you may have, and there are testifiers also behind me that can answer questions, as well.

MURMAN: Thank you. Any questions for Senator Juarez at this time? Senator Hunt-- or Hughes. Excuse me.

HUGHES: That's all right. Hunt and Hughes, it's close. Thanks--

MURMAN: Well, sound a lot alike.

HUGHES: It does. Thanks for bringing this, Senator Juarez. I just-- the question I have is the educator future-- Education Future Fund already is going for the, the \$1,500 of student foundation aid that we've got and the, the 80% special reimbursement or special ed reimbursement that we did 2 year-- 2 years ago? And we're putting in \$250 million, but it's-- we're not putting in fast enough as special education needs have gone up. And so I guess-- we're aw-- that fund is already on a trajectory to be at zero sooner than later. This-- I mean, I guess you realize that, and then this is going to also add to that, quickly annihilating that fund, as well.

JUAREZ: Well, I'm not--

HUGHES: I guess I don't know what am I asking.

JUAREZ: I'm not sure-- for sure about the exact dollars that you're mentioning. Maybe Mr. Royers behind me could help answer that question better. I did take a look at, actually, information about that fund, and saw all of the different categories that it's supposed to be assisting. So that's all that I know, being a new, a new senator.

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HUGHES: And I, I-- this would fit into that category. It's just-- we--

JUAREZ: Yes. It was one of them.

HUGHES: It doesn't, it doesn't have enough money. So.

JUAREZ: Yeah.

HUGHES: OK. Thank you.

JUAREZ: Thank you.

MURMAN: Any other questions for Senator Juarez? If not, thanks for the open. And we'll call for proponents of LB524.

TIM ROYERS: Hello again, Chair Murman, members of the committee. For the record, my name is Tim, T-i-m, Royers, R-o-y-e-r-s. I'm the president of the Nebraska State Education Association, and I'm thrilled to be able to testify in support of LB524 for the establishment of paraeducator grants. To make it as simple as possible, paras are some of the most important members of our school community. We have talked at length in this, in this room about the growing percent of students who need additional support, whether it's because special education services, English language learner services, they're coming from homes with profound poverty or a variety of other circumstances, I think we've pretty well established we have greater needs for our students coming into our doors than we did 5, 10 years ago. A lot of those additional needs are being met by paras. Because a lot of times, the optimal solution is one-on-one interventions with a student and with an adult in the building, and that often falls to paraprofessionals. So that's true for a lot of IEPs. Also, when class sizes get too large, as we've discussed the teacher shortage, one of the solutions to try and help deal with the additional number of students in the classroom is to have a class si-- a para specifically to assist the teacher, to make sure they can meet the needs of all their students. And so, again, growing percentage of those student needs are being met by paraeducators. And that's why when I come before you, I try and do my best to talk about how we, as an organization, represent educators. I know we're commonly referred to as the, quote, teachers union, but the reality is we represent a lot more than just classroom teachers, including thousands of members who are paras across the state. Paraprofessional compensation is far below what they deserve. So I wanted to add something in addition to what I always planned to say. You know, yesterday through this committee, there were conversations about how the recent ballot initiative

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regarding paid leave interacted with the proposal we discussed yesterday. I do think it's important for this committee to know as we discuss this bill, and I know there's an ongoing conversation about the minimum wage ballot measure, public school employees are not-- we don't-- we're not-- minimum wage doesn't impact us. We're, we're not subject to minimum wage laws in Nebraska. Well, that's not an issue for a certificated teacher under contract. That absolutely is an issue for our hourly staff. And they will never be forced to catch up with minimum wage because-- you can check the statute. Senator Day tried to introduce a bill to correct that issue, but that's not something that we're subject to in, in the public sector. So the \$1,000 proposed in this bill, I do want to point out-- Senator Hughes, I respect-- I completely understand and respect your concern, but what we're proposing here today is 1/10 of what we discussed yesterday with the teacher retention bill, \$9 million. That impact, however, would be massive. It's more than the dollar amount itself. The bill is about signaling an investment in these critical roles and helping break down a sense that many paras across the state have right now, which is they just kind of feel like they're kind of the ignored element of the conversation about education. This is going to help diminish para turnover rates and help reduce training costs. Because again, one of the other added challenges is you have to train and then retrain and then retrain, because you might have to be hiring multiple people for the same position in a single school year. Our data shows-- and when I was a local president, I bargained for paras in our school district. If you can get a para to stay past year 1, you're getting them for multiple years, and if you can get them to stay past your 3, it's probably a career. So that's an important part of this bill is the retention piece, which is better for kids and it's better for our community. So I'm happy to answer any questions and I appreciate your support.

MURMAN: Thank you. Any questions for Mr. Royers? Senator Lonowski.

LONOWSKI: Thank you, Chair Murman. Thank you, again. How much do paras make an hour? Do you know? Is there a--

TIM ROYERS: It, it depends. I've seen anywhere from \$12 an hour up to \$20.

LONOWSKI: Do you know what they're making in Lincoln by chance?

TIM ROYERS: I think Lincoln-based pay, if I remember correctly, is-- I think like \$16 or \$17 an hour, if I remember right.

LONOWSKI: OK.

TIM ROYERS: But I can-- I have that data. I'll email it to you.

LONOWSKI: OK. Thank you.

TIM ROYERS: Yeah.

MURMAN: Any other questions? I've got one on the, the fiscal note. You mentioned, I think, \$9 million something.

TIM ROYERS: Yeah. If you look at the-- that's the spec-- I was quoting the specific part about the paraeducator retention grants are \$9 million.

MURMAN: OK. Yeah. Because under Education, it's got 20-- over \$26 million.

TIM ROYERS: Yeah. We didn't have a chance to discuss the-- if you recall, there was also an error in yesterday's fiscal note, and we were able to get a corrective fiscal note for that one yesterday. We weren't able to, to get that resolved on this one. But the-- again, the intent of the bill, as you heard for Senator Juarez, is these paraeducator grants. And if you look at the details of the fiscal note, that particular part has a roughly \$9 million price tag.

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

TIM ROYERS: Yeah. Appreciate it.

MURMAN: Other proponents for LB524.

CARRIE GEORGE: Good afternoon. My name is Carrie George, C-a-r-r-i-e G-e-o-r-g-e. I am testifying today in support of LB524. Prior to starting my teaching career, I was an early childhood special education paraprofessional. I was living at home and going to school to be a special education teacher. I did work 2 other jobs at that time, so that my combined wages would allow me to cover my expenses, which included college tuition. Many of my fellow paraprote-- paraprofessionals also hold at least one other job while taking care of their families. Although I am encouraged to see the significant work that districts have done to increase paraprofessionals' wages, the grants provided through LB524 would help in supporting our paraprofessionals and in recruiting more qualified paraprofessionals. I feel compelled to speak today as a teacher to advocate for people

who play a vital role in the success of students. As a special education teacher, I rely on the valuable feedback my paraprofessionals-- of my paraprofessionals to make sure that I am providing the best programming in and out of the classroom, so that my students have con-- so that I have consistent data to show student progress, in order to know when a student is ready to move on, or when the next-- to that next skill, or what changes need to be made so the student can be successful. Over the years, I have met paras who have used their own funds to bring a student's favorite candy or an action figure, or even school supplies to school. I have also witnessed students be able to increase their emotional regulation because of the time paraprofessionals have taken to build authentic relationships with them. The role of our paraprofessionals is critical to student success. So I genuinely appreciate the efforts to move LB524 forward to make sure that we are providing support to our paras. Just a quick personal note. I had a sister with severe and profound health needs, and our family remained friends with the paras that supported her in her programming, so I also personally know the investment that they make. I recognize that this is a sizable ask of this bill, but I feel that our paraprofessionals are a worthy investment in our education system. This grant would also support our teachers who could continue to provide program-- programming that can consistently-- can be consistently carried out throughout the instructional day, ultimately, ultimately leading to the best outcomes for our students. Again, thank you for listening about our amazing paraprofessionals and thank you for your consideration. I'm happy to answer any questions.

MURMAN: Thank you, and I will agree with you that the para makes a huge difference to the special ed student that they're working with.

CARRIE GEORGE: Yes.

MURMAN: Any questions?

CARRIE GEORGE: Thank you.

MURMAN: Thank you very much. Other proponents for LB524.

MARY REYNOLDS-EAST: Members of the Education Committee, my name is Mary Reynolds-East, M-a-r-y R-e-y-n-o-l-d-s-E-a-s-t, and I am a paraprofessional for Millard Public Schools, and I'm here today to-- oh, gosh-- offer testimony in support of LB524. I wanted to start by answering the Senator's question about what paras make. I can speak to the fact that in my district, paras started \$15.15 an hour, which is \$0.10 less than Starbucks starts their employees at. Paraprofessionals

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are an essential part of the educational system throughout our state. We provide crucial support to students and teachers, fulfilling needs that would otherwise go unmet. Our roles are diverse and varied to best serve the specific needs of our students. Although rewarding, our roles entail the hardest work any of us could ever imagine. Oh, my gosh. I'm so sorry.

CONRAD: That's OK. Take your time. You're doing good.

HUGHES: We're not mean.

MARY REYNOLDS-EAST: The challenges of our profession are often misunderstood by those outside of the school environment. Paraprofessionals may be subjected to physical and verbal abuse. Some are responsible for administering medication and medical care. Paraprofessionals have also navigated an unprecedented pandemic and prepared for active shooter situations. While local staff-- school staff appreciate paraprofessionals' contributions, we are among the lowest paid school employees. It is disheartening that some of our high school students earn more at part-time jobs than many paraprofessionals earn after years of service and education. Paraprofessionals are dedicated to our work and understand that financial compensation is not our primary motivation. I know paraprofessionals in my district who have had to write checks to the district to cover their insurance premiums. Unpaid breaks and snow days can significantly reduce our paychecks, making it difficult to afford basic expenses. Paraprofessionals deserve recognition and fair compensation for their dedication and service. It is priceless to see smiles on our students' faces and we feel the impact we can have on young lives. However, these don't pay our bills. For this reason, I strongly urge you to support LB524, and I thank you for your consideration.

MURMAN: Thank you, and I appreciate-- I know teachers and especially paras can get very emotionally involved.

HUGHES: Thank you.

MURMAN: Any, any other questions?

CONRAD: So good. Thank you.

MURMAN: Thank you.

MARY REYNOLDS-EAST: Thanks.

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PENNY LARSON: I might be a pro now, so this will be a little easier. I think we'll make it through this one OK.

CONRAD: You'll do great.

PENNY LARSON: But again, good, good afternoon. And my name is Penny Larson, P-e-n-n-y L-a-r-s-o-n, and I am a paraeducator for Papillion La Vista Community Schools. I'm here on my own accord, though. And just back to that wage thing, our starting wage, which I believe was a contract negotiation maybe sometime last year or the year prior-- I work in a Title I building, so I'm an instructional paraprofessional that already has quite a bit of college coursework, which enables me to work in that building, and my compensation is \$16.12 an hour and I only work 30 hours a week. And like my cohort was saying, you know, it's underpaid. We only get paid for 3 snow days. We had 5. You know, we don't get-- there's no extra anything that we can do for winter breaks because we're not salaried. So I just take those 2 weeks of winter break unpaid. This week is unpaid and that is a financial strain for myself. I knew that going into this position, but didn't really-- I think I was just excited and really didn't wholeheartedly think about the impact that it would have on my life. Also, as an aspiring teacher, as you heard earlier, you know, there's a lot of those things that we are doing that play into-- to those roles that we are doing. But I am a paraeducator because I believe in the classroom where every student feels seen, heard, valued, regardless of their abilities or background. The validation helps students to learn the importance of hard work, contributing to society in meaningful ways. Paraeducators create environments every single day. We become mentors, confidants, friends, providing safe spaces where children feel comfortable expressing themselves, taking risks in their learning, and participating in school activities. Paraeducators work tirelessly to ensure every child succeeds. We provide extra help with lessons, assist with behavioral challenges, and foster a sense of belonging and self-worth. Despite our invaluable con-- contributions, paraeducation-- paraeducators in Nebraska are underpaid, leading to financial struggles outside the classroom. Our wages do not reflect our dedication and the impact we have on Nebraska's future. As a single parent working 2 jobs, I'm grateful for the opportunity to be able to work in my son's school. However, this is the only time I get to see him because then after school, I do leave for a second job or I am taking coursework to become a teacher, so that takes my time as well. But I work hard for-- to care for us and to teach my son the value of hard work and dedication, yet how-- what does my hard work prove if I cannot spend time with him, or afford other things, such as health insurance? As a paraeducator, I don't qualify for any type of

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employee-sponsored plans in my district, and so my son and I do rely on Medicaid. I know that's not really anything in this bill, but, you know, just stipends or additional compensation would make a difference in being able to afford some other things. A pay increase is not a massive ask for paraeducators. It would mean I could work the one job and spend more time with my son. Fair compensation is an investment in the lives of hard-working Nebraskans and future generations, in the future of our Nebraska economy and communities. It transforms lives and communities. Being a paraeducator has improved my life. It also creates financial stress. Our wages don't accurately reflect invaluable work I and my fellow educators do on a daily basis. We deserve to be included in any retention or wage changes. It is time we are fairly compensated for our role in Nebraska's future. Thank you for your time and consideration. I'm happy to answer any questions.

MURMAN: Thank you. Any questions for Penny? If not, thank you.

CONRAD: I, I just-- sorry.

MURMAN: Yes, Senator Conrad.

CONRAD: Thank you, Penny. Thank you so much. And it's-- maybe it's not within the 4 corners of the bill, but I really appreciate your candor and courage in sharing your personal journey with the committee, because it is relevant to helping us understand why this bill is necessary, and it helps to connect the dots to a lot of other issues that we're looking at before the Legislature--

PENNY LARSON: Right. Yeah.

CONRAD: --right now. As you might know, Nebraska voters voted to increase our minimum wage recently. They voted to ensure that there's a basic level of sick leave available to hardworking Nebraskans. And there's proposals before these legis--the Legislature right now, to gut those basic protections for people who are working just like you, really hard, multiple jobs, raising their kids, going to school, trying to keep your head above water. And so when you take the time to share your story in a public forum, which is super hard and intimidating. And yes, you are a pro after 2. You, you could teach many lessons in that regard. It- it's so important on a lot of different levels, because there's a lot of folks that are working multiple jobs, who are raising their kids, who are going to school, who can't come down to legislative hearings frequently. And so-- and some of the members who are going to be asked to vote on those things later this year aren't on the committee where maybe folks could come

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down. So when you tell your story about how you're trying to work, do everything right, play by the rules, and you can't keep your head above water, it absolutely is relevant and absolutely makes a difference. And I'm really--

PENNY LARSON: Thank you.

CONRAD: --really grateful that you were here today. And I hope my colleagues--

PENNY LARSON: Thank you.

CONRAD: --remember this when those votes come up this year, because there's a sentiment around this Legislature that a dollar here or there doesn't matter.

PENNY LARSON: Right.

CONRAD: Or that a day of pay here or there doesn't matter. And I just think that's really--

PENNY LARSON: It matters.

CONRAD: --really out of touch with how working Nebraskans are, are feeling when they're trying to balance their budget at their kitchen table right now.

PENNY LARSON: Yeah. And I, I feel like, you know, we put-- in general, you know, I think any country in the world could tell you what an emphasis education is and--

CONRAD: Yeah.

PENNY LARSON: --how important it is, and, and just to remember those, those kind of like the unsung heroes are the paraeducators that we are-- we're doing all those things that in a classroom with 20 kids that a teacher cannot do. We're, we're pulling a kid that's doing maybe a bad behavior, or they just need a break, or the teacher needs to use the restroom. You would be surprised how many they-- that they do not have that option in the middle of the day when they need to. They have to wait for a plan period or a lunchtime and that's not always, obviously, when that's going to happen. And so they just depend on us for so many things. And I am grateful because I work in an amazing building. I feel like my district supports me. I'm, I'm very lucky also that with what's going on in the world and the federal government not knowing what my college education will look like.

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CONRAD: Yeah.

PENNY LARSON: I appreciate that the Legislature did approve the Grow Your Own pilot. So I am lucky enough that I am going to be able to take part in that, so that I don't have to worry about where my tuition is going to come from for the next 2 years. But then, I have to worry about how to support myself during that student teaching time, how to continue to do those things on what I will be paid as a para during my time in the cohort program is something that I really have to now sit down and think about. And I think, just for myself in those coming years, but also those that follow me, that I tell them how much I love my job and what I'm doing, that I would say, hey, you should do this. You know, you're-- what do you want to do? Like, you're here or you're going to school for this, but what about just go and working as a para? Even if you just did it, you know, 5 years, finish your degree or whatever you're going to do, like-- but having that pay to match? And, and like my friend said, you know, Starbucks starts at more. And you know, that's disheartening, because I feel like our children are a, a commodity that's a lot stronger than a cup of coffee, so.

CONRAD: Great job. Thank you.

PENNY LARSON: Thank you.

MURMAN: Thank you. Other proponents for LB524.

NICOLE LOPEZ-BETTENDORF: Hello, again. I'm like a bad penny.

CONRAD: No. A lucky one.

NICOLE LOPEZ-BETTENDORF: Thank you. Hello. My name is Nicole Lopez-Bettendorf, N-i-c-o-l-e L-o-p-e-z-B-e-t-t-e-n-d-o-r-f. I'm, I'm from Lincoln, and I'm a special education teacher who began my career as a paraeducator. To share an answer to a question earlier, when I began as a para in 2014, my hourly wage was \$13.46 and my paras now make \$15.96. I am speaking in support of LB524. I believe this grant proposal is one that should be endlessly fought for. It is one that every senator should want to see come to fruition. Our paras are often forgotten in the realm of education, so I'd like to share some experiences that I believe will highlight the benefits and need for LB524. During COVID, I tried to vouch for my paraeducators' safety alongside the safety of my students. Sadly, I was met with hostility from many district individuals. When I was a para, I signed up for an after-school, multi-week course to learn how to work with students

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with deaf blindness. I had to fight to be welcomed in that educational space, as well as fight to be paid for that valuable time, because no one expected a para to need to be there. Even now, our paras are not being valued or treated fairly. In fact, leave is taken from them when inclement weather days occur. Our school closure policy for paras reads: Work responsibility: Will not work. Compensation: Employees are compensated for the first school closure day. Then the employee will utilize a maximum of four sick leave days and then available special leave. Employees without these types of leave will receive no compensation. My coworkers, our paras, don't even have the option to complete other forms of work to keep their earned leave. When a few asked if they could still come into the building to work their hours and keep their leave, the answer was no. As a side note, let me assure you, there is plenty for paras to do at our schools even when students are enjoying a snow day. Our paraeducators deserve so much more than what they receive. They are smart, strong, funny, and focused on their work. They add love to our classrooms. They honor who our students are and they share their lives with us every day. They are there for the good and the bad times, right alongside our teachers. I am incredibly blessed and immensely proud to be part of a team that includes paraeducators. This grant program is a great place to start to show them how valuable they are, and yet they still deserve so much more. Please support LB524. Thank you.

MURMAN: Thank you. Any questions for Nicole?

CONRAD: I have a question.

MURMAN: Yes. Senator Conrad.

CONRAD: Thank you, Nicole. Good to see you. Since Nicole is from Lincoln, we have a chance to touch base sometimes at community and school events. And it's good to always see you here in the legislative advocacy arena, as well. But something I was trying to get a better sense on, and I, I think maybe this even perhaps touched upon some of the issues we heard about yesterday, with Senator Spivey's proposal, but-- so the school districts-- and maybe you don't know and we can figure out afterwards, they budget for the paras that they've hired. Yes?

NICOLE LOPEZ-BETTENDORF: Correct.

CONRAD: And we don't know what-- how many snow days there's--

NICOLE LOPEZ-BETTENDORF: Correct.

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CONRAD: --going to be. I mean, we plan for them for a variety of reasons throughout the district. So if there's more snow days than the one afforded for in the LPS policy and LPS for-- I'm just using them for example. If LPS has already budgeted for 200 paras, because that's what they thought it would take to meet student needs and classroom needs that year, what happens to those, those budgetary-- what, what happens to that, that budget allocation? Does it just get poured back into the school for like, cost savings? Or if it's not going to the paras and they're already budgeted for and they don't have any ability to call the school day on or off because of snow, where-- like, where does that money go?

NICOLE LOPEZ-BETTENDORF: Based on the policy, I really think it is just allocated for the single snow day for them to be taken into consideration then otherwise to kind of keep the district money's anti-- you know, pay our paras at the same time that leave is taken.

CONRAD: OK. I'm just curious if they're somehow capturing budgetary savings by taking compensation away from the paras. I'm not sure if they are or not, but something you said there wants to make me learn more about it.

NICOLE LOPEZ-BETTENDORF: I, I hope--

CONRAD: And I can ask the schools. I can ask the schools--

NICOLE LOPEZ-BETTENDORF: --if there is moneys--

CONRAD: --about that, but.

NICOLE LOPEZ-BETTENDORF: But based--

CONRAD: It doesn't--

NICOLE LOPEZ-BETTENDORF: --on the increases--

CONRAD: OK.

NICOLE LOPEZ-BETTENDORF: --these last 10 years, I don't, I don't know.

CONRAD: OK. Very good. Thank you.

NICOLE LOPEZ-BETTENDORF: Yes.

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

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HUGHES: Thank you.

JENNIFER FAZ: Good afternoon. I'm Jennifer Faz, J-e-n-n-i-f-e-r F-a-z, and I'm a special education teacher at Norris High School, and I'm obviously here to, to speak about being in support of LB524. I'd like to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude for our paraeducators, who truly represent the backbone and heart of our schools. As I reflect on my 29th year of teaching, I feel incredibly fortunate to have collaborate-- collaborated with many amazing paraeducators across all levels in public schools. One consistent trait I have observed among paraeducators is their unwavering commitment to our students. Despite often being the lowest paid and most overworked staff members, their dedication remains steadfast. They do not seek, obviously, glamor or recognition. They perform their roles out of a deep understanding of the profound impact they have on the lives of our students. Currently, I work alongside 3 paraeducators at my high school, and the thought brings me back to 25 years ago when I started at Norris, when I worked alongside 10 paraeducators. It is concerning to witness many paraeducators leaving the field in search of better salaries and benefits. This trend is compounded by school district budget restraints and the lack of applicants, which both of these pose significant challenges for our education system. The presence of ped-- paraeducators in our classrooms is essential, especially in today's environment. I rely on them to ensure the effective implementation of my students' behavior plans and accommodations, as well as the maintenance of accurate documentation for IEP goals. And I wouldn't have been able to be here today if I didn't have my para back at school supporting, because we don't get spring break. Adjusting the Education Future Fund's usage criteria to include paraeducators and provide grants to supplement their income will validate what teachers and administrators already know. Paraeducators are crucial to the education system. This bill reflects a commitment to strengthening Nebraska's education workforce and infrastructure, aligning with broader goals and improving educational outcomes. In conclusion, supporting LB524 is vital, not just for the paraeducators, but for the entire education community. By recognizing their importance and providing the necessary resources, we can enhance the quality of education for all of our students. Thank you.

MURMAN: Thank you. Any questions for Jennifer? Yes, Senator Conrad.

CONRAD: Thank you, Jennifer. Appreciate your testimony. And as you were talking, I was also trying to think through-- and I don't know. Maybe we can get some data from the school districts or from the State Department of Ed, but do you have any sense about how districts

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approach-- well, at your school, the hiring of paras? Are paras FTEs? Are they full-time employees so they have not only access to their wage but also benefits? Are they part-time employees? I, I know because of budget constraints, there have been some reports of schools limiting or capping paras at 29 hours per week, so that they don't have to pay them a) more money and b) they don't have to provide them benefits.

JENNIFER FAZ: Right. I'm very fortunate at Norris. Our administration is very supportive.

CONRAD: OK.

JENNIFER FAZ: One of the issues we are finding, since, you know, we're not really a country school, but--

CONRAD: Yep. Yep.

JENNIFER FAZ: --kind of, you know, we're just, just far enough away-- we do have, you know, we have the opportunity to, you know, hire parents or people in the community. But a lot of times-- you know, it's great, you know, being able to do that if you have children that are on the same schedule. But a lot of times, we do have those people that end up leaving within a year or two because the money's not-- it's not doable. Because like, you know, we don't follow exactly how LPS does it. But, you know, snow days, we're actually-- our paras are able to make up time--

CONRAD: OK.

JENNIFER FAZ: --which we're very thankful for. But, you know, some of them choose not to take a lunch. And so in the high school, they'll be reading tests or working with students on, you know, homework assignments while they're-- so they can get a half an hour back. You know, same thing, you know, they'll-- they will let them come an hour or like a half an hour before or a half an hour after school and work, because we do have lots of things for paras to do. Now, you know, that's just not always the case, too. Because we are so close to Lincoln that-- and, and I believe-- I, I don't know the figures for--

CONRAD: That's OK.

JENNIFER FAZ: --what we're paying our paras starting out, but I know as, as far as teacher subs, which I know this has nothing to do with, but I know LPS and other school districts do tend to pay more for those positions than our school. So if you're, you know, financially

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able to, you know, if it's a two-income household and, you know, one of the, you know, parents are working at school as a para, typically it's, it's feasible. Now our paras do get one-- get single insurance--

CONRAD: OK.

JENNIFER FAZ: --the premium period for, but most of the time they have families, and then they'd have to pay the rest of that.

CONRAD: Yeah.

JENNIFER FAZ: And we also do have paras that do supplement with being bus drivers, because that's a whole nother ballgame, where I even drive a mini bus, so-- sometimes, too.

CONRAD: OK. All right.

JENNIFER FAZ: Gotta do it tomorrow after school, but-- yeah. So paras, is just-- that's just such a-- that's a tough one. That's a really tough one.

CONRAD: Yeah. No, I, I know. My mom's a teacher. She's retired now, but I know she taught in a small country school, with smaller class sizes and almost no support. And then I know she taught for many years in Lincoln, with larger class sizes and more support. And kind of how those different dynamics can impact your ability to connect with kids and--

JENNIFER FAZ: Right.

CONRAD: --teach and breathe--

JENNIFER FAZ: Right.

CONRAD: --and use the bathroom and eat lunch and all of those--

JENNIFER FAZ: Very true.

CONRAD: --kinds of things that contribute to-- ultimately, what we all want is kids to be able to achieve at their best and learn at their best.

JENNIFER FAZ: Right.

CONRAD: --and hit their highest potential and feel good in school and be successful.

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JENNIFER FAZ: And it, and it hits all levels. Elementary--

CONRAD: Yeah.

JENNIFER FAZ: You know, preschool, elementary, middle school, high school. It's all levels that are being affected by, you know, lack of paraeducators or the inability to retain.

CONRAD: Yeah.

JENNIFER FAZ: That's, that's the big thing is being-- retaining.

CONRAD: Yeah. Absolutely. And it takes a long time to get people trained and up to speed. And every time you start anew, you start anew.

JENNIFER FAZ: Oh, yes.

CONRAD: Yeah.

JENNIFER FAZ: And just the rapport. Building rapport with kids is-- that's--

CONRAD: Right.

JENNIFER FAZ: It's-- even in high school, that is so important.

CONRAD: Yeah. It absolute-- meeting them where they are and earning trust--

JENNIFER FAZ: Mm-hmm.

CONRAD: --and being able to communicate and collaborate. That--

JENNIFER FAZ: Yeah.

CONRAD: And especially the kids with the special needs, too, that need that continuity in terms of connection. So I really appreciate you coming here today. I think this hearing is really illuminating.

JENNIFER FAZ: Thank you.

MURMAN: Any other questions for Jennifer? If not, thanks for testifying.

JENNIFER FAZ: Thank you.

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MURMAN: Any, any other proponents for LB524?

MARY PHILLIPS: Good afternoon, again. Again, my name is Mary Phillips, M-a-r-y P-h-i-l-l-i-p-s. I still serve as president of the board of the Arc of Nebraska. I'm still a retired special education teacher and administrator, and I am here to testify in strong support of LB524 to expand the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Grant to include paraeducators. So we know that right now, paraeducators do not have the loudest voice in the room. And I purposely wanted to go last because I'm really representing a parent advocacy organization and a parent voice here. So, Senator Murman, feel free to, to jump in because I'm sure you've lived the same-- you have the same lived experience I have with being depended and relied upon, well-trained and, and well-supported paraeducators. And it wasn't-- it hasn't always been the case in my lived experience. So we know that in education circles, it's pretty well known that we sometimes place our highest needs students with the least paid individual in the building. Right? Sometime-- custodians might make more than paraeducators. It's-- we know if the district is even fortunate enough and I know from my ESU special ed director days that if a district is fortunate enough to have a para who also can be a local sub, they're going to pull that para when they need a sub. And so it doesn't matter if that para is a one-on-one para or a behavioral support para, or leading a small group or a communication group, they're going to pull that para because they need that sub, because there's also a shortage across all areas in education. The graphs that I provided before are, are still testimony to the need for having to retain and to encourage people to enter into the school workforce as paraeducators. We, we need them. As a special educator, there is no way I could have done my job running any program without the use of a special, special ed para to support me. I also had the advantage of supervising OTs and PTs in the school system, and we had motor activity paras that were really specially trained to just for the unique needs of orthopedic-impaired children and all the equipment and all the needs that they have. So we know that Nebraska schools still have this growing demand for special education services. And we know that giving a stipend isn't a fix, but it will certainly help alleviate some of those challenges and really ensure that the students with disabilities are still receiving supports from folks that are recognized for the work that they do. So I think I just want to kind of finish up by saying LB524 is one step in the process of ensuring to rebuild capacity and to maintain capacity. And it's important that we do look up and down that whole slate of bills that is being presented to you. And you can see all the other bills that the Arc of Nebraska is in support of, to make sure

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that our educational system in Nebraska remains as, as high as it has in past years. So thank you, again, for consideration of support of this bill on behalf of parents of children with disabilities who are dependent upon bus paras, motor activity paras, special ed paras, lunch room paras, media center paras. My-- some of my daughter's best friends were the paras. So thank you for supporting that position.

MURMAN: Thank you. Any questions for Mary? If not, thank you very much for--

MARY PHILLIPS: Thank you, guys.

MURMAN: --testifying again.

MARY PHILLIPS: Thanks.

MURMAN: Any other proponents for LB524? Any opponents for LB524? Any neutral testifiers for LB524? Senator Juarez, you're welcome to come up and close. And while she's coming up, online, we had 25 proponents, 6 opponents, and zero neutral testifiers.

JUAREZ: Thank you, again, to all the testifiers who came to support this bill, and any of you who might be here on spring break. Your-- the knowledge and experience that you shared really was appreciated. And it just was-- it really added a lot, I felt, to the-- my own testimony that I gave today. Teachers and paraeducators are indispensable to schools across Nebraska and we need to be proactive in retaining and supporting paras in the state. LB524 is that proactive approach, and I want to thank you, and will take any other further questions that you may have.

MURMAN: Thank you. Any questions for Senator Juarez? If not, thanks for bringing the bill, Senator Juarez.

JUAREZ: Thank you.

MURMAN: And that will close the hearing on LB524. And we will open the hearing on LB711 and Senator Hunt.

HUNT: Good afternoon, Chair Murman and fellow members of the Education Committee. My name is Megan Hunt, M-e-g-a-n H-u-n-t, and I'm here to introduce LB711. This bill addresses a disadvantage within our school finance statutes for high-growth school districts that need to open multiple new schools. I understand that Gretna and other rapidly growing school districts such as Elkhorn, OPS, and Bennington are encountering challenges meeting capacity needs to serve their growing

student populations under the current formula. These districts are seeking this change under LB711 to make it easier to open multiple schools over multiple years and receive a break in the school finance formula. Currently, if a school district opens up one school, they receive a break for 2 years within the formula to get the school up and running at its full capacity. The intent of this bill is to make it so that if a district is opening more than one school at a time, they can count all of those schools together. My understanding is that right now, the district can only get credit within the formula for one school. Thus, this bill would change the language from school to schools and add clarifying language to make it clear that more than one building can be counted. When a school district opens up a new school, there are preliminary logistical challenges that can create some startup costs. The year prior to a school opening, a school district has to ramp up and hire teachers and administrators who understand the culture and climate of the school district to transfer to the new school. This heed-- this leads to a year of overhiring. The first year a school is open, it's difficult to get the school room sizes exactly correct. This, again, leads to some inefficiencies. Nebraska law currently acknowledges the costs associated with getting a new school running, and that it allows school districts to apply for a Two-Year New School Adjustment. The first year, the new school adjustment equals the school district's basic funding per formula student, multiplied by 20% of the approved estimated additional student capacity. The second year, new school's school adjustment for each approved district equals the school district's basic funding per formula student multiplied by 10% of the approved estimated additional student capacity. This funding is outside of TEEOSA. The problem is the formula does not take into account what happens if a school district opens 2 or more schools over a period of 2 years. The school district still has efficiency issues, but the first year of the new school and the year before the second new school opens, the funding go down-- goes down to 10%, even though costs go up. For example, under the current law, school district opens a new school, 2 years later, it opens another new school. The current formula would give the school 20%, 10%, 20%, and 10%. However, if a school district opens up 2 schools in 3 years, the formula would provide 20%, 10%, and 10%, so less money. The intent of this bill is to say when a school district opens up 2 schools in 3 years, then during the school year, the school district gets 20% of the estimated additional student capacity. The school would get 20%, 20%, and 10%. This helps to better account for the cost of opening the new school, which the original legislation was meant to address. I realize, given the budget constraints, a bill like this could be difficult, but we must continue to find ways to lower

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property taxes, especially in a high-growth district which have the highest property tax rates. There will be someone from Gretna Public Schools coming up, I believe, who will be happy to answer questions about how this situation is specifically affecting them. And I'm happy to work with the committee on improving this bill to make sure the intent and language match up. And I'm happy to take any questions.

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

HUGHES: Thank you. Thank you for bringing this. And I'm just-- so I, I guess the question is, I'm assuming Gretna came to you and asked you to bring that. Is that--

HUNT: That's right.

HUGHES: And then-- or did all 4 of those schools kind of--

HUNT: All, all 4 of them would like the bill, but--

HUGHES: OK.

HUNT: --yeah. It was a representative from Gretna that approached me--

HUGHES: OK. Thank you.

HUNT: --originally. Yeah.

MURMAN: Any other questions? Senator Lonowski.

LONOWSKI: Thank you, Chair. Thank you for this bill, Senator Hunt. Do you see this as occurring often?

HUNT: I think it's occurring often enough that it's becoming a real problem. And it's going to continue to happen more often.

LONOWSKI: And we're really talking like Bennington and Gretna are, I assume.

HUNT: Bennington, Gretna, Omaha, Elkhorn, these kind of high-growth districts. Yeah.

LONOWSKI: Yeah. OK. Thanks.

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

HUNT: Thank you.

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MURMAN: And we will ask for proponents for LB711.

BURKE HARR: Chair Murman, members of the Education Committee, my name is Burke, B-u-r-k-e, Harr, H-a-r-r, and I am here on behalf of Gretna Public Schools. Senator Murman, I think it will be just proponent, singular, so we can get out of here early. First of all, I want to thank Senator Hunt for bringing this bill. This is a bill that, as Senator Lonowski pointed out, really only applies to fast-growing school districts, rapidly growing school districts, which is defined as a 3% growth over 3 or more years, so it doesn't affect everyone in the state, but those that it does affect, it does affect. Right? What we're trying to do today is-- and, and the language doesn't necessarily match up perfectly, and that's my fault. I, I gotta-- I'll, I'll work with the committee on the language. What we're trying to do is to say, hey, these school districts are growing at a fast rate. And, and as a result, we, we, we or you, the Legislature had recognized that there's an additional cost. However, the intent of the Legislature doesn't match with the reality of how TEEOSA works. And so what we're trying to do is develop language that matches that intent that says, hey, yeah, you're right. We should give money to these schools when you have more of a growth with the intent. And so it works to a certain degree, but it doesn't work if you have more school districts. And also, that second year, there's an additional problem in that, that TEEOSA-- or that funding is counted as a resource, so now it's within your TEEOSA. And so, there, there are some issues we have with how it was done. This, this language is new. It was a part of LB681 which happened before several members of this committee were here. We were trying to work on some amendments to change that. That bill was rather controversial. There were a lot of amendments for a lot of reasons. As a result, that amendment never got on [INAUDIBLE] bill. And so what we're trying to do is just to introduce a bill that gets that onto the bill, so that we can treat all school districts the same, whether you're a fast growing school district, slow-- or a slow growing school district, because the cost to that school district, it's the same. And as a result, when we don't do it the right way, the people who end up paying are the local property taxpayers. So that's what we're trying to do. And so I'd be willing to entertain any questions you may have. And I'd also say I'd sure like to have this part of a pri-- committee priority. Hey, buddy.

MURMAN: Any questions for Mr. Harr? If not, appreciate your testimony.

BURKE HARR: Thank you. Appreciate it.

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MURMAN: Can't give any assurances. So any other proponents for LB711? Any opponents for LB711? Any neutral testifiers for LB711? Senator Hunt, you're welcome to close. And while she's coming up, online, there were 5 proponents, 2 opponents, and zero neutral.

HUNT: Thank you, Chair Murman. And thanks again, everybody. I wanted to come up and, and give you the opportunity, if you had thought of a question, to share that with me. But I also wanted to note on the record that Norfolk Public Schools also submitted a position comment in support, saying that this bill would help them meet increased growth needs and add more space. So that's another school district that is behind this. Thank you.

MURMAN: Thank you. Any questions for Senator Hunt? Yes, Senator Hughes.

HUGHES: Thank you, Chair Murman. So if the language isn't-- and I-- I'm not as familiar with this little piece of the TEEOSA formula, so I feel like I can't--

HUNT: Well, I'm an expert, so I'm happy to answer.

HUGHES: Yeah. OK. Great. I guess my question will be clearly to proceed with this is just to make sure we ratchet it down the language so that we know, like it does exactly what the intent is.

HUNT: Exactly.

HUGHES: Yeah. So I had figured that was the case.

HUNT: We are totally same page with that. Yeah.

HUGHES: Yeah. OK. Thanks.

MURMAN: Any other questions?

HUNT: Let's solve the problem and no more. Thank you.

MURMAN: Thank you for bringing--

HUNT: Thanks.

MURMAN: --the bill, Senator Hunt. And that will close the hearing on LB711. And we are going to have an executive session.