

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Education Committee February 10, 2026
Rough Draft

MURMAN: Welcome to the Education Committee. I'm Senator Dave Murman from Glenvil. 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 green testifier sheet each time you come forward to speak on the mic. When it's 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 both spelling your first and last names to ensure we get an accurate record. Observers, if you do not wish to testify but would like to indicate your position on an agenda item, there are yellow sign-in sheets in notebooks at the entrances. The sign-in sheets will be included in the official hearing record. We will begin with the introducer giving an opening statement at the mic, followed by proponents, opponents, and those wanting to speak in a neutral capacity. The introducer will then have an opportunity to give a closing statement if they wish. We will be using a 3-minute light system for all testifiers. When you begin your testimony, the light on the table will be green. When the yellow light turns 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 final items to facilitate today's hearing. Please mute your cell phones or any other electronic devices. Verbal outbursts or applause are not permitted. Such behavior may cause you to be asked to leave the hearing room. Know that committee members may need to come and go during the afternoon for other hearings. I will now ask committee members with us today to introduce themselves, starting on my right.

CONRAD: Hi, I'm Danielle Conrad.

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

G. MEYER: Glen Meyer, District 17: Dakota, Thurston, Wayne, and the southern part of Dixon County.

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

LONOWSKI: Good afternoon, I'm Dan Lonowski with District 33, that's Adams County, Kearney County, and rural Phelps County.

JUAREZ: Hi, welcome. Senator Margo Juarez, south Omaha, District 5.

MURMAN: Staff with us today are, to my immediate right, is the committee's research analyst, Jack Spray. And to my far right is committee clerk, Connie Thomas. And I'll ask the pages to stand up and introduce themselves.

ELIAS REIMAN: Elias Reiman, from Lincoln Nebraska, at UNL, studying psychology in the pre-law track.

GRACE HARPER: I'm Grace Harper, I'm from Loveland, Colorado, and I'm a junior studying political science at UNL.

MURMAN: Thanks for being with us today. We appreciate your help. With that, we'll begin today's hearing with a gubernatorial appointment. And the first on the agenda is--

STEVE RAMOS: He's not on yet.

MURMAN: Oh, not online yet. So should we go to Joshua Fields?

STEVE RAMOS: Oh, he's going to call here any second.

MURMAN: Oh, OK. Is that Chad Buckendahl?

STEVE RAMOS: Yes.

MURMAN: Hello, Mr. Buckendahl?

STEVE RAMOS: Well, he says he can hear me, but-- OK, we'll just do this the old-fashioned way. Yeah, it gets, it gets plugged into someone else and then we'll come back to this guy.

MURMAN: OK, Joshua Fields, is he here? Oh, there he is. OK, so we'll begin the gubernatorial, gubernatorial appointment with Joshua Fields for the Technical Advisory Committee on Statewide Assessment and Reporting.

JOSH FIELDS: Good afternoon, I'm Josh Fields, J-o-s-h F-i-e-l-d-s. I am the current superintendent of Seward Public Schools. This is my

second go-around with the Technical Advisory Committee. And so you may be asking, what is a Technical Advisory Committee and what does it do? But our role is that we are just-- we provide advice and guidance to the NDE, the Department of Education, when dealing with things such as assessments, their classification system, and AQuESTT with, with-- NDE goes with. And so my role is one of two Nebraskans that are on that. We also have three people that are psychometricians that serve on this committee. So I kind of give the ground roots of what does this do and how will this affect schools where the psychometricians are fantastic like Chad that you'll talk to is also a native Nebraskan, give a lot of the technical pieces of looking at, you know, how do you do this assessment, what are the pieces that you need to do in the statewide assessment? And so my role in that, like I said, is just we meet about three to four times a year. And then provide NDE, the Board of Education, has a final say on those pieces. We just give suggestions and comments on what they may be proposing for the future. Be happy to answer any questions that you may have at this time.

MURMAN: Thank you, Mr. Fields. Could, could you tell us just a little bit about what the-- what, what's your main responsibility with the committee for statewide assessment reporting?

JOSH FIELDS: Yeah, so our, our main role is that many times we'll go and they'll present-- NDE will present us-- information presented to us what their plans are, and then we will look at what are the-- some of the psychometrician pieces of what this will entail and do, also making sure federal guidelines are being met. But then our role is truly just advisory. And so it is truly some-- I don't-- I, I consider myself a quasi-expert in assessment of nothing like the psychometricians that do that as a full-time job, that have experience in curriculum and assessment. When I was a-- before that I was the Curriculum Director for Seward Public Schools, but also had assessment experience when I was in Missouri. [INAUDIBLE] to serve on the statewide assessment committee that they had when creating statewide assessment types of components and also served on committees with the state of Nebraska looking at assessment. And so I'm sure that's why they sought me out from my experiences. But, like I said, ours is truly advisory and looking at what do we need to do as a state? And then what are some of the components? Like I said, NDE staff is doing all the work. What we're doing is just offering what are some suggestions, advisory components that we could feel like, and how would this look, look like implemented when they bring us questions in different pieces?

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MURMAN: Thank you. Any questions? Senator Hughes.

HUGHES: Thank you, Chair Murman. Thanks for coming in, Dr. Fields.

JOSH FIELDS: You bet.

HUGHES: OK, so we've had a bill brought to us earlier, a couple weeks ago, and we had some dyslexia groups come in and talk about that, you know, perhaps we should have a dyslexia assessment. Is that something that falls under kind of your purview or is yours more the standard testing that you do?

JOSH FIELDS: Ours would be the standard testing pieces, so looking like, you know, right now for the juniors we have the ACT, that's a statewide assessment, our NSCAS assessment, and then the classification system. What you're talking about would fall under the special ed components and so--

HUGHES: Yeah, and that would not be here.

JOSH FIELDS: --our technical advisory committee would not get into those types of pieces.

HUGHES: OK. Thank you.

MURMAN: Any other questions? Well, it not, we appreciate you coming forward and--

JOSH FIELDS: Thank you for all that you do, and feel free to ask me any questions down the road if you have them, so. Thank you. Ask Chad hard questions if you can actually get them on the phone.

MURMAN: Are there any proponents for Josh Fields who would like to speak or opponents or neutral? If not, that will close the hearing on Joshua Fields and we will open another hearing.

CHAD BUCKENDAHL: Hello, this is Chad.

MURMAN: Yeah, hi, Chad. We'll open the hearing on your, I think it's reappointment to the Technical Advisory Committee on Statewide Assessment and Reporting, and appreciate you coming forward and just tell us a little bit about yourself.

CHAD BUCKENDAHL: Sure, thank you, sir, and apologies to the members of the committee for-- I'm just glad this is not a technology advisory

committee, otherwise I would be clearly not qualified. Thank, thank you all again for the opportunity. My name is Chad Buckendahl. My background is as a psychometrician. I think as Josh noted, my, my background, I actually grew up in Nebraska. So I grew up on a farm outside of Pierce, Nebraska and have been-- I moved out of state about 20 years ago and have worked around the U.S. and internationally as it relates to assessment programs, both within the K-12 context. So anything that would be sort of taught or measured within even, like, a pre-K-12 context is sort of within, within my background from a, a measurement standpoint. And then I also do quite a bit of work with licensing and certification tests. So if you think about several professions that require one or more examinations or demonstrations of competence in order to be credentialed, we work with those sorts of programs as well. My responsibility with the Technical Advisory Committee, I've been fortunate to serve on the committee for several years now and as Chair for I think my last couple terms. And our goal is just to, honestly, ensure the, the quality and integrity of the statewide assessment program and provide input to ensure that things like validity, reliability, and fairness are, are components of not only the assessment program but also the accountability program on which schools and districts are evaluated.

MURMAN: Thank you. Well, appreciate you putting your name forward again, and I'll open it up to the committee for any questions they might have. Senator Lonowski.

LONOWSKI: Thank you, Chair Murman. And thank you, Mr. Buckendahl, for being here. Have you-- were you an, an educator for several years or in education?

CHAD BUCKENDAHL: I, I was not-- so I was not a classroom teacher within the K-12 setting. I, I taught a couple of seminars and have guest lectured quite a bit at the higher ed level, but, no, not within a K-12 classroom.

LONOWSKI: OK. This question is even more important. Are you an Iowa Hawkeye wrestling fan?

CHAD BUCKENDAHL: So, coincidentally, I, I am actually still friends with a guy named Brad Penrith who wrestled under Dan Gable at Iowa back in the early 1980s. But, no, I'm-- like, I bleed Husker red and, and if anybody saw the vehicle I drive around, and it, it even says Husker on it, like, I got the personalized plate that says Husker. So,

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no, I'm, I'm, I'm all in, whether it's volleyball, football, bowling, [INAUDIBLE]. Really, all of the above.

LONOWSKI: That's the right answer. Thank you, sir.

MURMAN: Well, we appreciate that answer. We dig pretty deep for any flaws that we might find. Any other questions for Mr. Buckendahl? If not, appreciate you getting on the phone and we'll ask are there any proponents, any opponents, any neutral testifiers for Chad Buckendahl? If not, thank you, Mr. Buckendahl, and we will see what the committee does with your appointment. Appreciate you testifying today.

CHAD BUCKENDAHL: Thank you, Senator. Thank you members of the committee.

MURMAN: So that will close the, the hearing on Mr. Buckendahl, and we'll open the hearing, open the hearing for Paul Von Behren and his appointment is for the Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education. Hello.

PAUL VON BEHREN: Good afternoon.

MURMAN: Hello, Paul. We appreciate you calling in and we put-- the Governor's put your name forward for the Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education. If I remember correctly, you're a reappointment. Could you just tell us a little bit about yourself and what you do?

PAUL VON BEHREN: Sure. First, appreciate you letting me do this remotely at a busy day, and it saved me a lot of travel miles and hours, so I appreciate that. I'm a retired veterinarian. I live in Fremont. And I was appointed to the Commission in 2017 by Governor Ricketts. And I've served 9 years now. Two of those years, I've served as Chair. And I think I've served in most capacities, but it's a, it's a good group, a good organization, and they do some very useful work.

MURMAN: Well, thank you. Let's see if there's any questions from the committee. Any questions that we would like to ask Mr. Von Behren? Well, I've got a dairy cattle production background, so I appreciate a veterinarian being on this committee. Could you maybe just expound a little bit on your qualifications? And, I guess, you've been on the committee for, you said, 9 years now, so a little bit about what you've done and what you hope for in the future?

PAUL VON BEHREN: Are you talking in regards to committee work itself?

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MURMAN: Yes.

PAUL VON BEHREN: OK. No, I, I think the-- the Commission does-- broadly, we do two things: We're in charge of approving-- we sit between the Unicameral, of course, and, the, the college, university and community college systems. And our basic responsibility is to approve academic programs and building projects. In most cases, we have a very qualified staff that does a very nice job of pre-screening those. We have had some in the past, as you would expect, that are not as straightforward as others. But that's the broad description. I think what's intriguing about it is there's such a breadth of learning to go on. Personally, my background, of course, is in veterinary medicine and agriculture. And it's not in the educational world, but we have enough of a balance on the committee itself, on the Commission, that it gives us a good array of experiences. And it's been very valuable, I think, to all the Commission members.

MURMAN: Well, thank you. Any further questions? Senator Meyer.

G. MEYER: Thank you, Chair Murman. Welcome today, Doctor. I appreciate you-- I would say I appreciate you coming in, but evidently you aren't in, so.

PAUL VON BEHREN: Well, this worked quite well, thank you.

G. MEYER: I'm, I'm curious, if you could just-- could you just list some of the educational programs or building projects and things that you've been involved in over the last 9 years?

PAUL VON BEHREN: All the years or in between?

G. MEYER: Just, just a thumbnail sketch.

PAUL VON BEHREN: I'm sorry. Go ahead.

G. MEYER: Just a thumbnail sketch of, of some of the projects you've been involved in.

PAUL VON BEHREN: Yeah, because the Commission is involved in approvals, we've been involved in virtually every aspect you can think of. The last one that, frankly, we, we all had to stop and, and do some serious head-scratching, was the \$2 billion University Med Center project where they're going to be redoing Clarkson Tower. We're not used to projects with a B. Most of our projects, 30 to 40 to 50 million dollars is not unusual and those can be anything from student

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dormitories to athletic facilities to science centers to ag centers, community colleges, they are literally all over the board. And I can tell you that Nebraska has made some very good investments. Right now, our community colleges are really stepping up in terms of lay training, if you want to call it that, in the trades, and are doing some very nice work.

G. MEYER: I appreciate that very much. I, I-- meeting three or four times a year, I would imagine your agenda is relatively full when you do meet. So thank, thank you for calling in today.

PAUL VON BEHREN: Well, thank you for your time.

MURMAN: Any further questions for Dr. Von Behren? Senator Juarez.

JUAREZ: Hi, Dr. Von Behren. I'm curious to get an opinion from you on a topic we had in the Legislature today. I wondered what you thought about the human relations class that is part of the curriculum for teachers. Do you have any opinion on that?

PAUL VON BEHREN: I'm sorry. Right now, at this point, I can't give you a good one. I just saw that come across in an information post this morning, and I've had two other meetings in the meantime. I have not had time to pursue that. So I apologize. I'm not trying to evade your question. I'm just not qualified to address it.

JUAREZ: OK. Thank you.

MURMAN: Thank you. Any further questions for Mr. Von Behren-- Dr. Von Behren? If not, are there any proponents for Paul Von Behren? Any opponents? Any neutral testifiers for Paul Von Behren? If not, we appreciate you being on. And online, we had zero proponents, two opponents, and zero neutral testifiers. And with that, we'll close the hearing on Paul Von Behren, and thank you for being on, Dr. Von Behren.

PAUL VON BEHREN: And thank you for your time. Thank you for your service.

MURMAN: Thank you. And we'll open the hearing on William Wilson. And he also is a reappointment for the Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education. And we appreciate you being here in person.

WILLIAM WILSON: Thank you.

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MURMAN: Welcome.

WILLIAM WILSON: Thank you, Senators. It's William Wilson, W-i-l-l-i-a-m W-i-l-s-o-n. A little bit about what I've been doing. I got appointed by Governor Heineman some time ago. I'm one of the most senior folks on the Coordinating Commission right now, and I have served every capacity. I was Chair and the committee chairs as, as well. My background, one of the things where Governor Heineman at the time wanted, is I'm from the private sector. There was a lot of academia on there. I'm an old phone guy. OK? I've been with the phone company for 40 years. I've got five name badges because we always sell off and all that stuff. But my perspective that I bring, you know, from construction and engineering perspective for a lot of the buildings and things that we do, I, I really like that. But I've also learned a great deal, you know, about academia. And I, I like to give my, you know, my private sector point of view. Our Executive Director is sitting right behind us and he, he knows I'm not afraid to speak up on, on anything. At least give it, you know from a different lens how I see it from up. But, again, I'm, I'm up for reappointment and it will be the third Governor, but I enjoy learning and, and love partnering with you folks. I think between our committee and the things that you folks do make us a pretty good team for Nebraska.

MURMAN: Well, thank you. Could you tell us just a little bit about how you coordinate the different colleges like community colleges, state colleges, and the university system?

WILLIAM WILSON: Well, it's kind of funny. When I came to the committee, that was when the big controversy with the funding for the community colleges, I got thrown right in the middle of that thing. But now there's a new formula and all that. But that was, I go, what did I sign up for? But to answer your question, we, we partner with them. We've seen the growth of them physically and we partner with them. They, they show up to our meetings. They put forth their proposals. The staff analyses them from all the different things that we have to look at them for. But the growth, I think, since I've been here with that contentious beginning, the growth of our community colleges I'd put up against anybody in the whole United States. I mean, Metro's building a whole new campus. I'm sure you're well aware of that across over there in Omaha, but it's exciting to be a part of that.

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MURMAN: Sure, and there's a lot of demand for graduates of the community colleges and, of course, for getting started in community colleges, and then going on to, to the rest of the college system.

WILLIAM WILSON: Yes. Yes, you got it.

MURMAN: Appreciate that. Any other questions for Mr. Wilson? Senator Hughes.

HUGHES: Thank you, Chair Murman. How many people are on the Coordinating Commission?

WILLIAM WILSON: Well, we have slots for 11, but we haven't been able to, to fill them.

HUGHES: OK.

WILLIAM WILSON: We range from, you know, clear to Scottsbluff to, to Omaha. We follow the districts, but then there's-- I'm an at-large member. So if you know of anybody, we've got openings. We'd love to have some good--

HUGHES: How many openings do you have?

WILLIAM WILSON: Can you help me, Executive Director, please?

HUGHES: One, uno.

MURMAN: He can hold up a figure. Yeah.

WILLIAM WILSON: Yeah. So I'll solicit you all. We, we would love some more, some more folks. We, we don't have a problem getting a quorum or not, but it's, it's nice to have, you know, the full range of the state, because it's just as important out at Western Community College as it is in, in Metro.

HUGHES: And you meet four times a year? Is that--

WILLIAM WILSON: Pardon me?

HUGHES: How many times a year do you meet?

WILLIAM WILSON: About half, six.

HUGHES: Oh, six. OK.

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WILLIAM WILSON: About six, every other month or so.

HUGHES: Do you kind of rotate different spots or--

WILLIAM WILSON: Pardon me?

HUGHES: Do you rotate different [INAUDIBLE]?

WILLIAM WILSON: Yeah, whoever wants to host us. We like to take-- in July, we like to kind of do our little road trip,--

HUGHES: Sure.

WILLIAM WILSON: --stay within our budgets. But I've got to go everywhere in Nebraska, out in Curtis is, is amazing. We've been there a few times. We were in McCook last year. This year, we're slated to go up to the tribal college in South Sioux City. That's going to be kind of our road trip. But we go to Chadron and we'll go wherever we can, we can get to, to-- and usually they're pretty happy to see us, so.

HUGHES: All right. Thank you.

WILLIAM WILSON: You bet.

HUGHES: Thanks for coming in today.

WILLIAM WILSON: Yeah.

MURMAN: Any other questions? If not, we appreciate what you do and appreciate you coming forward.

WILLIAM WILSON: Well, we appreciate what you guys do, and if we can help you, that's great, so thank you.

MURMAN: Thank you. Any proponents for William Wilson? Opponents or neutral testifiers for William Wilson? If not, no online comments. And that will close the hearing on William Wilson for Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education. And we'll open the hearing on LB855, Senator McKinney, welcome.

McKINNEY: Thank you, Chair Murman and members of the Education Committee. My name is Terrell McKinney, T-e-r-r-e-l-l M-c-K-i-n-n-e-y, and I represent District 11 in the Legislature. I'm here today to introduce LB855, the Youth Early Intervention and Support Act. I brought this bill because far too often, our young people are failed

by the very systems that are supposed to support them. Too many times after a child has already fallen behind, or being pushed, we hear adults say, we saw the signs. The truth is, we all see the signs all the time, and the real question is whether we choose to act on them. When we say our youth are our future, we have to ask, what kind of future are we building? One where young people graduate, start businesses, and thrive in their communities, or one where we continue to invest in more youth jails and prisons than prevention? LB855 is about making a different choice. It asks whether we are willing to support young people before they fail and fall through the cracks. Across Nebraska, early signs of trauma, neglect, and instability often show up first in our schools through chronic absences, slipping grades, behavioral changes, and unmet basic needs. Too often our, our response doesn't come until those warning signs escalate into juvenile justice involvement or child welfare intervention. By that point, the harm is deeper, the response is more expensive, and the outcomes are worse. LB855 is designed to change that trajectory. Importantly, LB855 does not reinvent the wheel. It aligns Nebraska with what many states are already doing through community schools, trauma-informed education, and early warning intervention framework. States like Maryland, New Mexico, Illinois, and Washington State have recognized that when schools are empowered to coordinate early supports alongside families and community partners, students are more likely to stay engaged, successful-- succeed academically, and avoid deeper-system involvement. LB855 reflects those best practices while ensuring strong safeguards, local flexibility, and accountability tailored to Nebraska schools and communities. This bill establishes a trauma-informed early support framework that helps schools identify when students are struggling and connecting to, to help early. Using existing data, existing staff, and existing community partners, the goal is not punishment or labeling, the goal is early, compassionate support that keeps students engaged, stable, and moving forward. LB855 brings schools, families, and community health workers and local organizations together through youth support coordination teams. These, these teams will focus on understanding what a student actually needs, whether academic support, mental health services, family engagement, or help address basic needs before a crisis occurs or turns into system involvement. Just as important, this bill acknowledges strong safeguards. A student cannot be referred to law enforcement or child welfare based solely on early warning indicators unless there is an imminent legal risk. All data must comply with federal privacy, and implementation must be monitored to prevent disproportionate impact based on race, disability, income, or

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language, because we know too well that historically these systems have not impacted all children equally. LB855 recognizes the simple truth: many communities already have the people, relationships, and resources needed to support young people, but those supports are often fragmented. This bill connects them in a coordinated, accountable, and trauma-informed way. At its core, LB855 is a prevention bill, it's an education bill, it is a public safety bill. It does not expand punishment, it expands care, it does not wait for failure, it intervenes early. I look forward to the committee's questions and anyone that's here to testify. Thank you.

MURMAN: Thank you. Any questions for Senator McKinney at this time?
Senator Juarez.

JUAREZ: Thank you. Thank you, Senator McKinney, for bringing this bill in. It looks pretty comprehensive. It's impressive, actually. I wanted to know would it be-- how should I say it-- an option for these families to participate? Like if the schools would recommend a certain family, I assume that they would be able to decline.

McKINNEY: Yeah, I, I guess my thinking behind the bill is, in my mind, it's a system where, let's say a kid, they start to miss-- they start to be late to school a few times, right? And, initially, that doesn't present a real issue, but let's say, like, they just continue to be targeted at school. The hope is that we have systems in place that say, hey, we've seen you been late a few times, what's going on? It's more of a check than a basic, like, trying to, like, completely intervene, but more-- yes, you want to intervene but you at, at least want to ask the question, what's going on? Why are you being late so much? And maybe it's just, you know, I missed, I missed the bus. You know, my parents' car is messed up, something like that. To where, if they're connecting with the other community partners, maybe there's a service that could be provided to get a kid a bus pass, for example, if the car, if the car is messed up. It's more so to say, hey, we see this going on. You're not in trouble. Can we help, essentially?

JUAREZ: OK. Thank you for clarifying that.

McKINNEY: No problem.

MURMAN: Senator Hughes.

HUGHES: Thank you, Chairman Murman. Thanks for bringing this in, Senator McKinney. Some of the things you're describing and when I read

through the bill is what I think a counselor at the school should, should be doing and picking up on those things. Like when you mentioned that, like, you know, somebody didn't show up at-- they missed 2 days of school. They call the family. Oh, it's they-- they're just not getting a ride or, you know, grandma's sick or whatever it is. I guess, so how-- I feel like a lot of this is being handled by counselors. Do you not think that's the role of counselors or this is maybe a little bit more robust?

McKINNEY: I think it's the role of counselors, but how often do students actually interact with counselors, especially in the bigger school districts? I don't think kids interact with counselors as much as we think they do. So, yes, the role of a counselor, but, how often do kids interact with counselors? Because I remember--

HUGHES: Well, and I, I think that's probably just our experiences of being different with different sizes of schools.

McKINNEY: Yeah.

HUGHES: Because in ours, a lot, I would say we dealt with the counselors. But, yeah.

McKINNEY: No problem.

HUGHES: OK. Thank you.

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

CONRAD: Thank you, Senator, for being here. I think it's pretty well documented that there's a pretty significant vacancy for school counselors all across Nebraska so definitely need to take that into account rather than just assuming that current counselors are able to carry out all of these duties because we know that the facts show otherwise. The other thing that I think is really interesting about your bill in terms of timing is just the fact, and I know you see this firsthand both as a community leader and from your position in leadership on the Judiciary Committee, Nebraska is actually perhaps one of the few states that's moving away from juvenile justice reform to an almost solely punitive model. We are throwing aside data, we're throwing aside best practices. This Legislature and my colleagues that are sitting here with me today have seen fit to detain and jail, what was it, kids as young as 10 in the last session and a, a host of other, I think, very misguided reforms in that regard. So we know that the juvenile justice and the criminal justice is the least effective,

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most expensive way to deal with society problems, but they just go ahead and push that aside for their own political purposes. So knowing that reality, we have to do every single thing we can try and do more investments upstream in prevention and trying to keep kids out of those systems because their political leadership has failed them and they're currently dealing with a lot of these, these issues in sharp contrast to how our sister states are handling these, so. Did you give any timing-- any thought to the timing of your legislation in this regard?

McKINNEY: Yeah, that was part of it, definitely based on what we did last year and even passing the bill I had last year with the family resource centers.

CONRAD: Right.

McKINNEY: And coming into this year, I just kept thinking what else can be done to keep kids out of the system as much as possible, because I think we should be trying to do what we can to help them as much as possible. And just my experience working as a coach and working with kids, I've seen a lot of kids that, that we are locking up that end up on the news. I've also been around some of the educators that's been around those kids, and they all say we saw the signs. We knew that kid was going to end up in jail or end up in trouble. And my question to myself is, if we know this, why aren't we stepping in to help and assist? If we see the signs and we always say, like, this is supposed to be a village and we're supposed to take care of all our kids, how are we openly seeing signs and letting kids fail? Like, there are kids literally walking in high schools across our state that are failing all their classes and nobody's doing nothing about it. But they're showing up to school every day. That should be an issue for everybody. And it goes back to the bill I had yesterday where we have kids graduating high school with D minuses. That should not happen. And I think the reason for this bill is because if we're supposed to be a village and we're supposed to be supporting our kids, it's going to take more than a counselor, it's going to take more than the school administrator. It should take people who are working in the community and all people who say they care to help that kid to figure out, OK, you've been missing school because your mom's car broke down, can we get you a bus pass? It's just that simple. Something like that will, will go a long way.

CONRAD: Great, thank you.

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McKINNEY: No problem.

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

LONOWSKI: Thank you, Chair Murman. Thanks for being here, Senator McKinney. Did you work at all with the state school board, or did you get any input from them?

McKINNEY: No, I really didn't. I honestly-- maybe it's just me, I really don't really ever work with anybody on my bills. Like, I'm--

LONOWSKI: They, they just jump in my case when I don't get the [INAUDIBLE].

McKINNEY: Honestly, I sit up late at night and I have, like, these thoughts in my head or just even this instance just visiting schools and visiting different places, I just write notes in my notebook and say maybe we should do a bill about that and then I eventually get with my staff and, and try to get something drafted. My bill ideas usually come from just interacting with people over the interim or talking to people saying something's an issue.

LONOWSKI: Sure, and we certainly need early intervention. I agree with that. We just, I guess, need to make sure we-- how we go about it is what we have to figure out. Thank you.

McKINNEY: No problem.

MURMAN: Thank you. Any other questions for Senator McKinney? If not, we appreciate your open.

McKINNEY: All right. I'll be back. I got to go open on something else and I'll come right back.

MURMAN: OK.

HUGHES: Busy day.

McKINNEY: All right. Thank you.

MURMAN: Proponents for LB855?

CHLOE FOWLER: All right. Hello, hello. Let me get situated here in my timer. I'd like to know where I'm at with speaking.

MURMAN: Good afternoon.

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CHLOE FOWLER: OK. Party time. Chairman and members of the Education Committee, my name is Chloe Fowler. That is C-h-l-o-e F-o-w-l-e-r, and I am the Child Welfare Policy Analyst here with the Children's Commission and I'm here to testify on behalf of the Commission in support of LB855. The Children's Commission examines how Nebraska's child-serving systems intersect and where failures in coordination causes harm to children and families. One conclusion is consistent that when Nebraska intervenes too late, challenges have already escalated into crisis. LB855 is important because it responds directly to what the data is telling us. Across the state, chronic absenteeism affects tens of thousands of students each year and is one of the strongest early predictors of academic failure, disengagement from school, and later system involvement. By middle school, students who are chronically absent are significantly more likely to drop out, experience behavioral health crises, or enter the juvenile justice system. We also know that adverse childhood experiences are widespread. Across the state, approximately one in every eight children has experienced at least two adverse experiences. Children with multiple ACEs are far more likely to struggle. Schools are often the first and sometimes the only place where these warning signs are visible. LB855-- oops, sorry. Yet, too often these signals are unaddressed until the response is punitive, expensive, and disruptive. And at that point, families are already in crisis and the state is already relying on systems that are costly and strained. Prevention is not only better for children, but also far more cost-effective for the state. And I know that that is a massive concern with the session at hand. LB855 creates a structured and trauma-informed nonpunitive framework for early intervention. It allows schools and community partners to identify patterns such as declining attendance, academic regression, behavioral changes, and helps respond early by connecting students and families to the appropriate support necessary. Importantly, this bill does not mandate referrals to law enforcement or child welfare systems. It emphasizes coordination among educators, counselors, health professionals, and community providers while maintaining very strong privacy protections. That distinction is quite important. Children should not be punished for struggling. They ought to be supported by the systems provided by the government and from those in their community. From the Children's Commission perspective, LB855 reflects strong practice because schools are one of the few universal touch points for all children regardless of geography or income. When we use that access responsibly, we reduce reliance on downstream systems and improve outcomes across education, health, and public safety. And I see that my light is on. You can read the last

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two sections of my testimony if you'd like, and I welcome any questions.

MURMAN: Thank you. And thanks for passing out your testimony, that's important we can follow along.

CHLOE FOWLER: I was a page, so I understand.

MURMAN: So I've got a question, second to the last paragraph on the first page there: The bill does not mandate referrals to law enforcement or child welfare, but it emphasizes coordination with educators, counselors, health professionals, and community providers. I think it's important to work with families, too.

CHLOE FOWLER: Yeah. Yes. Sorry. Maybe I forgot to indicate that. Yes.

MURMAN: That was maybe just an oversight there, but--

CHLOE FOWLER: Also working directly with the families.

MURMAN: Sure.

CHLOE FOWLER: Yes.

MURMAN: I think that's-- in a lot of cases--

CHLOE FOWLER: It's, like, a very important thing.

MURMAN: --it's the most important thing.

CHLOE FOWLER: Yes, absolutely.

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

CHLOE FOWLER: Thank you. Have a good day, all.

MURMAN: Other proponents for LB855?

CONNOR HERBERT: Thank you, Chairman Murman and members of the committee for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Connor Herbert, C-o-n-n-o-r H-e-r-b-e-r-t, and I serve as a staffer with the Nebraska Commission on African American Affairs. Nebraska's own data shows why prevention must come earlier. The Nebraska Crime Commission's CY 2024 Annual Juvenile Diversion and Nebraska Report found that black youth make up roughly 8% of the state's youth

population but account for 28% of arrests and 24% of juvenile court filings. Additionally, unlike other groups, they are underrepresented in referrals to diversion programs compared to their arrests. Other statewide analyses show that youth of color are overrepresented at multiple decision points in the juvenile justice process. Once young people enter formal systems, outcomes often worsen, costs increase to the state and also the communities, and families face deeper instability. LB855 takes a different approach by focusing on early identification and support before problems escalate to court or removal from the home. The bill establishes a coordinated trauma-informed network within schools to identify students showing early warning signs such as attendance changes, academic decline, disengagement, or unmet basic needs. Instead of punishment, the goal is connection, linking students and families to existing academic behavioral health and community-based resources through structured local support teams. Importantly, this system builds on partnerships schools and communities already have, using counselors, educators, community health workers, and service organizations in a more organized way. It also includes clear privacy protections, and explicitly states that students cannot be referred to law enforcement or child welfare based solely on early warning indicators, as has previously, previously all been mentioned. By investing earlier in responding to root causes, Nebraska can reduce later involvement in costly systems, support families more effectively, and improve long-term educational and life outcomes. LB855 creates a consistent statewide framework so that prevention does not depend on geography or local capacity alone. We respectfully urge advancement of the bill. Thank you.

MURMAN: Thank you. Any questions for Mr. Herbert? If not, thank you for your testimony.

CONNOR HERBERT: OK.

MURMAN: Other proponents for LB855?

VANESSA CHAVEZ JURADO: Hello. Good afternoon, Chair Murman and members of the Education Committee. My name is Vanessa Chavez Jurado, V-a-n-e-s-s-a C-h-a-v-e-z J-u-r-a-d-o, and I'm here today on behalf of Stand For Schools in support of LB855. LB855 aims to facilitate early intervention systems to reduce juvenile justice and child welfare involvement. The bill directs the Nebraska Department of Education and consultation with the Department of Health and Human Services to develop and administer an early support system to be implemented in

all Nebraska public school districts. LB855 would establish a standardized framework for early identification, support, using existing school and community data, and promote cross-sector collaboration to reduce juvenile justice and child welfare involvement. Such a framework would identify students who exhibit two or more early warning indicators, like chronic or sudden changes to school attendance, declining academic performance, or chronically incomplete work, persistent or unusual behavior challenges, and lack of engagement or participation in class, among others. Once identified, the youth support coordination team, established by LB855, would direct the school district support team to connect trauma-informed needs, assessments, engage families, and support planning and coordinate referrals to mental health, academic, and basic needs resources. Such efforts demonstrate thoughtful attempts to address challenges before they become greater barriers. According to the student, excuse me, State Justice Institute, youth involved in the the child welfare system, like their peers in the juvenile justice system, disproportionately live at or below the poverty line, have strained, limited, or no family connections, usually have mental health needs, or members of racially/ethnically marginalized groups, and have negative educational experiences outcomes-- experiences and outcomes. These circumstances can impact every aspect of a child's life, including if and how they show up to school. Research indicates that early intervention prevents the onset of delinquent behavior and supports the development of a youth's assets and resilience. By addressing the underlying challenges a student and their family may face before involvement in the juvenile justice system or child welfare system, students have a greater chance of overcoming these barriers to education. In addition to societal and personal benefits, research has demonstrated that delinquency prevention programs are a good financial investment. For example, a 2001 Washington State Institute for Public Policy study found that the total benefits of effective prevention programs were greater than their cost. This is in line with what RAND has found, which is that while designed early childhood interventions generate a return on investment ranging from \$1.80 to \$17.07 for each dollar spent on the program. We also appreciate the bill's emphasis on promoting and utilizing existing partnerships such as those of Federally Qualified Health Centers, local public health departments, behavioral health organizations, and community-based nonprofit organizations. While many of Nebraska's public schools are already engaged in many of these efforts, LB855's approach could lead to streamlined and more efficient collaboration for those districts already doing this work and a roadmap for the

districts who are not. Over the last few weeks, bills presented before you have generated discussion around the outside of school factors that impact students' ability to show up, engage, and succeed at school. We have appreciated the committee's willingness to dive deep into these issues and work to identify the root causes of these challenges students and their families face. This bill is an opportunity to invest in systems that identify signs that a student may be experiencing difficulties before they become barriers to their education. And for these reasons, we urge the committee to move this bill to General File. Thank you for your time, happy to answer any questions.

MURMAN: Thank you. Any questions for Ms. Jurado? If not, thanks for your testimony.

VANESSA CHAVEZ JURADO: Thank you.

MURMAN: Other proponents for LB855?

SPIKE EICKHOLT: Good afternoon, Chair Murman and members of the committee. My name is Spike Eickholt, S-p-i-k-e E-i-c-k-h-o-l-t. I'm appearing on behalf of Voices for Children and also Education Rights Counsel. And you've got a statement from me on behalf of Voices for Children. I'm not going to read that, but on the second page there are some statistics regarding the number of children who do have Adverse Childhood Experiences or ACE. You heard someone mention that earlier. I'm not going to read the statement because you got it and you can read it, but I just wanted to kind of respond to some of the earlier testimony and maybe some of the questions. I think what Senator McKinney is trying to do with this bill is to have maybe a different way of identifying those children who have suffered trauma, adverse childhood experiences, and are more likely to end up needing the services from the schools and from the state as well. And I think what Senator Hughes asked was right. In some respects, this is sort of what a counselor does. And I think the reality is that schools are sort of dealing with children who would be identified in this bill, but they're dealing with it in a slightly different way than maybe Senator McKinney would like us to look at. The schools are dealing with kids like this in the form of suspensions when they're very young, or absenteeism when they are missing class, or you've heard teachers before testify when we talked about school lunches, kids coming to school hungry and having to have staff and teachers actually give food to the kids, other behavioral issues, things that sort of aren't necessarily always being caught by the child [INAUDIBLE] process and

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the IDEA, identifying children with special needs. So I think that's what Senator McKinney is trying to do because as Senator Conrad asked about, the numbers are clear, the statistics are obvious, and even, Senator Lonowski, when you taught, you probably say a lot of times kids that end up in the system, many times you can see it coming, you can just see it happen. It's rare that it's surprising that a kid is just good, good, good, and then bam, 18, 19 they're in trouble. You usually see it happen, usually starts when they're young from childhood trauma, and what Senator McKinney is trying to do with this bill is have a different way, perhaps, maybe proactive way of identifying those kids and trying to help them rather than in a somewhat reactive way that we have now. So I'll answer any questions if anyone has any, but I thank you and urge you to support the bill.

MURMAN: Thank you. Any questions for Mr. Eickholt? If not, appreciate your testimony. Other proponents?

CHRIS JONES: Good afternoon. My name is Chris Jones, that's C-h-r-i-s J-o-n-e-s. I work for Catalyst Public Affairs and I'm a registered lobbyist on behalf of RADIUS. The President and CEO, Nick Juliano, was not able to attend today. He has a matter, an urgent matter that came up. So being passed out to you now is his letter, what he would have liked to have delivered in-person testimony but was otherwise unable so you'll have me today. For those of you who don't know, RADIUS is a residential program in Omaha. It's for youths ages 13 to 18. It opened in 2023. So it's a fairly new facility and program. It was designed to serve local youth involved with juvenile probation who would otherwise be sent out of state based on their level of need and lack of appropriate placement alternatives here in the state. So it's a new program. It's a new design. It's a new building. It's very innovative and fantastic. So RADIUS offers evidence-based interventions through four core programs. They have the residential program, so the juvenile court has court ordered these used to live and reside at RADIUS. They have a [INAUDIBLE] 18 interim school program there at their campus facility. They offer in-home services to provide some continuity and skill building support for families as kids transition home. And then they also are able to connect youth with ongoing physical and behavioral health care services through our unique innovative partnership with a Federally Qualified Health Center, Charles Drew Health Center, which is-- has a satellite location conveniently co-located with RADIUS on their campus. So while the youth live there, they're able to get their physical and mental health needs met, behavioral health services as well. But also when they transition home they can continue to see their medical and care providers at Charles

Drew so it has that, that great unique approach of being able to serve them while they live there and then provide that continuity in a medical home when they go back home. So that, that service is available to their family and siblings as well. So this approach-- this program is designed to keep youth in their community, keep them connected, get them able to receive their services during and after their time at, at RADIUS. So many of the youth who are served at RADIUS were unable to access these intervention supports like those outlined in the bill. You've heard about the ACEs and the complications and how that-- those cumulative adverse childhood experiences often ends up with child welfare intervention, juvenile justice, and other complex defense system intervention. So RADIUS supports LB855 because of its upstream prevention and holistic approach, including their partnership with Federally Qualified Health Centers like Charles Drew. Thank you, Senator McKinney, for bringing the bill, and I can try to answer any questions if you have any.

MURMAN: Thank you. Any questions? If not, appreciate what you do.

CHRIS JONES: Thank you.

MURMAN: Other proponents for LB855? Any opponents for LB855? Neutral testifiers for LB855? So we'll invite Senator McKinney to come back up and close. And online, we had 15 proponents, 46 opponents, and 2 neutral.

McKINNEY: Thank you, Chair Murman and members of the Education Committee. Again, I brought LB855 to try to do my part in trying to make sure that we're not just passing along punitive measures that address our youth, but to try to do something to swing-- to swim further upstream, to try to catch them before they end up in a situation where they might be in a juvenile justice system or the child welfare system. And try to, you know, create, you know, supports and systems that are in our schools, but not put it all on the schools, but have our communities act as villages to assist our youth and just help them and just interact with them sooner and just ask the question, hey, what's going on, can we help you? Not to try to get them in trouble or put them in a system or harm their parents or anything like that. It's more so just a, a pure preventative piece of legislation. I put in an amendment on the bill after some conversations with some advocates to make sure that parents of youth and youth are protected from any potential system involvement because of this legislation and ensure it's clear that we want to help youth and families and to try to do as much as possible because I think it's

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really needed and I think that's what we should be doing as a state. So with that, I'll take any questions.

MURMAN: Thank you. Any questions for Senator McKinney on his close? If not, thanks for bringing the bill.

McKINNEY: Thank you.

MURMAN: And that will close the hearing on LB855, and we'll open the hearing on LB1201, and that is Senator Dunixi Guereca.

CRISTINA PRENTICE: Do I look just like him?

HUGHES: Totally.

CRISTINA PRENTICE: He actually just began opening in another committee, so we'll be going at the exact same time, which is funny, so.

MURMAN: Thank you.

CRISTINA PRENTICE: Good afternoon, members of the Education Committee. My name is Cristina Prentice, C-r-i-s-t-i-n-a P-r-e-n-t-i-c-e. And I am Senator Guereca's LA, who represents District 7, which includes the communities of downtown and south Omaha. Today, I'm here to introduce LB1201 to support an overreaching goal of many in this Legislature and state, which is ensuring that every Nebraska child acquires the fundamental skill of reading. Across our state, educators and families work everyday to help children become proficient readers. We know that reading unlocks all other types of learning. It allows students to access science, history, math, and the world beyond their classrooms. And, yet, the most recent statewide and national data show that too many Nebraska children are struggling to read at grade level. The statistics we don't talk enough about, though, are some of these: the majority of Nebraska school children are likely to live in a book desert, where there are fewer than 100 books available in the home. For example, there is no census tract in Bellevue that is most likely to have 100 books available in the home. The 2024 National Assessment of Education Progress or the nation's report card, shows 65% of Nebraska's fourth graders, with 10 or fewer books at home scored below the basic, whereas only 32% of students who reported 100 or more books scored below the basic. The number of students who read for enjoyment continues to decline, especially among current students. The 2025 Walton Family Foundation Voices of Gen Z survey found that 43% of Gen Z students say they rarely or never read for fun. Even though

international student achievement assessments show students who read for enjoyment have typically been stronger performers in reading, irrespective of the amount of time spent reading. Nebraska's education leaders have made literacy a top priority through Nebraska's comprehensive leading state development program. This statewide effort aims to increase third grade proficiency on the state reading assessment to 75% by 2030, expand evidence-based reading instruction in early grades, and ensure teacher preparation is grounded in the science of reading. It also includes family literacy as a tenet. In LB1201, we build on that commitment. It responds directly to the research showing that literacy improves not just strong instruction in the classroom, but with meaningful access to books outside of it. Children who have books at home who can choose to explore reading texts regularly are more likely to read independently, build vocabulary and background knowledge, and develop fluency and comprehension, all of which support the science of reading. The availability of reading materials at home amplifies classroom learning and strengthens reading habits that endure. Yet, many Nebraska children, especially those from low-income families, do not have consistent access to books at home. This gap contributes to disparities in reading engagement and achievement, and it undermines our statewide goals for literacy. National research shows that early access to books increases reading frequency, improves vocabulary growth, and supports stronger literacy outcomes, particularly when children are able to choose and interact with books that actually interest them. In recognition of these realities, the bill before you today creates a pilot program to expand daily take-home book access in our elementary schools, focusing on kindergarten through third grade. Under the pilot, the Nebraska Department of Education would work with participating school districts, and they will provide high-quality, age-appropriate books that students can take home each day. The pilot would prioritize schools with the greatest need, including those with higher percentages of economically disadvantaged students and lower reading proficiency. Participants-- participating districts would track student engagement with the program and report on literacy outcomes and reading assessment data so that we can evaluate the pilot's impact and determine next steps. This is not a one-size-fits-all initiative. It is a strategic, evidence-based intervention designed to complement classroom instruction, strengthen family involvement, and increase the frequency and joy of reading outside of school hours. Providing books for students to take home daily is a relatively low-cost, but high-impact strategy that has shown positive effects in other local book access initiatives here in

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Nebraska and across the country. Expanding access to books helps young readers practice skills learned in school, build confidence, and develop the habit of reading that benefits them for a lifetime. Nebraska's literacy journey is already underway through statewide commitment and strategic planning. This pilot program is a practical next step, a way to give our youngest learners a trusted partner in reading a book they can read every day at home with their family or independently. I respectfully ask for your support of this legislation and ask for commitment to putting books into the hands of Nebraska's children. Thank you.

MURMAN: Thank you. And we won't be able to ask you any questions, unfortunately. I'm sure you'd have all the answers.

CRISTINA PRENTICE: Thank you.

MURMAN: Thanks. Thank you. Proponents for LB1201?

ANGIE MILLER: It is much warmer up here.

HUGHES: It is an icebox in here.

ANGIE MILLER: Good afternoon, members of the committee. My name is Angie, A-n-g-i-e, Miller, M-i-l-l-e-r, and I'm here in my capacity as Executive Director of Delivering Infinite Bookshelves for Kids, or DIBS for Kids, a nonprofit based in Omaha, Nebraska. This school year, DIBS served 7,000 Nebraska elementary students by providing classroom libraries for students to check out books for nightly reading at home. As of today, those students in public, parochial, and independent schools have taken home over 335,000 books this year, and are on pace for 500,000. Those are interesting outputs, but they are not outcomes. And we know, though, that providing books at home on a high dosage, high quality works. Our own program evaluation, a 5-year longitudinal study, with 4,000 students showed that kids-- students in Title I schools made statistically significant reading improvements, irrespective of age, gender, native language, prior academic achievement reported parental involvement because they received books. And when students receive-- take home 80 books a year every year from kindergarten, first, second and third grade they will make a full year of reading gains. That program evaluation is buttressed by evidence-based academic research. Specifically, the University of Pennsylvania has studied the ability of access to books in a kindergarten class and discovered that children made moderate or made statistically significant reading gains with moderate effects and,

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thereby, reduced cost because higher, higher level, more expensive interventions were not needed. An investment in classroom libraries and parental engagement materials pays off. We know that in our own work. We know that because of the sheer amount of books we send home for our students. But we also know it from what our students say, that they enjoy the books, that they get background knowledge. And what we do know, as you look at Scarborough's Reading Rope in front of you, is that reading is not just decoding. It's not phonemic awareness, it's not just phonics, but it's also what's called language comprehension, background knowledge, vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and the like. One can decode but not have meaning. One can have meaning but not be able to decode. Books provide the bridge to be able to bring together decoding and comprehension so students do achieve on grade level third grade reading. My hope for you today is to show that programs like this engage families. They're supportive of a comprehensive literacy program and they are sustainable and that they bring together both families, parents, and children in a way that supports the overall literacy goals of the state, of the Governor, and in a way that is accessible to all students. And if I may leave you with a comment from one of the students in a pre-K classroom that we serve: Thank you for all of the books. Now I know all about the solar system. Now I don't know if a four-year-old knows about the solar system, but my point being, now you have someone interested in it. I'd be happy to take any questions you may have, and thank you for your time and consideration.

MURMAN: Thank you. Your books are all traditional, like traditional books, not electronic, right?

ANGIE MILLER: Yeah, but tactile, physical books. Yes.

MURMAN: Yeah, I should say physical rather than traditional.

ANGIE MILLER: I understood what you meant.

MURMAN: The way we-- books have always been, until recently. But do you have any statistics on, like, physical books compared to electronic books, how well they--

ANGIE MILLER: Yeah.

MURMAN: --how much better they are?

ANGIE MILLER: Yeah, there's a lot of research coming out about that, Senator Murman, physical-- well, let's talk about this. The reason I have to wear reading glasses for all of you is because I've seen the

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screen too much and that's the same of, you know, our elementary students. But in all seriousness, physical books, the research is showing, are necessary to make that bridge between what's on the page and comprehension and vocabulary. Digital books, especially for students in lower income households just don't-- they don't, they don't-- people don't know the why, but they're not as effective as teaching reading skills, as having a literal physical book that you hold in your hand.

MURMAN: OK. Thank you. Any other questions for Ms. Scarborough? Oh, Miller?

ANGIE MILLER: It's OK.

MURMAN: Senator Hughes.

HUGHES: Thank you, Chair Murman. Thanks for coming in, Ms. Miller. So you're a nonprofit already set up in Omaha. Can you just-- I think you mentioned at the beginning, maybe I just didn't quite catch it, you've got some books already going out. How-- because this is a grant program literally designed for, for you, how, how is it working right now? Who's paying for the books going out? What tools are involved? Just kind of your set up now?

ANGIE MILLER: Yeah, so right now, again, we're a nonprofit. It's a mix of philanthropic support, earned revenue, in-kind revenue, individual donations. Grants are from both local, regional, and some national funders. On the earned revenue side, it's-- again, it's a mix of things, be that PTAs, be that agreements with parochial schools or the like. Like I said, in Nebraska, there's over 7,000 of students served and we are not limited to Nebraska. We work in southwest Iowa. We have pilots in Denver and Michigan as well. But that is the, the funding for us.

HUGHES: And do you target certain schools with, like, lower reading levels, typically?

ANGIE MILLER: Yes. Title I, lower reading levels, high English Language Learners. I grew up in western Nebraska so I have a particular affinity for rural schools as well that are not close to public libraries and so that is also an area of focus.

HUGHES: OK. Thank you. Thanks for coming.

ANGIE MILLER: Yeah.

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

ANGIE MILLER: Thank you very much.

MURMAN: Other proponents for LB1201? Any opponents for LB1201? Neu-- you're an opponent?

HEATHER SCHMIDT: I am.

MURMAN: OK.

HEATHER SCHMIDT: Good afternoon. Thank you for being here and listening again. My name is Heather Schmidt, H-e-a-t-h-e-r S-c-h-m-i-d-t. I am a member of the Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council, but I'm not here speaking for them. I'm here speaking for myself as a parent. I am opposed to LB1201. I love the idea of putting books in kids' hands. Everything I do when I come down here is to make sure those kids can read those books. My problem with LB1201 is that it would amend the Reading Improvement Act to include language that says high-quality, age-appropriate. That's on Section 3, line 7. And also line 20, it says, "The department shall provide a recommended list of high-quality books, covering a variety of topics, subjects, and genres in at least English and Spanish, for each participating elementary classroom." Noble cause, absolutely. But in the Reading Improvement Act, the update that happened when you guys funded the literacy coach piece, there were two bills that were brought before this committee. One was LB1254 and the other was LB1055. LB1055, ultimately, passed. That had the reading coaches included in it. LB1254 was the bill that Senator Linehan had brought, and in that bill it-- I think it was that one-- specifically said that it needed to be evidence-based materials in the science of reading. So that's my concern is that the language for this grant changes the intentional language in the Reading Improvement Act that we have to have to make sure that kids are getting structured literacy, decodable readers, everything that supports the science of reading, everything that we're, you know, pushing the teachers to start teaching in the classrooms. A grant for books in book deserts is admirable. I support that idea, just I do not support amending the Reading Improvement Act to take out that intentional language. And the Department of Education does have a \$55 million grant from the federal government. The family literacy is a huge tenet of that. They are building out recommended supports that align with all of this that would be targeted to help families. So with that, I will take any questions.

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MURMAN: Thank you. Any questions for Ms. Schmidt?

HEATHER SCHMIDT: OK. Thank you.

MURMAN: If not, thank you for testifying.

HEATHER SCHMIDT: Thanks.

MURMAN: Other opponents for LB1201? Good afternoon.

CAROLINE EPP: My name is Caroline Epp, C-a-r-o-l-i-n-e E-p-p. Was I supposed to give my address?

MURMAN: No.

CAROLINE EPP: I forgot. I'm going to be honest, I was not prepared to speak, but just in hearing what has come up and knowing how much money it would take to fund this. I just couldn't sit here and not say something. So I am opposed to this. I feel that we need a heart change overall in our state, our country, that we need families more serious about their kids' learning. And more money isn't going to get us anywhere. That it really is a heart matter of parents really caring, and even church families caring and reaching out. So that's, I guess, all I have to say. But I just feel like money does not create better environments or better learning environments. It's the heart. Thank you.

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

HUGHES: Thank you.

MURMAN: Any other opponents for LB1201? Any neutral testifiers for LB1201? If not, you'll have to waive closely. That'll close our hearing-- or excuse me.

HUGHES: Dunixi got off easy.

MURMAN: We have 9 proponents, 45 opponents, zero neutral. And that'll close our hearing for LB1201. Thank you. And that will close our hearing for the day, but we are going to go into executive session.