

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee February 6, 2026  
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**SANDERS:** Welcome to the Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee. I am Rita Sanders. I serve District 45 here in the Legislature. And I am chair of the committee. The purpose of the public hearing is an information-gathering endeavor in which senators on the committee are seeking information about the proposed legislation that they do not know or have not thought about. It allows individuals representing themselves or a group to share their unique perspective on a proposed measure. It also serves as a record about the proposal for future, historical, and legal purposes. A key component of the process is the ability for senators to engage directly with testifiers to ask questions and elicit clarification on information provided. The committee will take up bills in the order that was posted. If you are planning to testify today, please fill one of the green sheets out that are on the back of the room on the table. These are on the table in the back. Be sure-- clearly-- print clearly and fill it out completely. When it is your turn to come forward to testify, give the testifier sheet to the page or to the committee clerk. If you do not wish to testify but would like to indicate your position on a bill, there are also yellow sign-in sheets back on the table as well. These sheets will be included in the exhibit in the official hearing record. When you come up to testify, please speak clearly into the microphone. Tell us your name, and spell your first and last name to ensure we get an accurate record. We will begin each bill hearing today with the introducer's opening statement, followed by proponents on the bill, then opponents, and finally anyone wishing to speak in the neutral. We will finish with a closing statement by the introducer if they wish to give one. We will be using a three-minute light system for all testifiers. When you begin your testimony, the light comes on on the table green. When the yellow light comes on, you will have one minute remaining. When the red light indicates your time has ended, an audible alarm will also sound. Questions from the committee may follow. Also, committee members may come and go during the hearing. This has nothing to do with the importance of the bill being heard. It is just part of the process, as senators may have bills to introduce in other committees. A few final items to facilitate today's hearing. If you have handouts or copies of your testimony, please bring up at least 12 copies and give them to the page. If you do not have enough copies, the page will make sufficient copies for you. Please note that thumb drives, CDs, DVDs, oversized documents, books, lists of signatures, and similar will not be accepted as exhibits for the record. Please silence or turn off your cell phones. You may see committee members using their electronic devices to access more information. Verbal outbursts or applause are

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not permitted in the hearing room. Such behavior may be caused for you to be asked to leave the hearing. Finally, committee procedures for all committees state that written position comments on a bill to be included in the record must be submitted by 8 a.m. the day of the hearing. The only acceptable method of submission is via the Legislature's website at legislature.nebraska.gov [SIC]. Written position letters will be included in the official hearing record, but only those testifying in person before the committee will be included on the committee statement. I will now have the committee members with us today introduce themselves, starting to my far right.

**ANDERSEN:** Good afternoon. I'm Senator Bob Andersen, representing District 49, which is northwest Sarpy County and Omaha.

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

**WORDEKEMPER:** Dave Wordekemper, District 15: Dodge County, western Douglas County.

**SANDERS:** And Bob Andersen-- Senator Bob Andersen is the vice chair of the committee. We also have-- Senator Cavanaugh, if you'd like to introduce yourself.

**J. CAVANAUGH:** John Cavanaugh, District 9: midtown Omaha.

**SANDERS:** Perfect timing.

**J. CAVANAUGH:** Yeah.

**SANDERS:** Also assisting the committee today: to my right is our legal counsel, Dick Clark; to my far left is committee clerk, Julie Cash. And also, we have three pages with us today. They are Luke Perry from Gretna, who is a freshman at UNO and majoring in history and political science. We also have Grace Harper from Loveland, Colorado, who is a junior at UNL and majoring in political science. And also with us on-- today is Joel Henderson [SIC: Henson] from Lincoln, who is a junior at UNL and majoring in political science and advertising in public relations. Thank you very much for being here. I'll now start the hearing on LB1048. Welcome, Speaker Arch.

**ARCH:** Thank you. Good afternoon, Senator Sanders, members of the Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee. For the record, my name is John Arch, J-o-h-n A-r-c-h. And I represent the 14th Legislative District in Sarpy County. I'm here this afternoon to

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introduce LB1048. I introduced LB1048 on behalf of Governor Pillen, and this bill is a continuation of the Governor's efforts to get rid of government waste and improve efficiencies. I applaud Governor Pillen for his ongoing endeavor to clean out the closets of state government and bringing forward what I consider to be good government bills. Last session, I introduced LB346 at the Governor's request, and that bill-- which passed-- terminated or consolidated nearly 40 different board, commissions, and committees. And we'll talk a little bit about that bill during the next hearing. But also last session, the Legislature passed LB376, introduced by the Health and Human Services Committee. This bill eliminated or modified over 35 outdated government reports. LB1048 builds on LB376's efforts and calls for eliminating or streamlining 24 additional agency reports. These reports have been identified by agencies as outdated and irrelevant or duplicative of other reporting requirements. These reports take time-- take staff time and state dollars to prepare. As the Legislature passes new initiatives, tho-- those initiatives often come with reporting requirements, allowing the Legislature to monitor programs and make adjustments as needed. Once a program is solidly established, that information is generally readily available through the ad-- administrating agency. To pile on reporting requirements without periodically reviewing their value merely serves to increase wasteful bureaucracy. I do have an amendment that I have shared with the committee. It is AM1957. First, the amendment would reinsert stricken language regarding the Small Business Compliance Advisory Panel. Apparently there was a feeling like that report needed to continue, so we put that back in. And second, the amendment would ensure LB1048 does not conflict with a bill we just passed on Final Reading-- I think it was yesterday-- LB518. LB1048 seeks to consolidate the mandatory discharge report with the Correctional System Overcrowding Emergency Act. As you may recall, LB518, introduced by Senator Juarez, added reporting requirements to the mandatory discharge report. And so this amendment incorporates those changes approved in LB518 so they don't conflict. So that concludes my testimony. I encourage the committee to advance LB1048 with AM1957. With that, I would also say that, as we did last year with the, with the report as well as the commission bill, when it, when it came to the floor, we were always ready to take edits. I mean, if somebody feels a report is essential, needs to continue, that's fine. We just-- we're just looking to eliminate reports that nobody's reading, nobody cares about. The time has passed for getting a lot of feedback on, on whatever the new program was. And if we can do that and, and-- we'll, we'll have

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achieved something for the efficiency of government. So with that, I will pause and see if there's any questions.

**SANDERS:** Thank you, Senator Arch. Are there any questions from the committee? Senator Lonowski.

**LONOWSKI:** Thank you, Chair Sanders. Real quickly, sir, are there any positions eliminated along with these reports?

**ARCH:** Not that I'm aware of.

**LONOWSKI:** OK.

**ARCH:** That, that-- that's-- that was never communicated to me.

**LONOWSKI:** OK. Thank you.

**SANDERS:** Any other questions from the committee? Senator Cavanaugh.

**J. CAVANAUGH:** Thank you, Chair. Thanks, Speaker Arch, for your continued work on this issue.

**ARCH:** Mm-hmm.

**J. CAVANAUGH:** I just wanted to point out-- so in the comments, there's one neutral from Justin Hubly from the-- NAPE/AFSCME. And it doesn't specifically say that they absolutely have to have this wor-- suggestion award board and suggestion award system, but it does say that they, they may-- I guess it doesn't sound like they're opposed to eliminating it, but I just wanted to put into the official record here--

**ARCH:** OK.

**J. CAVANAUGH:** --that was one of the concerns that was raised--

**ARCH:** All right.

**J. CAVANAUGH:** --in case somebody wants to raise it later. If you want to comment on that.

**ARCH:** Again, if it-- if, if it's something that needs to be raised to our attention, we'll, we'll certainly, we'll certainly follow up on it.

**J. CAVANAUGH:** Thank you.

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**ARCH:** Yeah.

**SANDERS:** Are there any other questions from the committee? See none.  
Will you stay to close?

**ARCH:** Yeah, I'll stay to close.

**SANDERS:** Thank you, Senator Arch. Are there any proponents on LB1048?  
Good afternoon. Welcome.

**DUSTIN ANTONELLO:** Good afternoon. Good afternoon, Chairperson Sanders and members of the Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee. My name is Dustin Antonello, which is spelled D-u-s-t-i-n A-n-t-o-n-e-l-l-o. And I'm here on behalf of Governor Jim Pillen to provide testimony in support of LB1048. I want to start by thanking Sen-- Speaker Arch for agreeing to introduce this bill on the Governor's behalf and continuing to partner with our administration on cutting governor-- government waste and improving government efficiencies. Last year, Governor Pillen signed LB346, which was also introduced by Speaker Arch. And as a result, approximately 40 boards, commissions, committees, and other entities were combined or eliminated. In many cases, the work performed by these boards and commissions were duplic-- duplicative or already carried out by a state agency. This legislation further builds upon Governor Pillen's commitment to clean out the closets by getting rid of unnecessary reports required to be submitted on a regular basis by state code agencies. By eliminating these outdated reports, state employees will be able to focus their time on providing critical services to Nebraskans instead of wasting resources on irrelevant reports that mostly go unread. The Legislature over decades has added new reporting requirements, often with good cause. Most of these reports were intended to bring transparency to a pressing issue at the time. However, the objectives behind some of those reports have since become obsolete, yet they are still on the books. The idea behind this bill came after last session's passage of LB376, which eliminated 28 outdated reports and modified 8 others that were required to be produced by the Department of Health and Human Services. Following the successful passage of LB376, we decided to extend this effort to all state agencies and work with agency staff over the interim to modify all reporting requirements that could either be eliminated altogether or modified in order to make the submission process more convenient by consolidating reporting requirements. All told, LB1048 will impact roughly 25 reports that are required to be submitted by state code agencies to the Legislature on a regular basis. In closing, our team

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is willing to amend the legislation to remove any reports from LB1048 that the Legislature or stakeholders continue to see value in. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

**SANDERS:** Thank you very much for your testimony. See if there are any questions from the committee. Senator Guereca.

**GUERECA:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you for coming in. I got in a little late towards the end of the, the Speaker's testimony. Talk me through the elimination of the report from the Broadband Office.

**DUSTIN ANTONELLO:** So my understanding is this was this was a-- this was a bill that passed in 2024. I believe it b-- was by Senator Bostelman that required telecom companies to submit their rates to the Nebraska Broadband Office. But as far as I know, despite their efforts, they have never been able to get the telecom companies to provide that information to them. So that's why they suggested its elimination. It may just be that we need to coax the telecom companies to comply with the law, but that was their, their suggestion.

**GUERECA:** All right. Thank you. Appreciate that.

**SANDERS:** Any other questions? Senator Cavanaugh.

**J. CAVANAUGH:** Thank you, Chair. Thanks for being here. I was going to ask about the Water Resources Cash Fund report, but first I just want to say it's a fantastic-looking report. I mean, it's just-- everybody go check it out. It's got great dynamic. Got a lot of maps. Can zoom in on the maps and the watersheds and things. I mean-- so first off, already, it's, it's wonderful. I, I can't imagine that more people aren't reading it. But my question is, is the Water Resources Cash Fund one of the funds that we've transferred money out of the Environmental Trust into that fund?

**DUSTIN ANTONELLO:** I would have to ask the, ask the Department of Water and Energy and Environment to follow up on that.

**J. CAVANAUGH:** Well, I think we've done it-- previously in the budgeting process, the Legislature has moved that money.

**DUSTIN ANTONELLO:** Yeah. I'd ha-- I'd have to double-check with them, but I, I do know that this report is still required for them to submit. So in order to consolidate the amount of reports that they have to submit throughout the year, they want to be able to add these

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four reports that they're required to submit separately into their annual report in order to-- in order to make it more convenient for their staff.

**J. CAVANAUGH:** So it wouldn't be eliminated. It would just be condensed. So they would still potentially have this--

**DUSTIN ANTONELLO:** Correct.

**J. CAVANAUGH:** OK. I got you now. I'm-- I missed that column on the end there. Thank you for the clarification.

**SANDERS:** Are there any other questions from the committee? See none.

**DUSTIN ANTONELLO:** Thank you.

**SANDERS:** Thank you very much for your testimony. Are there any other proponents on LB1048? See none. Any opponents on LB1048? Any neutral testifiers on LB1048? With that, Senator Arch, if you'd like to close. The online comments: proponents, 1; opponents, 0; and 1 in the neutral on LB1048.

**ARCH:** Thank you, Senator Sanders and committee. I-- again, I would appreciate a positive vote on this. But-- and if there are any other questions-- yeah. It's-- I-- it, it, it was a variety of issues that they're trying to solve with this. You could, you could hear that some were rolled into an annual report. Some were eliminated entirely. One in particular-- I, I think, Senator Cavanaugh, you, you talked about eliminating DAS. It, it was interesting. LB-- LB346, the one we passed last session, directs the state personnel to absorb this program. However, the state personnel director indicates a downward-- if not deficient-- use of the program. There was no pending ideas for award. So the program itself is apparently not being used. We're not eliminating the program. We're just eliminating the report on, on that. It was actually established in 1978, but the last award was in 2021. So-- anyway, there's a variety of reasons for eliminating or combining these reports. And if you have other questions, you know, after today's hearing, I'd be happy to provide you with whatever information you would a-- we would-- you would like.

**SANDERS:** Thank you. Are there any questions for Senator Arch? See none. Thank you. This now closes the hearing on LB1048. And we will move on to LB905. Welcome back.

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**ARCH:** Thank you. Moving on to boards and commissions. All right. Good afternoon, Senator Sanders, members of the Government and Military Aff-- Veterans Affairs Committee. For the record, my name is John Arch, J-o-h-n A-r-c-h. I represent the 14th Legislative District in Sarpy County. And I'm here today to introduce LB905. This bill is essentially a cleanup of a measure the Legislature passed last session. But LB905 was too involved to be a Revisor bill, so it, it is a standalone bill. As you may recall, during the 2025 session, we passed LB346, which terminated or reassigned 39 different boards, commissions, committees, and councils. The bill called for a majority of the provisions to go into effect July of 2026. And I introduced LB346 on behalf of the Governor as part of his efforts to eliminate government inefficiencies. The 39 commissions and boards in LB346 touch a multitude of areas of statutes. During the interim-- when the Revisor's Office codifies passed laws into the statutes-- the office found parts of LB346 that were in conflict with other provisions of law and did not harmonize with existing statute. I want to personally thank our revisor, Marcia McClurg, for her work on this. LB346 was a large, complex bill, and she put in extra work to correct the inaccuracies of LB346, ensuring the policies we adopted last session are properly codified and able to be carried out. And this work then is reflected in LB905. In addition to cleaning up the provisions adopted last year in LB346, LB905 provides clarification with respect to the transferring of duties from eliminated boards to other entities. LB346 eliminated the Board of Examiners for County Highway and City Street Superintendents and transferred its duties to the Board of Public Roads Classifications and Standards. LB905 clarifies that the members of the board-- of the former board shall be presumed eligible to serve on the Board of Public Roads Classifications and Standards. The bill also provides that the Board of Public Roads Classification and Standards is statutorily authorized to meet at such times and places necessary to carry out its duties and that members who are appointed to the board when the Legislature is not in session shall act as interim appointees. LB346 also terminated the Vacant Building and Excess Land Committee and assigned its duties to the Department of Administrative Services. LB905 clarifies that the Department for Administrative Service is responsible for declaring whether a state-owned building or land is vacant or excess. Additionally, the bill clarifies that the director is also responsible for granting utility easements on state-owned land. Again, LB905 is necessary to ensure the policies we adopted last session are able to be carried out as intended. And I ask you in advance-- in, in advance for passing LB905 out of committee. And so, again, this is, this is a

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bill that really could have been a Revisor's bill, but it just was too complicated to be passed in that, in that form.

**SANDERS:** Thank you very much. Are there any questions for Senator Arch? Senator Lonowski.

**LONOWSKI:** Thank you, Chair Sanders. Thank you, Speaker Arch.

**ARCH:** Mm-hmm.

**LONOWSKI:** This is more of a general question here, but I look at the Nebraska Potato Development Committee. If there's funds left in there, where do they go? In any--

**ARCH:** If the, if the-- if it is-- it-- you mean if, if we end the-- if we end the board, if we end the program--

**LONOWSKI:** Correct.

**ARCH:** --where do those funds go? I'll have to get back to you on that. I believe they, they roll to the General Fund, but I'm--

**LONOWSKI:** That's what I would guess, but--

**ARCH:** I believe that's-- I believe that's the case. If that is incorrect, I will be sure and clarify that for you.

**LONOWSKI:** I-- I'm just curious. Thank you.

**ARCH:** Yup.

**SANDERS:** Are there any questions? See none. Thank you very much.

**ARCH:** And I'll stay and close.

**SANDERS:** Thank you. Are there any other-- oth-- are there any proponents on LB905? Any opponents on LB905? Any testimony in the neutral for LB905? I see none. Online comments for LB905: opponents-- or, proponents, 0; opponents, 2; neutral, 0. And to close.

**ARCH:** I will waive close on that bill.

**SANDERS:** OK. So we'll move on. We'll close on LB905. And we will open on LB1087.

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**ARCH:** Thank you. Good afternoon once again, Senator Sanders, members of the Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee. For the record, my name is John Arch, J-o-h-n A-r-c-h. And I represent the 14th Legislative District in Sarpy County. I'm here today to introduce LB1087. Now that we've talked about eliminating nearly 40 boards and commissions, I figure this would be an appropriate time to introduce legislation to create a new commission. LB1087 calls for the creation of the Nebraska-Ireland Commission. The commission will be comprised of ten members, including the director of the Department of Agriculture or designee, the director of the Department of Economic Development or designee, a representative from a postsecondary educational institution, two representatives from a business association such as a trade organization or chamber of commerce, a representative from nonprofit offering child and family services programs, a public member, and three members of the Legislature from each congressional district, who shall serve as nonvoting members. The purpose of the Nebraska-Ireland Commission is to advance, promote, and encourage business and other mutually beneficial activities between Nebraska and Ireland. The bill does establish the Nebraska-Ireland Fund, but I have no intention of taxpayer dollars ever being appropriated to that fund. However, a fund is necessary to hold any moneys raised on behalf of the commission-- gifts, and grants. For administrative and budgetary purposes, the commission will be housed within the Department of Economic Development. So that's the bill in a nutshell. But the commission proposed under LB1007 [SIC: LB1087] is not like other state commissions with a narrowly defined purpose. The commission envisioned under LB1087 is specifically designed to be a long-term, broad-based entity that will serve as a catalyst to present mutually beneficial opportunities to leaders in business, research, education, and whatever else in both Nebraska and Ireland. The relationships developed through the commission will reveal and open up previously unidentified avenues for partnerships and possibilities of investment and global expansion. 25 other states have already adopted similar commissions, and 20 more are currently in the legislative process of consideration this year. The initial Ireland Trade Commission legislation was drafted by a member of the New Jersey American-Irish State Legislators Caucus after a trip to Ireland in 2022. After the visit to Ireland, members of the caucus asked how its members could support the peace process in Ireland and the Good Friday Agreement. Fostering relationships and elevating economic security for the entirety of Ireland is essential in maintaining global stability. Thus, Ireland Trade Commission was established. As I mentioned, 25 states now have

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commissions in place, with over 300 commissioners representing the various states. As the biggest English-speaking country in the European Union, Ireland is offering itself as a doorway to the rest of the EU, which represents a market of 450 million people in 27 countries. But it is also an all-- Ire-- an, an all-Ireland commission, including both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. And this would give Nebraska access to both the UK as well as the EU market simultaneously. I'll explain a little bit more about that here in a-- here in a second. Irish exports to North America total \$7.3 billion, are set to grow by 19% by 2029. According to the American Chamber of Commerce Ireland, over 780 Irish-owned companies in the U.S. directly employ over 200,000 people. Conversely, there are over 870 U.S.-owned companies with operations in Ireland directly employing over 240,000 people. Again, a relationship of mutual benefit, and I want, I want Nebraska to be part of it. LB1087 will help us build Nebraska's relationship with Ireland, though currently-- through currently unknown opportunities, opportunities in education, investment, research, or personal association. I do have an amendment that I have shared with you and that I am bringing at the request of the interim director of the Department of Economic Development, Maureen Larsen. AM2000 simply expands the stakeholders available to facilitate the work of the commission. Also, I have two letters of su-- of support of the bill that I would like to share. These are being handed out. I understand these will not be part of the record, but I do encourage you to read them. One is from Bertie Ahern, the former prime minister of Ireland, and one is from Senator Mark Daly, the pre-- the current president and speaker of the Irish Senate. They tried to submit their comments through our online portal but had technical problems. I encourage you to support LB100-- LB1087. And to quote from Prime Minister A-- Mr. Ahern's letter-- which I will have to note references the incorrect bill number, by the way-- they had, quote, for the principles of cooperation, partnership, and peace, which it reflects. I, I just want to go off script a little bit here and, and talk about-- and talk about this. I, I became intrigued. It-- I-- it-- I found out about these Irish-- these Ireland commissions-- the American-Ireland commissions a couple of years ago and-- from Senator Mark Daly, who's been here-- he was here in January of '25 and, and, and this, and this year as well. And he, he was kind of the genius behind all of this, but, but what it is is really-- it is a-- it is, it is more than a trade commission. So trade commissions go to a country. And they-- the Governor may lead a trade commission or the Secretary of State may lead a trade commission. And there are people within the state of Nebraska, for instance, that want to go talk to

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tho-- that country to see if there's opportunities to sell what they have, sell their product in that country. And, and it's a-- it's-- those trade commissions are great, but they're kind of one and done. And, and when-- and you get something out of them or you don't get anything out of them. And, and they're a lot of work to, to set up and coordinate and-- so what this is, this is a-- this is a meeting of these-- all the states commissions meet in the fall in Dublin. And they-- it happens to surround the football game, the kickoff of, of our college sport here, but it-- but it's-- it surrounds that. But what he does-- what, what Senator Daly does and others is they bring all the ministers together from, from the nation of Ireland, plus coun-- companies come, and, and you-- it is-- it's like a-- it, it-- it's like a conference where you can say, well, I want, I want to talk about this, and they say, oh, here's the Minister of Agriculture and, and-- right here in the room and-- go, go talk to him. It's so, it's so difficult sometimes on these trade commissions to find the door. How do I-- how do I get into the EU? I-- I'd like-- I-- I'd like to talk to somebody about getting into the European Union and selling. Ireland is offering that door to these states. So you, you, you ge-- ge-- you get a commission, maybe the commissioners-- maybe all the commissioners go one year, maybe three commissioners go the next year. But I, I will-- I'll give you an experience that I had in Ireland because I, I visited there. And I'm in Cork, at the University of Cork. And-- large room, lots of professors, faculty sitting around the table. There were a, a number of states. This was an NCSL Leadership Conference. Number of states in the room. And-- they had-- people are just talking about the various connections to the United States. And this person-- a faculty member over here says, well, you know, let me tell you about my relationships with the University of Nebraska. It was like, like, what? The University of Nebraska? I mean-- well, agriculture, and they were doing research together and, you know, and, and so they were, they were exchanging faculty and, and all of this. And, and it's those types of relationships-- I think that this provides that opportunity. It's not one of those things like they say, like, hey, come to Ireland and you can sell us \$5 million of your product. But it is one of those things where you come to Ireland with an idea and you're going to have people in the room that you can talk to. One of the-- one of the things that Mark Daly told me the last time he was here was, at one of these trips, they had actually arranged 780 companies in Ireland to come to the-- to come to this event with, with a request. These 780 companies all expressed an interest from Ireland to, to come to the United States and, and have a footprint in the U.S. We want to open a-- we want to open a warehouse,

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we want to open a manufacturing company, we want to open-- you know. We want to come. And so they're looking for, like, well, where should we go? Should we go to New Jersey? Should we go to Nebraska? Where should we go? And that kind of opportunity would be so difficult to program yourself, you know. I-- how could you get that number of companies in the room all at once? But they do that. Now I want to talk for a second about the EU and about the UK and all of that. Ireland's complicated as a, as a country and, and, and its, its national identity. And, and when the United Kingdom broke away from the EU and-- with Brexit, they became their own-- they became their own trading partner. And, and, and, and Ireland remained in the EU. Northern Ireland, on the other hand-- while it is a unified Ireland, Northern Ireland-- Northern Ireland still gives you access to the UK's market. So they have relationship to the United Kingdom. Ireland has relationships to the EU. And so you're-- you can go to Ireland and-- both-- market through Northern Ireland to the UK and their market as well as entering-- as, as entering the EU through, through the country of Ireland. So it's a unique opportunity. Ireland is the largest English-speaking country within, within the European Union. And so you don't have the-- you don't have the language barriers and-- and again, it is a no-cost opportunity to the state of Nebraska to participate in something like this. So that's why I think it's, it's, it's worth our-- it's worth our time. With that, I'll close-- I'll end my opening.

**SANDERS:** All, all exciting information. Let's see if there's any questions from the committee. Senator Hunt.

**HUNT:** Thank you, Chair Sanders. Thank you, Speaker Arch.

**ARCH:** Sure.

**HUNT:** I like this bill. Do you have testifiers coming?

**ARCH:** I do.

**HUNT:** Are there some folks-- OK.

**ARCH:** There are some folks.

**HUNT:** I thought maybe-- I had a--

**ARCH:** Enthusiastic testifiers.

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**HUNT:** Great, great. I don't, I don't think that-- I don't want to speak ignorantly. I don't think Ireland is unified. Northern Ireland is a completely different--

**ARCH:** Well, it's complicated.

**HUNT:** They, they have kind of an open border where there can be trade, but it's not one government or anything like that.

**ARCH:** Yeah. I couldn't begin to explain the complexities of, of Ireland. And, and, and even-- and even-- I mean, the, the-- one of the-- one of the me-- members who provided us with the letter was very instrumental in negotiating the, I would call it, peace in Northern Ireland.

**HUNT:** Yes.

**ARCH:** Bertie. And I had a chance to meet him as well. Great gentleman. And he, he-- yeah. It, it is, it is very complicated. I, I will tell you that I asked-- so, so have you got this all resolved with the United Kingdom as to your relationship? Because there, of course, was independence, war that was fought. And you-- the answer was kind of like, we're working on it.

**HUNT:** Yeah.

**ARCH:** Yeah.

**HUNT:** It's, it's really special how meaningful and important Ireland is to so many Americans. You know, there's so many immigrant stories from Ireland. I got to go there a couple years ago with ACYPL to Northern Ireland.

**ARCH:** Oh, yeah.

**HUNT:** And so we spent a little time in Ireland, but most of the trip was in Northern Ireland. And that was very educational and interesting. So I think anything we can do to continue to build the relationship between the U.S.--

**ARCH:** Yeah.

**HUNT:** --and Northern Ireland and Ireland and Nebraska especially is a really good thing.

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**ARCH:** Yeah. I, I would say that-- you know, the leadership of Ireland, Mark Daly's very vocal about it. Without the United States, there would not be peace in Ireland. The United States played a huge role in brokering that deal that, that shut down the Troubles.

**HUNT:** Yeah. Thank you.

**SANDERS:** Any other questions? Senator Andersen.

**ANDERSEN:** Thank you, Chairwoman. Thank you, Speaker, for being here and bringing the bill. You talk about the complexity. I'd also add the, the intertwining of the commonwealth as well. So although they're separate, they're all still united in, in different ways.

**ARCH:** Mm-hmm.

**ANDERSEN:** Much more complex than the way it is here.

**ARCH:** Yep.

**ANDERSEN:** Are there any other countries that we have this kind of relationship-- this kind of commission with now?

**ARCH:** Not that I'm--

**ANDERSEN:** Or is this the first one?

**ARCH:** Not that I'm aware of. I, I, I am not aware of any other-- I'm not aware of anybody that has tried this concept of, of these commissions.

**ANDERSEN:** Yeah.

**ARCH:** So I, I-- I'm not aware of any other.

**ANDERSEN:** So then how would you-- because trade falls underneath Secretary of State--

**ARCH:** Right.

**ANDERSEN:** --right? So it seems like we're kind of bridging between a couple of different parts of the, of the Nebraska government. How would you differ-- differentiate this commission between that-- or is it a cooperative effort with the Secretary of State's Office?

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**ARCH:** It's a-- it's cooperative. it, it-- it's not to replace trade commissions. It's not to-- it is-- it really is-- it's a fostering of relationships. And so if there's specific-- if there's specific trade, it-- I mean, it can roll under this or it can stand alone. It-- you know, it-- it's not exclusive. It's just a-- it's a, it's a mechanism for fostering those relationships.

**ANDERSEN:** Thank you. Last year, there was a bill brought about establishing a exchange and an enter relationship with an African country. I think it was Ghana. Yeah. I, I don't know if that's actually-- how far that's moved.

**ARCH:** Not aware.

**ANDERSEN:** Thank you.

**ARCH:** Mm-hmm.

**SANDERS:** Are there any other questions from the committee? See none. I think you have a few testifiers. Thank you. Any proponents on LB1087? Good afternoon. Welcome.

**MATT BLOMSTEDT:** Good afternoon, Chair Sanders and members of the Government Committee. For the record, my name is Matt Blomstedt, M-a-t-t B-l-o-m-s-t-e-d-t. And I am here today on behalf of the University of Nebraska in support of LB1087. Appreciate Speaker Arch introducing this and in-- involving us in the conversations as well. The University of Nebraska views Ireland as a strategic partner for advancing education, research, and economic development that directly aligns with Nebraska's strengths. LB1087 would help buil-- help the state build a more coordinated and intentional approach to partnerships that are already producing results. Across the NU system, our campuses have long-standing academic exchange relationships with Irish institutions, particularly the University College Cork. Through the Mid America Universities International Consortium, students at UNK, UNO, and UNL study in Ireland while remaining enrolled in their home institutions. These exchanges expand access to global education, strengthen cultural and professional ties, and help Nebraska attract globally-minded students, who often return with skills that benefit our workforce and communities. Research collaboration is another critical dimension of this relationship. Nebraska and Ireland share deep expertise in agriculture, food science, and sustainability. University of Nebraska researchers are actively engaged with Irish partners through the US-Ireland Research and Development Partnership,

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working on projects related to precision agriculture, data analytics, climate-resilient crops, water management, and food security. These efforts directly support Nebraska producers while positioning our state as a leader in globally relevant agricultural innovation. At the University of the Nebraska Medical Center, Ireland's ambassador to the United States has visited Nebraska to explore collaboration around advanced simulation, virtual and augmented learning technologies, and health innovation. The-- these conversations reflect strong international interests in Nebraska-developed technologies and open doors for future research, workforce, and commercial partnerships. LB1087 would help Nebraska move from a collection of successful but separate efforts to a more coordinated strategy, one that supports research collaboration, strengthens work-- workforce pipelines, and creates new opportunities for business engagement between Nebraska and Ireland. The University of Nebraska believes the Nebraska-Ireland Commission would be a valuable tool for advancing the state's educational research and economic interests. And we "respectably" urge your support of LB1087.

**SANDERS:** Thank you for your testimony, Mr. Blomstedt. We'll check to see if there are any questions from the committee.

**MATT BLOMSTEDT:** I was going to volunteer that I want to go over on the, on the exchanges too. That's-- I-- that's all I wanted to put into the record, so. You know, it-- I've been there twice. It's fantastic, so.

**SANDERS:** Yeah. Hope to get to go. See no questions for you. Thank you for your testimony. Any other proponents on LB1087? Good afternoon, and welcome.

**COLM BREATHNACH:** Thank you. Good afternoon, Madam Chairman and members of the committee. Thank you for this opportunity to testify to you today. My name is Colm Breathnach. That's C-o-l-m B-r-e-a-t-h-n-a-c-h. I live at 6777 Platteview Road, Papillion, Sarpy County, Nebraska, and I am here representing the Ancient Order of Hibernians of Nebraska. I have lived in Nebraska 36 years. I was born in Ireland. I am a proud University of Nebraska graduate. And today, I am a business owner in Omaha. But Nebraska is my home. The Irish-American community-- the Irish-American community has played a significant role in Nebraska's history and continues to contribute to our state's economic, cultural, and civic life. This bill builds on the legacy in a way that directly benefits Nebraska. Father Flanagan of Boys Town and Edward Creighton of Creighton University are both two of the many contributions of the

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Irish con-- of the Irish community to this state. Ireland is a gateway to the European Union. It is a first-world, English-speaking nation with deep ties to U.S. business, education, and innovation. Strengthening formal relationships with Ireland creates a new opportunity for Nebraska students and workers and businesses. From an educational standpoint, Nebraska offers strong universities and research institutions. Expanding and formalizing student and academic exchange programs would give Nebraska students access to global experiences while keeping connections rooted here in our great state. From an economic perspective, Ireland punches well above its weight. The Irish market represents four times Nebraska's GDP and is a global leader in biomedical and informational technology systems. At the same time, as we know, Nebraska excels in agriculture, particularly in beef production. There is real, practical trade and investment opportunities for both sides. This bill establishes and strengthens relationships with Irish business and educational communities, opening doors for trade, research collaboration, and workforce development that benefit Nebraska long term. For these reasons, the Ancient Order of Hibernians of Nebraska support this bill, and we do so as we head towards our national convention in Omaha, where we strengthen Irish-American ties that remain a priority. Go raibh míle maith agat, mo chara. Thank you for your time. And I'm happy to answer any questions.

**SANDERS:** Thank you very much for your testimony. So Ireland speaks English, but that accent-- it's pretty heavy. It almost needs interpretation as well. But thank you for your testimony.

**COLM BREATHNACH:** Thank you. When I go home, they say I have an American accent.

**SANDERS:** Really? Let's check with the committee if there are any questions for you. Any-- Senator Cavanaugh.

**J. CAVANAUGH:** Thank you. Thanks for being here. Obv-- I'm a co-sponsor of this bill, so supportive. I just wanted to know-- so you came here to go to the university. How did you make that connection?

**COLM BREATHNACH:** My sister came here before me. My sister is actually the first PhD student out of University of Nebraska-Omaha, so we had ties to Nebraska already. And so I came out here, and I am a graduate of the College of Civil Engineering.

**J. CAVANAUGH:** OK. Well, thanks, thanks for being here.

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**COLM BREATHNACH:** Thank you.

**SANDERS:** Senator Hunt.

**HUNT:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you for being here, sir. I can understand you just fine. Do you speak Irish?

**COLM BREATHNACH:** Yes. My father is-- grew up in the Irish-speaking region, so my dad and all his children-- all ten of us-- are what we call Gaeilgeoirs. We are all fluent.

**HUNT:** Wow. That's really, really cool. Thank you.

**SANDERS:** It's a cool accent too.

**COLM BREATHNACH:** Thank you.

**SANDERS:** Any other questions for Mr. Burnock [SIC]? See none. Thank you for coming in.

**COLM BREATHNACH:** Thank you.

**SANDERS:** Appreciate your testimony. Are there other proponents of LB1087? Good afternoon. Welcome.

**HUNTER TRAYNOR:** Good afternoon, Chairwoman Sanders, members of the Government Committee. It's not often that I'm before you, but I'm eager to be here today. I understood the memo was red, but I brought my green. I think Callum [SIC] as well. My name is Hunter Traynor, spelled H-u-n-t-e-r T-r-a-y-n-o-r. I'm here today on behalf of the Nebraska Chamber of Commerce and Industry as well as the Greater Omaha Chamber. I'm also here as the nephew of Barry and Brian Fleming [PHONETIC], who owned Two Fine Irishmen in Omaha for years. So this is personal as well as professional. We are here in support of this bill. I was fortunate to spend some time with Speaker Arch and Senate President Mark Daly a couple weeks ago to hear about this proposal. And from our vantage point, a couple things stood out. The first is that it is annual and consistent and the goal is collaboration and relationship building first. It's not a one-off mission where you go and shake hands and maybe something materializes. I think the beauty of this arrangement, which-- as Speaker Arch indicated-- has been pursued now in almost two dozen states, is that it is frequent and rolling and is in the spirit of Nebraska roots to build relationships with people first and then see where things go. Of course, in Nebraska, O'Neill is our capital-- our Irish capital here. There's

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about-- 10% of Americans, I believe, have Irish roots. And Ireland is, as was mentioned before, a powerhouse economy. The United States imports well north of \$100 billion of products from Ireland. I think our export margin is at about \$80 billion. And as my friend, Matt Blomstedt, indicated and the speaker before me, there's some fantastic overlap in our strengths here in Nebraska as well as the strengths of our friends in Ireland. They are a particularly heavy importer of manufacturing equipment, machinery, of which Nebraska is also a powerhouse economy in that sector. And the growth of pharmaceuticals, biosciences, as well as insurance and financial technologies is also a natural fit for Nebraska's strengths and economy here. So with that, I'd be happy to answer any questions. But we're here in support because of the overlap and the potential for future foreign domestic investment here in, in Nebraska. So thank you for listening.

**SANDERS:** Thank you for your testimony. Let's see if there are any questions for you. I see none. But there's lots of smiles, so that's a good thing.

**HUNTER TRAYNOR:** Thank you all. Appreciate it.

**SANDERS:** Thank you, Mr. Hunter, for your testimony.

**HUNTER TRAYNOR:** Of course.

**SANDERS:** Are there any other proponents? Welcome.

**BURKE HARR:** Thank you, Senator. Madam Chair, members of the committee, my name is Burke Harr, B-u-r-k-e H-a-r-r. I would like to thank Speaker Arch for bringing such a wonderful bill. I am here in my personal capacity as a treasurer of an Omaha group called the Omaha Irish Cultural Sys-- Center. And it is our job to promote Irish culture. Last spring, working with the University of Nebraska at Omaha, we brought a Professor Minahane over from Ireland to speak on a very exciting topic, which was a battle between two medieval Gaelic poets. It was a keynote and a very captive audience to an exciting lecture. We also promote Irish culture, and we're excited about formalizing that relationship. We have a film festival. Not to promote it, but it is March 6th through the 8th at the Benson Theatre. We bring in-- it's all films from Ireland, about-- from Irish people. The last two years, we've been fortunate enough to have a local-- one of the preeminent local filmmakers to do some film-- to present films. Last year, it was on the history of south Omaha-- Irish in, in, in Omaha. But it's, it's exciting tur-- event, and I'd encourage everyone

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to come to it. But just wanted to come here and speak in favor of this and to answer any questions you may have. Or not, on a no-question Friday.

**SANDERS:** Thank you, Senator Harr--

**BURKE HARR:** Thank you.

**SANDERS:** --for your testimony. See if there is any questions.

**BURKE HARR:** Uh-oh.

**SANDERS:** Senator Cavanaugh.

**J. CAVANAUGH:** Thank you, Chair. Can I ask about anything? No. I, I went to the film festival last year, and I went to it the year before. I'm happy to see this back at the Benson Theatre. I thought that was a better venue. But in last years', there was a film about the Troubles that featured Mark Daly.

**BURKE HARR:** It was. And Senator Daly was in that--

**J. CAVANAUGH:** Yeah.

**BURKE HARR:** --in that fi-- yeah.

**J. CAVANAUGH:** So I-- it's a great event. I appreciate it. I'll, I'll try and make it one of the--

**BURKE HARR:** There was a short film on Harr-- on Harris Tweed. So I'm wearing my Harris Tweed jacket today as well. Handmade, hand-stitched.

**J. CAVANAUGH:** Well, thanks for being here.

**BURKE HARR:** Thank you.

**SANDERS:** Are there any other questions for Senator Harr? See none. Oh. Senator Guereca.

**GUERECA:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Senator, for being here. Just wanted to point out that my, my colleague, Senator Cavanaugh, has never been to the Irish Cultural Center, so. Maybe extend an invitation to him so he could further support his heritage, I think that would be great.

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**BURKE HARR:** That is correct. Thank you. And, and it was a wonderful film about south Omaha as well.

**GUERECA:** I'll have to look into that, yeah.

**BURKE HARR:** I'm sure Senator Cavanaugh can get you a copy of it.

**J. CAVANAUGH:** I have seen it.

**SANDERS:** Any other questions, comments? See none. Thank you again--

**BURKE HARR:** Thank you.

**SANDERS:** --for your testimony. Are there any other proponents? Good afternoon.

**MAUREEN LARSEN:** Good afternoon. Good afternoon. Thank you, Chairperson Sanders and members of the Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee. My name is Maureen Larsen, M-a-u-r-e-e-n L-a-r-s-e-n. I'm the director of the Nebraska Department of Economic Development. And I'm here appearing today to testify in support of LB1087, introduced by Speaker Arch. LB1087 creates the Nebraska-Ireland Commission to advance, promote, and encourage commercial and cultural ties between Nebraskans and the people of Ireland, strengthening our existing friendship. Nebraska Department of Economic Development helps Nebraska businesses gain access to overseas markets and recruits international investment to the state. Establishing this commission aligns with DED's mission of growing Nebraska. As indicated, Ireland is the sixth largest source of foreign investment to United States. Irish companies offer-- operate in diverse sectors, including agri-food manufacturing, building materials, construction and services, and this commission will foster partnerships in agricultural ventures, academic research, and innovation. It also swings open the door for Nebraska businesses to trade in Ireland and the broader European Union. In August 2022, DED coordinated a state travel mission to Ireland-- notably, the delegation met with Enterprise Ireland, which supports the expansion of Irish companies into United States. There's opportunities for collaboration in business innovation, especially to welcome Irish ag tech bids-- businesses into Nebraska. As the Department of Economic Development works to expand trade and grow business in Nebraska, will continue to provide leadership and services that enable Nebraska communities, businesses, and people to succeed in a global economy, and we believe that LB1087 very much aligns with that mission. I want to thank Speaker Arch for introducing this bill and for his proposed

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amendment that aligns the department's goal of strengthening our public-private partnerships. Be happy to answer-- answer any questions you have about this bill.

**SANDERS:** That's a lot of information in one minute. Are there any, any questions for Ms. Larsen? See none. Well done. Thank you for your testimony.

**MAUREEN LARSEN:** Thank you.

**SANDERS:** Are there any other proponents for LB1087? Any opponents for LB1087? Any testimony in the neutral for LB1087? Senator Arch, would you like to close? The online comments for LB1087: 2 proponents, 1 opponent, and 0 in the neutral.

**ARCH:** Thank you. And, and thanks for your questions. Thanks for your time today. I am-- I hope this bill advances. I, I-- what I wanted to make sure is you-- that you understood the, the distinction between what, what are your typical trade-- your trade visits and, and this particular commission, so. I think we laid that out, and so I'm just happy to answer any questions if you have any remaining.

**SANDERS:** Any questions from the committee? I have one. When's the next trip over? Any idea?

**ARCH:** It would be-- it would be in the fall, so it would-- it-- if you've-- I, I can't remember who the football teams are playing. It's not Nebraska. But the big trip I think-- I think next year it's Notre Dame. So that'll be a big one with the luck of the Irish, so.

**SANDERS:** Save pennies for next year.

**ARCH:** Yeah. Yeah.

**SANDERS:** OK. I see no questions or comments from the committee. Thank you for your testimony and the bill. And this closes the hearing on LB1087. Thank you, Senator Arch and all those that came out to testify. Now closes our hearing on the LB1087 and our hearing for today.