

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Health and Human Services Committee February 6, 2025

HARDIN: [MALFUNCTION] and I serve as chair of the committee. The committee will take up the bills in the order posted. This public hearing today is your opportunity to be a part of the legislative process.

MEYER: Am I Dan Quick today?

HARDIN: Can you figure out who you are?

MEYER: Dan is way better looking and taller than me [INAUDIBLE].

HARDIN: See the pa-- the problems we deal with here? I'm just saying. So if you're planning to testify today, please fill out one of the green testifier sheets that are on the table at the back of the room. Be sure to print clearly and fill it out completely. Please move to the front row to be ready to testify. When it's your turn to come forward, give the testifier sheet to the page. 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 for each bill. These sheets will be included as an 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-- that's the part everybody forgets-- to ensure we get an accurate record. We will begin each bill hearing today with the introducer's opening statement, followed by proponents of the bill, then opponents, and finally anyone speaking in the neutral capacity. We will finish with a closing statement by the introducer if they wish to give one. We'll be using a three-minute light system for all testifiers. When you begin your testimony, the light on the table will be green. When the yellow light comes on, you have a minute remaining. And the red light means that they're going to eject you out of the chair soon. No. We'll just encourage you to wrap up your final thoughts. Questions from the committee may follow, which do not count against your time. Also, committee members may come and go during the hearing. This has nothing to do with the importance of the bills. It's just part of the process, as senators have other 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 a dozen copies and give them to the page. Props, charts, or other visual aids cannot be used simply because they cannot be transcribed. Please silence or turn off your cell phones. Verbal outbursts or applause are not permitted in the hearing room. Such behavior may cause you to meet one of our handsome troopers or one of the Red Coats who are also handsome. Finally, committee procedures for all committees state that written position comments on a bill to be included in the record must be

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submitted by 8 a.m. the day of the hearing. The only acceptable method of submission is via the Legislature's website at nebraskalegislature.gov. 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'll now have the committee members with us today introduce themselves, starting with Senator Riepe.

RIEPE: Welcome. I'm Merv Riepe. I represent District 12, which is part of Omaha, southwest Omaha, and the fine little town of Ralston.

HANSEN: Senator Ben Hansen, District 16, which is Washington, Burt, Cuming, and parts of Stanton County.

FREDRICKSON: John Fredrickson. I represent District 20, which is in central west Omaha.

MEYER: Glen Meyer, District 17, northeast Nebraska. It's Dakota, Thurston, Wayne, and the southern part of Dixon County.

QUICK: Dan Quick, District 35: Grand Island.

BALLARD: Beau Ballard, District 21 in northwest Lincoln, northern Lancaster County.

FREDRICKSON: Also assisting the committee today: to my left is our legal counsel, John Duggar; to my far left is our committee clerk, Barb Dorn. Our pages for the committee today are Sydney Cochran and Tate Smith. And today's agenda is posted outside the hearing room. With that, we will begin today's hearing with LB304. How are you, Senator DeBoer?

DeBOER: Not an answer I'd like to make on the record.

HARDIN: OK. Welcome.

DeBOER: Thank you very much. Hello, Chair Hardin and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Wendy DeBoer, W-e-n-d-y D-e-B-o-e-r. And I represent District 10 in beautiful northwest Omaha. I'm here to do-- today to introduce LB304, which eliminates the sunset provision on expanded eligibility for the childcare subsidy. I began my work on childcare issues during 2020 and introduced my first piece of legislation on childcare, LB485, in 2021. While this work partially began as a response to pandemic closures of childcare facilities, it has continued as the pandemic highlighted some structural issues with our Child Care Subsidy program in Nebraska

that existed even before the pandemic. First, I want to make sure that we're all on the same page with respect to how Child Care Subsidy program functions. The childcare subsidy is a payment to help lower income families afford childcare and be able to participate in our workforce. Families who are eligible pay 7% of their income for childcare, and the state covers the remaining cost by providing the subsidy payment directly to the childcare providers. So whatever that delta is between the costs to the childcare provider based on the reimbursement rates we have for childcare subsidy-- which, by the way, is lower than what they get for their private payment clients-- and the 7% of their income-- which obviously gets bigger as their income goes up-- the state pays whatever that delta is. Providers opt in to accepting, accepting childcare subsidy eligible children. There's no requirement that childcare providers accept the childcare subsidy. Eligibility is set by statute, and the Department of Health and Human Services determines reimbursement rates. When I first started working on the issue, eligibility was set at 130% of the federal poverty level, or FPL, for initial qualification to the program. If you were enrolled in the program, you could remain eligible until you made 185% of FPL. Income beyond 185% FPL would make you ineligible for this study. What we found is that both the initial qualification and the transitional limit were too low to have this program be successful for getting people into the workforce. A key tenet of the Child Care Subsidy program is to provide the, the subsidy to encourage economic self-sufficiency for the families enrolled. Instead, the opposite was happening. Families would decline promotions at work and would restrict their work hours to maintain eligibility because the cost of losing their childcare subsidy was often greater than the increase in pay that they would receive. Thus, in 2021, I introduced LB485, which expanded eligibility to have the initial qualification begin at 185% of federal poverty level with the ability to make up to 200% before becoming ineligible on the back end. LB485 in 2021 also included two other important provisions. The first provision stated that there would be an impact study done on the expanded eligibility to determine if the expansion was working the way we intended-- i.e. to get more people in the workplace. The study was done at no cost to the state. First Five Nebraska took on the study-- once again, at no cost to the state-- and will be here testifying after me if you have questions about the result. Secondly, the expanded eligibility-- this is part of the original LB485 in 2021-- shall only be paid for by using Child Care Development Block Grant, or CCDBG dollars, or in the event those funds are fully expended, the cost shall be borne by TANF dollars. It specifically stated no General Fund dollars were to be used to pay for expanded eligibility. That was in the statute in 2021.

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It was in the statute when I ex-- set the sunset out farther to 2026 in my 2023 bill. It's in the statute now. No General Fund expenditures can be used. While working on childcare subsidy eligibility, my conversation with childcare providers point to, to another structural issue with our subsidy program, the pos-- process by which DHHS determines reimbursement rate. By statute, the department was to use a market rate survey to determine reimbursement rates. But in the market rate survey, they determined there were only two markets in Nebraska. The first market was Dakota, Dodge, Lancaster, and Sarpy County, and the second market was everyone else. I came to talk to you during a interim study about the problems of having just two markets, and we talked about other cost models. Last year, we passed a bill that simply gives permissive authority to the department to use whatever they think is the best model for determining how to provide that sild-- childcare subsidy rate-- reimbursement rate. So now they have some flexibility and they can figure out how they would like to do that on their own. So that brings me to why I'm here before you today. LB485's sunset expanded eligibility through the fall of 2023. Due to some technical issues at DHHS, the study was not going to be, be, be prepared in time to allow us to evaluate the program, which was the purpose of the study. So to accommodate this, in 2023 I pushed the sunset out with a bill to 2026 to result-- so that we would get the results of the study. Today's bill, LB304, seeks to make the expanded eligibility permitted and no longer subject to a sunset. I believe this is the right move for Nebraska for a variety of reasons. So we passed it out in '26. Today, I'm trying to get rid of the sunset altogether. First, isn't-- the first reason why I think we should do this is a nationwide comparison. If we allowed the sunset to occur, our eligibility will be 50th in the country. Now, there are 51-- because D.C. is a market-- so we're not the worst. We're the second worst. West Virginia is lower than us if you're wondering. Of our surrounding states, you may see in the policy brief I handed out we would be last. Missouri would be the closest to us at 139%. If we maintain eligibility at 185% federal poverty rate, we will be right in the middle of our border states. We'll be ahead of Wyoming at 175%, Iowa, 176%, and the aforementioned Missouri. And then South Dakota has 209%. Colorado, 218%. And to our south in Kansas, 250%. It can be difficult to understand what the income levels are for individuals when solely based on FPL percentage, so I'm going to give you some examples. 130% of federal poverty level for a family of three-- 130% of federal poverty for a family of three is \$33,576 a year for a family of three. That could be a mom with two kids, could be a mom and a dad with one kid. But it could also be a mom with two kids. At 185% federal poverty liv-- level for a family of three, it's \$47,772. And

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20-- 200,000 federal poverty level for a family of three is \$51,648 a year. So we're not talking about people who are making a lot of money qualifying for the childcare subsidy. These income levels might sound all right to us as senators since we make \$12,000 a year, but by no means are they enough to support a family with childcare-eligible children. The second reason, and perhaps the most important reason why I think the permanent elimination of the sunset is best for Nebraska, is because the program works. The childcare subsidy's goal is to help families become economically self-sufficient and to support childcare providers by providing consistent and reliable payments to continue to allow them to provide childcare. I firmly believe the expanded eligibility helps us achieve those goals. Of the over 2,000 newly eligible families, 98% of them cited employment reasons for why they needed childcare. They can also get it if they're in education. But 98% of them, it's for childcare. That means we're helping families stay in the workforce. The childcare subsidy is also a consistent payment childcare for-- payment for childcare providers, which helps stabilize their centers. We know many childcare providers have shuttered their doors since the pandemic, and due to the structural issues identified before, few were accepting-- fewer were accepting childcare subsidy. Eliminating the sunset on the expanded eligibility is our signal to our childcare providers that our state is serious about providing support for childcare, encouraging more providers to accept subsidy-eligible children. And I do not believe this is achieved by just pushing the sunset further into the future, but rather a firm commitment by the state to continue the childcare subsidy at 185% of federal poverty level. Finally, I believe this is the right move for Nebraska because eliminating expanded eligibility will have a damaging work-- impact on our workforce. Bryan Slone with the State Chamber will be testifying and I'm sure he will discuss with you how we are desperate for workers in our state. We have incredibly high workforce participation in our state and we still have job openings. Eliminating the expanded eligibility will force working families to have at least one parent leave the for-- workforce to provide childcare for their child on their own. Childcare is an essential need in our state. Not only does, does it allow for parents to work, but it also provides important stable-- socialization and skilled demel-- development for our children. Children enrolled in childcare see improved school performance, reduced criminal justice involvement, improved health, and more benefits. OK. So now the fiscal note. The fiscal note was submitted yesterday at 11:03 a.m. It accidentally included cost projections for the '25-26 fiscal year, which doesn't make sense because the program is already running through that time. So the one that came at 3:29 p.m. yesterday

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indicates no fiscal-- fiscal impact this year. However, DHHS still believes there would be fiscal impact in fiscal year '26-27 to the state General Fund. I disagree. As I mentioned before, in LB45, we mandated that the program be funded through CCDBG funds or TANF funds if CCDBG funds were fully expended and not through general funds. If LB304 does not change this-- or, LB304 doesn't change this. I'm not changing that. In fact, you can see on page 4 of the bill, the language is unchanged. As such, besides the administrative cost to administer the Child Care Subsidy program, there should not be an impact on the state General Fund to continue providing the child-- the expanded eligibility for childcare subsidy. So we're looking into this-- I'll just not read any more of this. We're looking into this. Something strange is happening because we're being told that suddenly we're going to have to start using general funds that we're not using now. I will tell you I have talked with a bunch of folks. I wanted to reach out to DHHS, but I was in Judiciary till 9:30 last night and then our phones and computers didn't work this morning. So I'm trying to get to the bottom of this for you. So I will ask you as a committee to give me a little bit of time before you exec on this to figure out what's going on. And I will let you know and update you on what has happened with that. But of course today, nothing works. So we had a little difficulty with figuring that out. I don't, I don't know how we don't have a General Fund expenditure this year and we would in the future. Because the letter that you received from DHHS says that they were using ARPA funds, which was not one of the allowable funds to support it, but maybe they found a way. And then those ran out in September of '24. So what are we doing right now? And what are we doing until '26? So I don't know what's going on. So I come to you telling you I don't know what's coming on and I'm sorry I-- going on and I'm sorry I couldn't work that out before. But the-- things have been stacked against me today. So there we are. And that is the end of my opening. I'm sorry it was so long.

FREDRICKSON: Thank you, Senator DeBoer. Any questions from the committee? Senator Riepe.

RIEPE: Thank you, Chairman. Thank you for being here. I think you, you start off with an assumption that childcare is the primary responsibility of government or the taxpayers. I would argue that business and private, private businesses have an accountability. It's their workforce that they're seeking to develop. So they have some accountability equally as well as this government. My second question-- I ge-- wasn't really a good question, was it? I guess it's a statement.

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DeBOER: But I'm going to answer it anyway.

RIEPE: Oh. Well. I would expect no less. Do you have an aggregate dollar in terms of the dollars that the, the state has committed to this particular program over the last, say, two years? Because it-- I mean, it, it's someplace probably in the millions, but everything is.

DeBOER: Can't get much for \$1 million these days. So to your second question first.

RIEPE: Yes.

DeBOER: I do not have an exact number, but I will say this: the costs that the state bears would be the administrative costs. The costs that the actual subsidy dollars would be part of our federal block grant. And if they are not, then they are not following the law as it is currently written.

RIEPE: So you don't count federal dollars as real dollars?

DeBOER: No, you asked me state. So I was answering you state.

RIEPE: I'd like to-- I'd like to amend my question.

DeBOER: Please do.

RIEPE: My other question would be is, why action in '25 if the sunset expires in '26?

DeBOER: Very--

RIEPE: I'm a-- I believe in, why do today what you can put off till tomorrow?

DeBOER: Well, you know, we have a difference of philosophy on that one.

RIEPE: OK.

DeBOER: So let me answer your first question.

RIEPE: OK.

DeBOER: I think you have incorrectly identified my assumptions. I do not assume that this is-- you said first a duty of government. And I don't assume that. I actually think it is just smart governance to say we need to do something to help our state to figure out how to get

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some purchase on its workforce issues. And this is specifically targeted at a group of individuals for whom-- they're not working-- if, if they're making the kind of wages we're looking at, they're not working as paralegals in law offices. They're not working necessarily in a big company like UP. There's small businesses. There are places like this. UP can afford-- bygones, apologies to UP-- but they can probably afford to do some help with childcare. And they are. But if I have a small business providing HVAC services in which I have one truck that's kind of rusted out but it still drives and an employee, I cannot provide that employee with childcare. I can't. I don't have the ability to do that. So if I'm looking at how do I want to support small businesses, we do all sorts of things to subsidize and further the growth of small business and encourage it in Nebraska because we know that someday small businesses become medium businesses. And so having the ability to help these small businesses who can't just open up a childcare subsidy-- or-- I'm sorry-- a childcare center in the back of the rusted out van. Having them have the ability to get some support for their workers that is being used with economies of scale of the state to best serve those people I think is something. I don't know if it's a function that the-- that is the number one function of the government or whatever, but I think it is something that we can do if we're looking at how to foster economic activity in Nebraska, not just for the families that need childcare, but for the very businesses you're talking about, including the small businesses.

RIEPE: Will you then admit that it is a subsidy to small businesses?

DeBOER: In some cases it might be.

RIEPE: Thank you. What did we learn during the sunset times? Because oftentimes we see the sunset as get a foot in the door and then come back when we want to remove it. It's on SNAP programs. We see it on every aspect. I want to know, what did we learn that says now it needs to be-- go off the SNAP endangered species list?

DeBOER: OK. I'm not sure I understand your question. What does sunset times mean?

RIEPE: Well, it says here LB30-- eliminates the October '26--

DeBOER: Oh.

RIEPE: --sunset date. Two of them. Both of them on the-- care provision and the funds are both-- were sunsetted and apparently are coming-- you want to take them off sunset, make them permanent?

DeBOER: Yes.

RIEPE: OK. What-- did we learn anything? Or was the sunset simply a vehicle of getting it inside the door?

DeBOER: Yes. Got it. Now I understand your question. What you were trying to ask me I think--

RIEPE: Oh, trying to? OK. Go ahead.

DeBOER: What you were trying to ask me--

FREDRICKSON: Can I get a gavel?

DeBOER: What you were-- what you were-- what you were eloquently asking me that I misunderstood was, since we started this program, what have we learned about its efficacy?

RIEPE: Bingo.

DeBOER: OK. The handout that I gave you, that I passed out--

RIEPE: Which I didn't have time to read.

DeBOER: Oh, I apologize.

RIEPE: Oh, thank you. I accept it.

DeBOER: That handout is a brief. Since you don't have a lot of time, you can read this brief. There is a longer report that came from First Five regarding their results of their study, which was completed, I believe, in '24. Yes, '24. And in the results of that study in '24, they found a number of things. One, the impact on parents of families with young children was greater than parents of families with older children. That makes sense, right? Because the older the children are, the less expensive the childcare is.

RIEPE: Correct.

DeBOER: So there are a number of findings they found. They found that there were about 2,000 families that took advantage-- or, were able to take advantage of the new eligibility. And so-- and I don't have it in front of me. There's a certain number of children that we have now provided childcare for or helped them to have their parents pay their 7% of their income and get childcare. And those parents then, because 98% of them applied for a working purpose, were able to go into the workforce. So there are-- this thing is, like, 40 pages long or

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something. And I will email it to you, but I gave you the brief to tell you some of the brief things. Additionally, since we have behind us Katie Bass, who did much of that work and she's here to testify today, I will defer some more questions on that to her.

RIEPE: And I will give myself a break and say thank you. Mr. Chairman, back to you.

FREDRICKSON: Thank you, Senator Riepe. Senator Hansen, question?

HANSEN: Yes, thank you. Did you say you originally started this because of COVID in 2021?

DeBOER: So if you remember in 2021, that was part of it, is that we were trying to figure out how to support childcare--

HANSEN: I remember that.

DeBOER: --in that time because it was crisis level. I mean, it's still crisis level, but it was, like, super, horrendous, big crisis level. And so that's how I-- that's-- the real story of how I got started on this is that Kate Bolz had had it before me. And we were working on the LB1107 negotiations, and this was going to be part of that, but it was getting too complicated. So we stood on the back stairs and she said, why don't you work on it next year and we'll take it out of the negotiations now? And I said, deal. So that's the real story of how I got it. And then that next year was 2020.

HANSEN: OK. I, I notice we're starting to see more, more bills coming in front of, like, HHS that had sunsets or have sunsets that were started because of COVID.

DeBOER: So--

HARDIN: Now we're trying to make decisions on, OK. Do we-- now that COVID's over, do we keep it? Do we not keep it? And so I, I guess-- that's why I asked that.

DeBOER: No, I understand why you asked it. And so that's why I told my long story about standing on the stairs, is because in fact this was in the works to try to get it to work out. But we had an extremely complicated piece of legislation and we did not want to add this complication to it in the end, although there was some appetite for it. But it just seemed too much. And so then since she was term limited, I said, this seems like a really important thing to do because at the time, before COVID, we needed it to be done because we

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did not have enough childcare. And then COVID happened and it became a big, scary, angry, awful, disastrous atomic mess as opposed to just a regular dumpster fire.

HANSEN: OK. And maybe a cleanup question.

DeBOER: Yeah.

HANSEN: On page 4, the paragraph starting on line 18. Do you need that paragraph anymore? If you're going to-- are you doing any more amendments on this bill?

DeBOER: I'm sorry? Am I doing any more--

HANSEN: Amendments. Do you have any planned?

DeBOER: I don't have any planned.

HANSEN: OK. That's not a huge deal. I would say, if you do, you probably don't need that paragraph.

DeBOER: Which one?

HANSEN: Starting on line 18, (d).

DeBOER: Oh, yeah. Because it just asked for the--

HANSEN: About the study that has to be done before July 1, 2024?

DeBOER: Yeah, I probably don't.

HANSEN: I don't know. If you [INAUDIBLE] amendment, you can cross the whole section out.

DeBOER: Yeah. I will.

HANSEN: Thank you, Mr. Vice Chair.

FREDRICKSON: Are there questions? Senator Ballard.

BALLARD: Thank you, Vice Chair. Thank you. Good to see you. I do have a question about the fiscal note. I know you're working on that. So what if-- wouldn't there still be a fiscal impact if we went back to 130%? Because they'd still have to pay. So is this fiscal impact in addition to-- do they still-- does that question makes sense?

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DeBOER: It does make sense, except that I can't answer it because I don't-- it, it shouldn't. The, the fiscal note is overly broad in its explanation of what has happened. And so I don't know-- if, if we said, OK, instead of 130%, we'll go to 135%, 140%, where does the General Fund impact kick in? First of all, it can't use it, because I say can't use general funds. But I don't know where that number would be. And if it's 130%-- first of all, we know that our federal de-- delegation-- I mean, all props to Senator Fischer, because she has made sure that the federal block grant for childcare is strong and that it's not going down. In fact, you'll hear we're getting more money than we used to. So the look on your face of confusion, Senator Ballard, is one that I also feel--

BALLARD: OK.

DeBOER: --in my very heart.

BALLARD: I appreciate that. I have one more que-- do you-- and I don't know why you would know this, but you might. So it-- with the increase of minimum wage across the state, what is this going to do to people that-- is-- do you, do you see-- foresee a, a, a number of people falling out of this subsidy line even if we increased it?

DeBOER: So I have not done all the calculations on federal poverty level to know if that will affect some families that are currently eligible, because obviously it depends on the number of kids, number of people in the family, all of that. But at some point, some wage kicks you off of it. That's why we have the 185% to get into the program. You don't get kicked out until you're over 200%. So there's a little bit-- now, it probably makes more sense-- not trying to do that here. Of course, if the committee sua sponte wants to do it. If you want to go take that top number, which is 200%, and go up to 220% or something like that so that you have a longer runway, surely you could do that and that would help with that issue. So you don't get in unless you are under this certain level, but then you might stay in longer so you don't get kicked out if you take a, a higher wage job.

BALLARD: OK. Thank you.

DeBOER: Mm-hmm.

FREDRICKSON: Other questions? Senator Quick.

QUICK: Yeah. Thank you, Vice Chair. And thank you for, for being here. So one of the things and-- since this minimum wage thing was brought up-- and I'll just make a more-- comment about that, but. My son and,

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and his wife at the time, each-- one was a school nurse. He worked in a factory setting. Together, they made \$60,000 a year. So he made over-- I know he was well over \$20 an hour. And she-- I don't know what her wage was, but I can tell you that this-- I don't think the minimum wage will ever affect-- I know she made above the \$15 an hour wage. So I don't think that minimum wage is ever going to affect that, just in my opinion.

DeBOER: OK.

QUICK: I shouldn't be answering your question, but coming from blue collar work and understanding that, I do. But one of the things that I was always a proponent of was, you know, as people make more money, that sliding scale-- and I see that's in here, to go from 185% to 200%, if you can explain how that works. And-- because I was always in favor of that. You know, people-- they want to get off of assistance and they want to be-- they want to provide for their families on their own. But this would allow them to do that without getting kicked off of that, you know, the cliff and having that cliff effect, so.

DeBOER: Yeah. So you come in at a lower eligibility-- so you come in at a lower poverty rate, what you can make. You come at 185% in. You make, we'll say-- I don't know how many children you have to have to do this, but we'll say it's \$40,000. And your boss says, you're doing such a great job. I'm going to give you a promotion. And you do the numbers and you figure out if you take that promotion, you're no longer going to be at 180%, 185% of federal poverty level. Now you're going to be at 195%. Well, that's fine because you're still going to get your subsidy. That subsidy amount is going to be-- what they pay is bigger than what you are going to get in a raise. You're fine. If you find out big promotion, oh, no. The amount of money that I'm going to get from this is in fact less-- from my promotion-- is less than what I'll lose by going off the childcare subsidy because now I'm going to make 210% of federal poverty level. You might say, gosh darn, I really want that promotion. Gosh darn, I know I could do a good job, but I better not take it. Because if I do, I'm going to lose this childcare support that I need to keep my kids in childcare. So that's why I said if the committee on its own motion would like to move that number, I'm not going to oppose that. But right now, we've kept it to where it is, 185% to 200%.

QUICK: OK. And on that though, as it goes up, does-- and how, how does that-- do they have to refile or something? Does it, does it-- their subsidy would decrease as they make more money. Is that how it works or--

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DeBOER: Yes, insofar as, as they make more money, 7% of their income becomes a higher number.

QUICK: OK.

DeBOER: And since they always have to pay 7% of their income, just naturally the amount they pay grows as they make more money.

QUICK: Do they have to rep-- how does that reported then, or how do they-- how does that-- [INAUDIBLE] know how that works?

DeBOER: Senator Quick, now you're getting into some questions that I might be a little fuzzy on and would be best suited to say that there are people behind me who could answer that.

QUICK: OK. Thank you.

FREDRICKSON: Thank you, Senator Quick. Other questions? Seeing none. Will you be around to close?

DeBOER: I will attempt to do so, but I have another bill in Judiciary.

FREDRICKSON: Sounds good. Thank you, Senator DeBoer. We will now take proponents for LB304. Welcome.

KATIE BASS: Thank you. Vice Chair Fredrickson and members of the Health and Human Services Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Dr. Katie Bass, spelled K-a-t-i-e B-a-s-s. And I'm the Policy Research Manager at First Five Nebraska. First Five Nebraska is a statewide public policy organization focused on promoting quality early care and learning opportunities for Nebraska's youngest children. I am here today to support L-- for-- in support of LB304, eliminating the sunset on expanded income eligibility for the subsidy program. And want to thank Senator DeBoer for introducing this legislation and her commitment to the families who rely on the Child Care Subsidy program and the providers who support them. So we've already talked a little bit about the history here, but just to kind of back up, in 2021 is when expanded eligibility occurred with LB485. And during the process of development for that bill, this committee really made a smart decision, right? Originally, it was just expand to 185%. And they said, let's talk about putting a sunset on there. But more than just a sunset, let's study that sun-- study that time period and see what information we can gather to make an informed decision when that sunset rolls around. So exactly what Senator Riepe was discussing earlier. We did make sure it was kind of set up correctly. And that study was paid for not through state funds. It was paid for

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separately, but it was in collaboration with the Department of Health and Human Services. I want to be clear that they, they helped provide us with the data, the information that was needed. Right? But they were not the authors of the study. They were collaborating with us. So First Five Nebraska did do that study. We led the effort, but we did not lead it alone. We also partnered with the University of Nebraska's Bureau of Business Research. We brought in some collaborators from the Nebraska-- or, the-- Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative and the National Institute for Early Education Research. So we made sure we had a well-rounded team. We looked at the quantitative data, and we also looked at-- or, we had conversations with childcare providers, with families, and with community members who are affected by expansion. Now, we've talked a little bit about some of the study results-- which I gave you in a handout because some of you were not on-- in the Legislature when that was submitted, when that original report was submitted. So I wanted you to have it today. But I just want to hit on a couple of things. Is that, one, we saw that it was mostly for work. Right? 98% for work is why people needed the subsidy. And more importantly, during the expansion period, more people-- a higher proportion of people moved from a nonemployment category to an employment category. Right? That movement towards self-sufficiency. We did see that it was 2,500 families overall over the two-year period that we studied and that those families generated approx-- between \$5.8 and \$8.93 million in expend-- or, in economic impact for the state of Nebraska.

FREDRICKSON: So Dr. Bass, you are in the red zone.

KATIE BASS: I am in the red zone and so I will stop now.

FREDRICKSON: But if you have a few-- if you could-- have a few more thoughts, please continue. And to-- and then-- yeah.

KATIE BASS: I will just briefly say that the-- one thing that we could not track with the quantitative data was child development outcomes, right? The department does not track those, but I want to say that consistently that is the message we heard from childcare providers and from parents. Parents saying, I didn't know I should have my child doing this, but my childcare provider is an expert in that and told me I need to get some services. I need to get connected to folks to help with my child's development. I think that's a really important finding that we can't quantify in that economic impact. I also want to be completely transparent. It wasn't all rosy, right? There were lots of conversations about administrative burden, and we certainly want to look into that. But even with discussions of administrative burden,

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the childcare providers we talked to all said, but we think the expansion should remain because it's important for our families. And with that, I am happy to answer any other questions. Thank you for the opportunity to finish.

FREDRICKSON: Of course. Any questions from the committee? Senator Meyer.

MEYER: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think Senator DeBoer's hands are pretty much tied on trying to get any information today-- financial information. Do you know-- and, and, and I think perhaps you do-- why up until this point using federal block, block grant money, why there would be a fiscal note for '25-26? Was ARPA money involved in part of this as far as pay?

KATIE BASS: You know--

MEYER: Which I can understand. It has to be used up by the end of-- you have to commit by the, by the end, end of last year and has to be used up by the end of '26. Could that be a factor?

KATIE BASS: You know, I am, I am not necessarily convinced of that. I, I do think-- we do know that ARPA included additional federal funds that were tied to childcare, for sure. And while that may have been the case through 2024, what's interesting is when we extended the sunset-- or, or, sunset-- when this committee extended the sunset with-- it would have been ultimately LB227. It was originally introduced as LB35. I looked back at that fiscal note because I was confused by the fiscal note we received for this bill, and that fiscal note said that the department currently had sufficient federal funds to extend the sunset and that-- it did say that perhaps if federal funds decreased they may need to request general fund dollars. And so I, I did my research before I came here. And the federal funds have not decreased. So, so I'm equally perplexed.

MEYER: So perhaps the fiscal note could possibly be inaccurate.

KATIE BASS: I think so, at, at least for the expansion in and of itself. Right?

MEYER: Thank you.

FREDRICKSON: Other questions? Senator Quick.

QUICK: Yeah. Thank you, Vice Chair. And-- you know, one of my things is about early childhood education. So with the, you know, with the,

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the subsidy, it would make-- it would assure that maybe some children who didn't have-- their families don't have the resources or they have the finances to actually send their children to daycare. They're missing out on that early childhood education piece, so. I don't know if you can talk about that.

KATIE BASS: I think, absolutely. Right? That's-- we often talk about at First Five the importance of quality early care in education and what that means. And there's a story that I put into that report that you all received today that I, I didn't really talk about, but I do want to mention it. It's from a childcare provider who actually began caring for a child through the subsidy program, through child welfare involvement, which sometimes happened. And what the childcare provider had told me is that when the child arrived, they were about nine months old and the-- their new caregiver said this will be an easy child to care for. She, she's been so ignored that she doesn't really respond to anything. This should be really easy for you. Can you imagine? And that childcare provider said over the time that that child was in her care, right, they learned how to have emotions and how to express emotions. She said, you may not think about it this way, but a temper tantrum was a big deal for that kiddo. And we've learned how to communicate and how to express ourselves. We-- that's the sort of quality care that these providers are giving. I can't tell you the number of parents who said, I would have never known that my child needed early intervention services if my childcare provider hadn't said they should be talking at this stage. I was a first-time parent. I just didn't know. Right? And we heard those stories over and over again. We can't quantify that in an economic impact for you. Right? But that was part of the conversations consistently when we talked to parents and providers.

QUICK: Thank you.

FREDRICKSON: Other questions? I have a couple. Well, first of all, I just wanted to say thank you for being here and for sharing your expertise and, you know, in my opinion, always being a reliable kind of go-to source for a lot of information on as it pertains to, you know, subsidy and, and other childcare needs in our state. I really appreciate that you provided this study. I think that that's one of the things that so much when we think about programs that we vote on or that we decide to implement as a state, having the actual results of that are, are key. So thank you for, for providing that. You mentioned-- because I, I had questions about the fiscal note myself as well. I know that's been covered a little bit in here. But one of the things you mentioned was that the federal funds have not decreased

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that we're receiving for subsidy. To your knowledge, have we had any significant shifts in reimbursement rates? In other words, would there be a reason that even with stable federal funding we're still seeing this gap that's kind of unexplained at this point?

KATIE BASS: So Senator DeBoer did talk about her work to increase reimbursement, right?

FREDRICKSON: Yes.

KATIE BASS: So that, that would be part of it. But I, I would hate to see this bill become the carrier of the other changes. Right? That's not necessarily what this bill does. And so that's why it's a little confusing to me. But we did-- we have increased reimbursement rates, right, from the 60th percentile of the market rate survey to the 75th percentile of the market rate survey. Some of you who've been on this committee for a while love hearing me talk about the market rate survey, I'm sure, and what that means for reimbursement rates. So that did happen. You know, we know that there are some federal regulations that are going to be changing over the next two years, right, that, that may have a fiscal impact. But again, that is not for this bill. That-- it certainly shouldn't have changed things for this year.

FREDRICKSON: Sure. Sure. Well, yeah. Well, hopefully we can get some more clarity on, on the fiscal note and-- yeah. Any other questions? Seeing none. Thank you for being here.

KATIE BASS: Thank you.

FREDRICKSON: Next proponent for LB304. Good afternoon.

BRYAN SLONE: Good afternoon. Chair Fredrickson and, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee, thank you for holding this hearing today. My name's Bryan Slone, B-r-y-a-n S-l-o-n-e. And I'm President and CEO of the Nebraska Chamber of Commerce. And I'm here today representing the Nebraska Chamber, the Omaha Chamber, the Lincoln Chamber, the South Sioux Chamber, the Washington County Chamber, the North Platte Chamber, the Broken Bow Chamber, the West Point Chamber, the Grand Island Chamber, the Columbus Chamber, Cheyenne County Chamber, the Wayne Chamber, the Kearney Area Chamber, the Fremont Area Chamber, the Central City Area Chamber, the Seward County Chamber, the Nebraska City Economic Development Group, and a number of other economic development groups within the state. It's, it's-- I'll summarize my testimony given the time. It's no secret the number one issue we have in this state is workforce. And this is

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something we've known for, for many years was coming and is going to consistently become more and more serious. From 2010 to 2020, 69 of our 93 counties lost population. For decades, we've been growing at less than 1% per year. Blueprint Nebraska identified the need particularly to attract 18- to 34-year-olds, which is the area that, that we find the most difficult, the brain drain era. Not shockingly, people my age, we don't have brain drain. I don't know what kind of drain it is, but it, it's all moving our way. Every time we survey our members, every time we surv-- survey community leaders, this is the greatest threat to our economy. It's the greatest threat to the sustainability of our community, is how do we attract young people and young families to our communities? It's, it's, it's basic. For Nebraska to remain competitive and to repay-- to remain competitive in business, it's essential that we devel-- develop longer term and bolder strategies and make greater investments, both public and private, in affordable childcare throughout the state. It's essential to be able to attract and retain these young families. We're in a competition against 49 other states. This is not a time to make things more difficult for young families in Nebraska, particularly young families at the lower end of our income scales. The urgency and importance of this is very, very real. There isn't hardly a town hall that I conduct where some parent doesn't come up to me and say, we can't afford it and one of us is not going to be able to work anymore. I'd urge this committee to support LB304 as a concrete step that we can take to hold the line on our existing commitment to childcare for our most challenged families. I'd be happy to respond to any questions. And being a free market advo-- advocate and a small government advocate for over 40 years now, I'd-- Senator Riepe, I'd be welcome to take the questions that you asked Senator DeBoer, if you were willing. Thank you.

FREDRICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Slone. You know, next time you testify, I would appreciate if you represented a few more organizations.

BRYAN SLONE: Well, this is, this is not normal for me. This sets a record for me. We sent out an email to the other chambers just to see if they were interested, and within ten minutes we had a list.

FREDRICKSON: Wow. Any questions from the committee? Senator Riepe.

RIEPE: I think I should have made my questions harder.

BRYAN SLONE: You can ask any questions you want, Senator.

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RIEPE: But I do have this question. What is the status-- I know Blueprint Nebraska has-- report in 2019. Is that still in play to some degree?

BRYAN SLONE: Yes. So Blueprint Nebraska at the time said that we need to-- needed to attract around 40,000 new workers in the 18 to 34 category to compete even against our peer states. That number continues and is probably larger at this point. While we've had population growth, it's-- we still are getting older. We're not replacing the boomers as they retire, and they're retiring quickly. But also said we needed to build 40,000 affordable houses. And it also talked about childcare. That childcare number of what we need right now is it-- is in the ten thou-- tens of thousands of seats within Nebraska just to address the children that we already have here.

RIEPE: OK. Thank you. Thank you for being here.

BRYAN SLONE: Yeah. Thank you.

FREDRICKSON: Other questions? Senator Quick.

QUICK: Yeah. Thank you, Vice Chair. So-- and I had asked a question earlier about, you know, early childhood and the impact it can have not only to change that child's life and help the family, but do you-- would you know, like, on the dollar side or what-- what kind of impact if a child has that access to early childhood education and how that could have that impact later on in their lives?

BRYAN SLONE: Yeah. And I'm sure First Five has better information on this, but the, the one, the one-- my father was a school superintendent. And so what got, got totally billed into me was that third-grade reading level is, is very, very determinative of what, what happens later and literally means very sizable differences in terms of, of education attainment later and, and also economically, both for the individual and the state. I have an 18-month-old grandson who every time I can get to Atlanta, I read him as many books as I can. The interaction and, and childcare, that process starts well before kindergarten, and we know that from the Buffett Institute and others. So it, it's substantial and well-documented.

QUICK: Yeah. Thank you.

FREDRICKSON: Other questions? Senator Hansen.

HANSEN: Thank you. Out of all the counties that you mentioned and cities, do any of them have their own subsidy programs or assistance programs for childcare?

BRYAN SLONE: So I, I want to put this in context, and it really goes to the-- Senator Riepe's early questions. To be competitive-- so all 50 states understand this. If you went to any one of the chambers at any one of the other 50 states and said, what's your top three issues? I'll guarantee you childcare is in the top three issues of every state chamber in the, in the country. We don't have to invest \$5 or \$10 million into childcare. For this state to remain competitive over the next ten years, we have to invest hundreds, hundreds of millions of dollars. And I agree with the senator. It won't all come from the government. There isn't enough government money to fund what we need to do. Businesses have to be part of it, and businesses are. We actually have businesses, as you know, who are building their own childcares and, and just taking the bull by the horns. A lot of our hospitals, which oftentimes require 24-hour childcare for their employees, are partnering with businesses in many of our cities in the state to, to build childcare. Philanthropic dollars will be a big part of this as well. This is just the piece-- this is the safety net piece for those, those-- at a-- at an economic level that I do really believe is government's responsibility, that at a minimum government should be in the, in the business of making sure that we are helping people in this income range work, because we've long held the belief that, that work and, and offering a hand-up is far better than the, than the opposite.

HANSEN: So-- if I can ask another question, Mr. Vice Chair.

FREDRICKSON: Sure.

HANSEN: You brought up a good point. I think maybe one of the only reasons small businesses have taken the bull by the horns is because they're not getting as much government money. Do you think that's true?

BRYAN SLONE: No. I think for small businesses-- what I see as I travel the state and talk to big business and small bus-- if you're a big business, you've got enough employee base that you can-- you've got enough return on investment to make that investment by the building and, and hire the people. If you're a small business, you don't. And what you need to do and what will have to do outside of this-- and we may come back to the Legislature for this-- is, you're going to-- you're going to partner with people in big public-private partnerships

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to, to make this work to, to really reach small business. And, and-- so there are other things that need to be done in this regard, but it's impossible to build a business model for childcare where there is no safety net for, for the really low income-- lower income parents.

HANSEN: I-- and I think-- and I think you're right. I, I would appreciate a-- more of an approach where it's a public-private partnership [INAUDIBLE].

BRYAN SLONE: You and I both.

HANSEN: [INAUDIBLE] a buy-in from the community as well.

BRYAN SLONE: As, as--

HANSEN: And I don't feel like we have a whole lot of that here now.

BRYAN SLONE: Well, I, I, I would-- I will give you some examples. I think Seward's an example. I think Columbus is an example that has been pretty aggressive on, on this. You know, there's some, some very small towns where they've just simply went out and built the center. I've got friends in Scottsbluff who are building their own childcare. It is happening. The, the hospital in Holdrege has been very active in trying to develop the community. So, yeah, I, I think-- and, and with that comes the small businesses. What the small businesses need is a partner in a big business. And, and this will happen because-- we will be competitive as a state. And, and this is something I talk to our business members about all the time. They know they're going to have skin in this game. What this bill does is something totally different, which is ensuring that we do the part that really government does need to do. This is the starting point. Because there are a lot of geographic areas that don't have big business in them. And, and probably our most impoverished areas don't have big businesses and big anchor businesses to do this.

HANSEN: OK. Thank you.

FREDRICKSON: Other questions? I have one. At the risk of asking you something maybe above your pay grade, I-- with the--

BRYAN SLONE: Everything's above my pay grade anymore, Senator.

FREDRICKSON: Well, with the-- you know, the financing piece got me thinking a little bit. I mean, do, do you think this should-- it all be addressed in our TEEOSA formula?

BRYAN SLONE: Should it be what? I'm sorry.

FREDRICKSON: Addressed in our TEEOSA formula. I mean, I'm just thinking in terms of front-loading where we get to that highest return or--

BRYAN SLONE: So you're taking me down a really big rabbit hole, Senator, because that's my other issue. I think as we look at the question of what is, what is government's role-- and I'm going back to the senate-- good senator here. We have as a government-- the big we. I realize I don't push the buttons. But the big we have a, have a role in protecting our children and the development of our children and in, in providing competitive education. It's, it's the future for this state. It-- does it mean it needs to be gold-plated? No. So schools are a part of this, and, and flexibility is a big part. So I come from small towns in Nebraska, out in the Panhandle. In some towns, that school is, is the big entity. Some towns it's the hospital. Sometimes it's both. Sometimes it's something else. There's got to be enough flexibility in this area where, where there is an opportunity. The other thing I would say about childcare is, compared to other states, we tend to have more mom-and-pop shops in childcare than, than other states. It's really important that we have the ability to continue to develop those mom-and-pop shops as, as well as the big, big centers. And for that to happen, they need some certainty in terms of what this, what this payment and support system is going to be. And so when you ask the question, do we need to eliminate the sunset? Yes. If I'm sitting here today and I'm a mom-and-pop trying to open up a, a new center, I kind of want to know that, that my low-income population is, is still going to be able to afford this two or three years from now as I'm making this investment.

FREDRICKSON: Thank you.

BRYAN SLONE: Yeah.

FREDRICKSON: Other questions? Seeing none. Thank you for being here.

BRYAN SLONE: Thank you very much.

FREDRICKSON: Next proponent. Good afternoon.

KRISTINE VANHOSEN: Good afternoon, Senator Fredrickson, fellow committee members. What a day you guys have had today sounds like. It's easy to follow up all of the numbers, and so I'll kind of tailor my testimony just to kind of talk about the parts that Senator Quick asked about, the child impact that this bill has on, on all of the

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children that we serve. And so my name is Kristine VanHoosen, K-r-i-s-t-i-n-e V-a-n-H-o-o-s-e-n. I am the Director of Early Care Education of the Grand Island YWCA. Ooh, goodness. Today, I testify in support because it's very crucial to us as childcare owners-- members. I'm a nonprofit kind of girl, so I won't say owners. But it's important for all of us to keep this threshold at 185%. This August will mark my 24th year. Hoo. Man. I come to this because it's important. It's rewarding for families. It's rewarding for me, not only is exhausting for me as well. I advocate because there are so many kids that come through our center at the Y that would not come through the center without this kinds of supports. These families aren't families who are looking for a handout. They're not looking for us to provide free childcare so they can go home and watch TV and things like that. They're coming because they want work and they want to get-- to move up in the industry. I'll tailor this a little bit and just talk mostly about my, my two biggest impacts of families that we have currently right now. Our rates are \$200, and they'll go \$225. That seems like a lot per week for families, but it's really not. It does not cover the cost of providing infant care. That \$25 that we're going to go up is very detrimental to a, a family of four, two kids, a working mom and dad. They are writing to me-- and you'll read their testimony in here-- saying that they're not sure childcare is, is sustainable for their families. We will work through things. As the Y, our-- Grand Island also has some scholarships. We have very, very good business community partnerships that help with, with these things too. So we'll work hard to help this family because they will not meet-- they do not meet the income threshold. They do not receive subsidized care. They, they cannot. They're just over the level of the 2-- I think it's 210%. They're just over that. So they don't receive any kind of assistance whatsoever. The second family I got when I came to the Y, he was a, a baby. Dad got custody. Mom just kind of dropped out. And Dad's like, what do I do with this baby? He wasn't working. He had a background that was colored, I will be honest with you, but he wanted to do better. So I sat across the table with him and I said, let's apply for a subsidy. Let's do this knowing that you're going to work your way out of this situation. And so he got a job in, in the construction industry making pennies on the dollar. Did a really good job. And he really liked to work. And the little boy kept coming to us and kept coming to us. And Dad said, I'm going to get a promotion. And I'm like, oh, that's awesome. Don't forget you have to reapply. And so I walked him through the reapplying method. And he got a family fee, which was fine. He was OK with the family fee. Now he'll pay a portion and the state will pay a portion. This last year, he got another promotion. He came back in to reapply. And before he reapplied--

FREDRICKSON: You're in the red zone, so if you won't mind finishing up your thoughts.

KRISTINE VANHOSEN: Thank you so much. I said, before you reapply, let's run your numbers. I ran his numbers. I said, you won't be able to get subsidized care. Let's make a plan for you. He said to me, let's do it. He didn't want to turn that promotion down, but he knew it would be difficult. And so him and I have worked very tirelessly to figure out how he's going to make the payments, how he's going to do this. And the impact on his child has been amazing. He didn't know that he had to have so many milestones met before he was 18 months. He didn't know he had to have this before he went into kindergarten. All of those things that single father now knows and was supported by our system, and he no longer takes subsidized care. He's a prime example of how this system and how this level makes a difference in our families in Nebraska.

FREDRICKSON: Thank you for your testimony. Any questions from the committee? Senator Quick.

QUICK: Thank you, Vice Chair. So how many kids do you actually serve wi-- at, at your facility?

KRISTINE VANHOSEN: So we are licensed for 165. We-- 38 of our families are subsidized. Eight of those families are infants. 17 of those families are school-agers. If you're from Grand Island-- or maybe lots of places-- that's just my home-- infant care and school-aged care are the hardest things to find, so the majority of those are subsidized.

QUICK: OK. And then one other question, if I could, that-- so whe-- when you go from 185% to the 200%, how does that work? Do they-- does it reduce the amount of their subsidy by the amount they make? Or how does that work?

KRISTINE VANHOSEN: Typically, it's actually in, in, in the in between. So before you get to that 210%, you probably already have been reduced. If the system works as it should, you, you can come in there and you can get free childcare. When you start to work and you get more money, then you go into, like, a family fee, where then you pay a portion and then they pay a portion and the system still works and you're still doing your part. Eventually you pay the full thing. So it-- there, there is a cliffed effect. But I, I believe as a provider, if we do a good job of supporting them, they won't always fall off the said cliff you, you guys hear a lot about.

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QUICK: Thank you. Thank you for what you do.

KRISTINE VANHOSEN: Yeah.

FREDRICKSON: Other questions? Seeing none. Thank you for being here.

KRISTINE VANHOSEN: Yeah. You're welcome.

FREDRICKSON: Next proponent for LB304. And while we wait, we did have online comments for LB304. We had 91 proponents, 3 opponents, and 1 in the neutral capacity. Welcome.

GARRET SWANSON: Thank you. Vice Chair Fredrickson, members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Garret Swanson, G-a-r-r-e-t S-w-a-n-s-o-n. And I'm here on behalf of the Holland Children's Movement, a nonpartisan, not-per-- not-for-profit organization that strives to fulfill its vision for Nebraska to become a beacon in economic security and opportunity for all children and families. In support of LB304. Thank you for taking the time to hold this hearing, senators. A lot of great testimony has been heard and I don't want it to retread ground that's been walked on. With that in mind, I just want to provide some data and research for the record and your consideration. In 2021, the Census Bureau studied the impact of the childcare subsidy on working mothers. Through examining data from the Child Care and Development Fund, the Social Security Administration and the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey, the Census Bureau found that working mothers were 7% more likely to retain their jobs four years later if they receive the subsidy than when they didn't. The study also found that working mothers, working married mothers were 7% more likely to receive equitable wages when compared to their spouses. These percentages increase when examining just marginalized grou-- marginalized groups and not the whole population. In 2021, the Morning Consult conducted a survey of 654 parents living in rural areas with children under the age of five. In that sta-- survey, 68% of respondents said that they had considered formal childcare options. Of those that actually sought care, 34% said their provider was experiencing an employee shortage. 60% of respondents said they were not receiving any federal subsidy. 25% said they were not even aware that these options existed. Parents in the Midwest region of polling were the least likely to receive a subsidy and even know that options were available. In a stubly-- study published by-- in 2023 by the National Advisory Committee on Rural Health and Human Services, they found that 63% of low-income rural residents live in a childcare deser-- desert compared to 46% in urban areas. Although the federal government in the Child Care Development Block Grant specified

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that the copayments for parents that receive a childcare subsidy should not, should not exceed 7% of family income. As of 2014, families that were not receiving a subsidy were on average spending over 12.2% of their income on childcare. 11 years later, that number is likely much higher. So this is a lot of information, but I wanted to bring it all up just to highlight that there's still a lot to do passed passing LB304, such as raising awareness for this program and continuing to advocate for rural areas. We also need to look at what other friends in the Midwest are doing. For example, Wisconsin-- Wisconsin, which now puts our eligi-- the eligibility for a childcare subsidy at 200% of the federal poverty level. Or Minnesota, a state which will have paid parental leave starting January 1 of next year. Thank you for your time, senators.

FREDRICKSON: Thank you. Any questions from the committee? Senator Riepe.

RIEPE: Thank you, Chairman. I have a question. I'm very familiar or somewhat familiar, I guess, with the, the Holland Family and the Holland Movement. Now, is the children's movement, is-- are you an advisory side--

GARRET SWANSON: So the--

RIEPE: And is there a foun-- a fit-- I'll go with the rest of the question so you get a full picture here. Is there a foundation side that provides any funding for childcare?

GARRET SWANSON: There is a foundation that does do that. We are actually not affiliated with the foundation. We're a separate 501(c)(4).

RIEPE: Oh.

GARRET SWANSON: Yeah. And then there's actually a Holland Children's Institute, which is a 501(c)(3). There's so many Holland things.

RIEPE: It sounds like you're well-diversified.

GARRET SWANSON: What's that?

RIEPE: You're well-diversified.

GARRET SWANSON: Yeah. Yeah. An understatement.

RIEPE: It's all based on the Holland family, though.

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GARRET SWANSON: Yes, a lot of it is. Goes right back to Dick Holland. Unfortunately passed away a few years ago.

RIEPE: OK. Thank you. Thank you, Chairman.

FREDRICKSON: Thank you. Senator Hansen.

HANSEN: Thank you. I probably should have asked this earlier of Katie. We have an eligibility of no more than 60 months, and then we have some other kind of assistance I think after that. It's more a precaution, like a share. Is 60 months pretty typical of the other states?

GARRET SWANSON: So it's changing quite a bit in the last few years since COVID. With this 60 months date, I'm not sure. But I do know that some states are now starting to implement recurring adjustments where it's tying it to things like CPI. And there's actually new formulas popping up that are mixing in with the FT-- FPL level. A lot of states are doing different things.

HANSEN: OK. I can always ask them later, but. I didn't know if-- some states-- cash assistance shall be provided for a period of-- not exceeding six months. I just didn't know--

GARRET SWANSON: That is for the ADC.

HANSEN: Oh, that's right. Yes.

GARRET SWANSON: Yeah. It's for ADC, I believe.

HANSEN: That's right. Nope, you're right. All right. Thanks.

FREDRICKSON: Other questions? Seeing none. Thank you for being here.

GARRET SWANSON: Thank you.

FREDRICKSON: Next proponent. Welcome.

TAYLOR GIVENS-DUNN: Welcome. Thank you. Good afternoon, Vice Chair Fredrickson and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Taylor Givens-Dunn, T-a-y-l-o-r G-i-v-e-n-s-D-u-n-n. And I'm the Policy and Power Building Manager at I Be Black Girl. Our mission at IBBG is to ensure that black women, femmes, and girls can actualize their full potential through autonomy, abundance, and liberation. And we advocate for policies that support families in making the best decisions for themselves and their children, policies that recognize

the structural barriers to economic security, access to care, and overall well-being. And for that reason, we're here today in support of LB304. Access-- accessible childcare options are integral to ensure black women can fully participate in Nebraska's workforce. And we support LB304, as it maintains critical childcare subsidy income eligibility levels enacted in 2021. In Senator DeBoer's introduction, she did a really great job explaining how this policy measure was really born during the pandemic. But I think what we want to be really clear about is that the challenges of affording childcare did not begin with the pandemic, nor have they disappeared. Families across Nebraska continue to struggle with the high cost of childcare, and rolling back eligibility levels would undermine the progress we've made in ensuring that parents, especially those with low incomes, can remain in the workforce while providing for their children. I don't want to rehash anything that the previous testifiers have shared, but what I do want to share is that in 2024, I Be Black Girl partnered with the Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative to launch the Child Care Catalyst Program. This was a ten-week initiative designed for black women and femme-owned licensed childcare providers in Omaha. This program helps providers learn more about operating a successful business, build a peer network, and assess valuable resources, professional services, and actionable toolkits to help them grow and build their childcare business. We know that walking back the protections, walking back the sunset date in LB304 would have an impact on these small business owners, as we know that many of the children that they take in their care are, are beneficiaries of this, of this subsidy. We know that this piece of legislation would allow these small business owners to keep their doors open, strengthen the local economy, and really, really continue to be a huge impact on the black community in Omaha and beyond. The last thing I'd like to share as I see my yellow light is on is that when we talk about childcare in Nebraska and we talk about childcare subsidies, the impact-- the fiscal impact may be large, but the impact on these children's lives is so critically important. And we want to make sure that Nebraska continues to invest in the well-being of children, parents, and the economy as a whole. We'd like to thank Senator DeBoer for bringing this bill. And we urge the committee to advance LB304. I'm happy to answer any questions, especially if they're questions about our really cool catalyst program.

FREDRICKSON: Thank you for your testimony. Any questions from the committee?

TAYLOR GIVENS-DUNN: Beautiful.

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FREDRICKSON: I will ask about your catalyst program. Do you want to give us a 30-second summary?

TAYLOR GIVENS-DUNN: Sure. Of course. So our catalyst program is a-- really, it's a think tank for black business owners, specifically childcare business owners in Nebraska. So over the course of the ten weeks, they get training from folks who have been doing childcare in Nebraska for a really long time on the best practices to manage their business and the best practices for care. So then at the end of the ten weeks, they graduate from our program and they continue to have business resources and support so they can grow their childcare business, care for more children, and really provide that service back into the communities where they're already rooted. I think when we're talking about Omaha, specifically north Omaha, where many of these childcare catalyzers were from, childcare-- quality childcare can be difficult to come by geographically. So this program really, really focused on making sure that folks were able to get the childcare services right in their neighborhoods, right in their community. We're really proud of the work we did.

FREDRICKSON: That's great. I'd love to learn more from you later.

TAYLOR GIVENS-DUNN: Sure.

FREDRICKSON: Thanks for being here.

TAYLOR GIVENS-DUNN: Of course. Thank you so much.

FREDRICKSON: Other proponents. Welcome.

KEN SMITH: Thank you. Good afternoon, Vice Chair Fredrickson, members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Ken Smith, K-e-n S-m-i-t-h. I'm the Director of the Economic Justice Program at Nebraska Appleseed. And we're here today in support of LB304. I'm going to keep my remarks pretty brief. I just wanted to let the committee know that the, the history of childcare eligibility and this body's sort of consideration of that actually goes back to 2002. So prior to 2002, eligibility levels for this program were at 185% of federal poverty. It was in 2002 that then-- that number-- eligibility was cut to 120% federal poverty. There were many, many efforts after that point in time to move the eligibility threshold back to what it was prior to 2002. Senator Kathy Campbell I think had a couple bills in 2013 or '14. And then I think th-- sort of the kind of breakthrough was-- 2019, we, we were able to get it up to 130%. And then thanks to Senator DeBoer in the-- kind of the legislative history that we've

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heard in the opening is kind of what, what got us to today. But ultimately, what LB304 does is just have us revert back to the income thresholds that existed way back in 2001, like way back when, you know, Nebraska football went to its last national championship game. I mean, this is, this is just reverting back to a, a previously existing threshold of eligibility that's important for all of the reasons that have been so thoroughly discussed by other testifiers. And also, Senator Quick, I just wanted to touch on a question that you had about income reporting. So in the Child Care Subsidy program, you do redetermine every 12 months or so. And, and then if in that period of time your income changes, people that are receiving childcare subsidies report income changes to the agency. And so that's how I think they can track income eligibility through childcare and then through transitional childcare as well. I think that's all I have. Happ-- would be happy to answer any, any questions.

FREDRICKSON: Thank you. Any questions from the committee? Seeing-- oh. Senator Hansen.

HANSEN: I think I probably know the answer, but why 185%? Why, why-- do you know why they landed on that number? Is that just kind of-- so we're in the average or we're kind of in the middle? Like, why not 165% or 1-- 200%?

KEN SMITH: I think the calculation is-- I guess the short answer is I don't know for sure, but I think there is a-- the federal sort of ceiling for eligibility is 85% of a state's median income. And so I think the way that-- it's about just calibrating both the Child Care Subsidy program and then the transitional program to facilitate as easy of a-- sort of a transition off of childcare benefits as, as possible.

HANSEN: OK. That makes sense. All right. Thanks.

FREDRICKSON: Other questions? Seeing none. Thank you for being here.

KEN SMITH: Thank you.

FREDRICKSON: Next proponent for LB304. Last call. Proponents. Seeing none. We will move on to opponents. Anyone here to testify in the opposition to LB304? Seeing none. Anyone to testify in the neutral capacity? Welcome.

JOHN MEALS: Hello. My name is John Meals, J-o-h-n M-e-a-l-s. Good afternoon, Chair Fredrickson and members of the HHS Committee. I apologize. I don't have a testimony to hand you like the department

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would normally. I'm the CFO for DHHS. And I apologize, Senator DeBoer. Normally we would tell you that we're going to be here, but I was not planning on testifying. We submitted comments that I think speaks to some of the fiscal impact, but I was sitting in the audience and I'm going to try to answer some of the fiscal note questions if that's OK. The first one about why it's a General Fund cost now. So on an annual basis, we receive about \$73 million for the childcare subsidy block grants. There's another \$17 million that we can utilize from TANF. So it's about \$90 million in total that we have available annually. In '24, we spent about \$125 million on childcare subsidies. So we already exceed the annual value of the grant. So they are eligible to be spent on the federal grant, but we already spend them all. So it doesn't-- it's going to end up being a General Fund cost is, is where we're at with the subsidy. As far as the ARPA funding, I think-- Senator Meyer, you referenced the, the state relief funds earlier that were from LB1014 in 2022. The ARPA funds that we used for this were ARPA funds that we received directly to the department. So we received a number of childcare grants that we, you know, sent out a number of payments to childcare providers from basically 2021 through '23, I think, or 20-- the beginning of '24. And that funding expired in September of 2024. So it wasn't the state relief funds that were from the-- that the Legislature took in LB1014. The, the other question of, what are we doing in the gap, right? Why if the ARPA funded-- funding ended in September of '24 through '26? And the reason that there's not a request for that is we're trying-- it was an attempt by the department to live within our existing means. We're-- again, we're utilizing the ARPA funding at the beginning of this biennium. That created some carryover for us that we believe can cover that gap. But if the sunset goes away, we don't have that amount in our current base. So it would need to become, you know, occurred addition to our base. So basically, I mean, we're, we're trying to live within our means for this two-year gap, like in the, in the current year and into 2026. But it's not in our current base. So if this-- if the sunset goes away, then we would need that added to our base. One other thing I'll clarify. The, the \$14 million fiscal note. I think LFO put-- Legislative Fiscal Office put \$10 million in there because it's for 3/4 of the year. That represents the number of people that are eligible for the subsidy between 130% and 185%. So that cost is \$14 million a year. That's just the, the math behind it, so. Does that-- I think those were the questions that came up. Were there other things? I'm happy to answer any other questions.

FREDRICKSON: We'll find out. Thank you. Thank you for being here. Any questions from the committee? Senator Quick.

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QUICK: Yeah. Thank you, Vice Chair. And I'm new to the HHS, so TANF funding is-- you know, I know some things about it, but probably not enough, but. So I know there's TANF funding and there's probably a lot of different areas where that TANF funding is moved to or used for. So is there are only so many dollars that can be used for--

JOHN MEALS: Yes. Thank you for the question, Senator. So the TANF grant is capped at 30% per year. So our annual TANF grant is a little over \$56 million. So 30% of that is just under \$17 million. It's, like, \$16.99 million. So that's the max that we can use on an annual basis for childcare purposes.

QUICK: OK. All right. Thank you.

FREDRICKSON: Other questions from the committee? I have one. I-- so first of all, I appreciate you being here because there was, as you probably saw, a lot of questions about, about that gap. So I just want to make sure I understood correctly. I was taking some notes on what you were-- when you were testifying. So currently-- so-- what, what-- we are no longer currently using ARPA funds to cover this.

JOHN MEALS: Correct.

FREDRICKSON: The hope of the department is between now and 2026, when the sun sets, you'll be able to live within existing means.

JOHN MEALS: Yep.

FREDRICKSON: Is that \$10 to \$14 million a year existing means?

JOHN MEALS: Yes. So, so what using the ARPA funds did is it allowed us to basically use a lower amount of the existing childcare block grant. So we have basically carryover in both our general funds and in the childcare block grant. Those are-- so, so because we have that carryover, the block grant is only-- only last for two years. It's, it's not like TANF where it's open-ended and we can spend it forever. Childcare block grant is elig-- is, is able to be expended for a two-year period. So we believe with the excess that was created with the ARPA money that we received we can cover that two-year gap until 2026.

FREDRICKSON: OK. Thank you. Senator Quick

QUICK: Yeah. Thanks. Excuse me, I-- because-- just because I'd like to know, but, can, can you request more TANF dollars or is that-- is the

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federal government just going-- only going to send you so much and say what you can use it for?

JOHN MEALS: Yeah. TANF is-- it's a formula. It's based off of an act from the mid-90s. So that-- we get \$56.8 million a year until the federal Congress changes that. The childcare block grant does change a little bit each year, and that has gone up, but it's usually only a few million dollar change a year. So it's-- like I said, this pat-- in '24, we received \$73 million. So-- I mean, if it changes, it might be 74-something. But either way, I mean there's a \$30-plus million delta between the grant and the spend.

QUICK: All right. Thank you.

FREDRICKSON: Other questions? Seeing none. Thank you for being here.

JOHN MEALS: Thanks.

FREDRICKSON: Anyone else here to testify in the neutral capacity? Seeing none. Senator DeBoer, you are invited to close.

DeBOER: Thank you, Vice Chair Fredrickson. So I'm very glad we're doing things the old school way. And now I'm going to go talk to the gentleman from DHHS and ask him some questions that I have, face to face because we're not relying on our devices to get us to them. So a couple of things I wanted to clear up. We don't have a 60-month limit on childcare subsidy. That's only the ADC. For Senator Hansen. Also, Senator Hansen, I told you the wrong year when I said-- when I was having that conversation. That was in 2020, not 2019, with Kate Bolz. I just remembered the wrong year. But as you heard, what we're doing now is going back to 20-- 2002 numbers for the-- or, we're staying at 2002 numbers, the 185%. And my understanding is that the entire time between 2002 and 2021, when we passed my original LB485, they had been trying to get back to 185% because that seemed to be the right number. And I don't, I don't know if there was science or art or witchery involved in finding that right number, but that seemed to be the right number for everyone on what was kind of helping the economy the best. We have some more clarification on the fiscal note. I'm going to get it even clearer in my mind so I can report back to you all. But right now, I have that the expansion should not use general funds. Even if we did, though, I would still stand behind this bill. Even if we used 100% general funds, knowing what a hole we have in our budget, I would say that we should still pass this bill. I'm going to try and find a different way to do it. I think we should pay for it with federal funds if we can. But if we can't, I think we should still pass this

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bill. And here's why. If you don't have enough food, you could arguably still work. That's a pretty crappy thing to do to somebody, but you could still work. If you don't have enough heat or housing or whatever, any other subsidy we provide, doesn't directly affect your work in quite the way it does if you don't have a place for your kids. If you do not have a safe place for your kids, if you do not have a place for your children to go, you can't take a job. If you're a single mom, if you're a single dad, if you're a mom that wants to work and dad's already working, if you're three people-- whatever combination, if you don't have a safe place for the kids, you can't work. And Senator Riepe says, shouldn't businesses take care of that? I agree with Senator Riepe with respect to, you know, the big businesses, the wealthy businesses, whatever. We certainly need to work out some way of working with them to help take care of this problem. And you heard Bryan Slone say, yeah, they know some of this has got to be on them. But if you are one of the poorest amongst us and you want a better life for yourself-- the old adage about teach a man to fish. Childcare is the closest thing we as a government can do to get people in the workforce, provide them an opportunity to get a better economic situation for themselves. That's it. We do that, we give people hope. We give people an opportunity to work on their own so that they can now participate in getting themselves off of any kind of government assistance they might have. Childcare. Yes. Look, don't tell the SNAP people I said this, right? Because SNAP is really important. People ought to have food. And if we can't do that, we're probably bad people. But they can't work if they don't have a place for their kids. So I'll work with this committee any way you want to figure out how to do this, but I do not want to lose to everyone but West Virginia in this country in terms of our ability to provide childcare for the poorest amongst us so that they can get in the workforce, so that they can get off of government assistance, so that they can do what they want with their lives and become more economically viable. I don't want us to be second to last in the country. Not on my watch. Thank you.

FREDRICKSON: Thank you, Senator DeBoer. Any questions from the committee? Seeing none. Thank you.

DeBOER: Thank you.

FREDRICKSON: That will close our hearing for LB304. Senator Hallstrom will be up next.

HALLSTROM: Vice Chair Fredrickson--

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FREDRICKSON: You are welcome to open on LB339.

HALLSTROM: Thank you. Vice Chair Fredrickson, members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Bob Hallstrom, B-o-b H-a-l-l-s-t-r-o-m. State Senator, representing Legislative District 1. LB339 requires the Department of Health and Human Services to provide a summary report due annually on February 1 of childcare subsidy claims reimbursed for each licensed childcare provider in the previous calendar year. The language in the bill stipulates that the department shall break down the number of paid day units and paid day half units-- or, paid half-day units or the measure by which it quantifies authorized childcare subsidy reimbursements. The report will disaggregate the data to show the monthly average number of children in the early childhood age group-- under six-- and school-age group-- six and older. In recent months, childcare providers have reported issues with overly burdensome application requirements when filling out their tax credit forms for the nonrefundable School Readiness Tax Credit. To be eligible for the credit, a provider must be caring for children under six enrolled in the subsidy program. Their credit is based on the monthly average number of children enrolled in subsidy and their quality rating in Step Up to Quality, the state's quality rating improvement system for early childhood programs. The application requires providers to calculate the monthly average number of children enrolled in subsidy by combing through, in some cases, hundreds of pages of their explanation of payment reports, identifying which lines within the report are specific to children under six, then separating the full day and partial day reimbursements. The current monthly EOP reports do not aggregate the payments that they receive and often include modifications to reimbursements from prior months by the department, presenting even more confusion with their reimbursement claims. Providing this report will not require the department to gather additional data. This is all information that is already part of their current billing system. LB339 is stipulating an end of the year summary for information already correct-- collected by the department. The department's February 1 deadline will ensure that providers have access to this aggregated information in time for tax failing-- filing deadlines. There are other important benefits to the yearly report required by LB339. It provides for accountability to ensure that accurate reimbursement information is given to providers so that they can continue to be responsible partners in serving Nebraska's low-income working families. In recent years, childcare providers have expressed frustration with the department's administration of the subsidy program. It is often cited as a reason for not participating in the program-- currently sitting at about 60%

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participation. The Child Care Subsidy program is designed so that low-income, working families have the same choice in quality childcare arrangements as private pay families. Providing for accurate reporting of reimbursement is one way to help make subsidy administration more conducive to participation rates. Following me is a provider who can share her experience navigating the EOP reports and how they present a barrier to accessing the nonrefundable School Readiness Tax Credit. First Five Nebraska will also detail some of the technical issues with the EOP reports and how LB339 will remedy these issues. I would note I've handed out some amendments. They are really technical. One of the things I'd note for the record, I looked at the submission of comments by Nicole Barrett with the-- in-- with the Department of Health and Human Services. I don't want to read in too much to what they said, but I took from what their comments involved, that they are thinking that this is an annual report to the Legislature. It is not. This is a report to each childcare provider regarding their subsidy kiddos of six and under and so forth. And so if that makes any difference in their position. I know that Mr. Clark from First Five had reached out to them. I do not know-- as of 1:15, he had not heard back from them. No fault of him or them. Just the, the timing issue because we found out about their, their comments earlier today. So if that makes a different slant on the bill for them, we certainly would want to hear from them. But we think that it is the aggregation of information that they currently have. So hopefully it's not a major programming issue for them to have to deal with, and it will provide benefits to the providers in terms of qualifying for the credits. Be happy to address any questions.

FREDRICKSON: Thank you, Senator Hallstrom. Any questions from the committee? Seeing none. Will you stick around to close?

HALLSTROM: I will.

FREDRICKSON: All right. We will now take proponents for LB339. Proponents.

APRIL BENDER: Hello.

FREDRICKSON: Welcome.

APRIL BENDER: Thank you. All right. Good afternoon, Vice Chairman Fredrickson and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is April Bender, A-p-r-i-l B-e-n-d-e-r. I have owned and operated a childcare center in Fremont, Nebraska for the past 20 years. Our school is actually a step five Nebraska's Step Up to Quality program

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called Fremont Children's Academy. I am also a business coach, speaker, and advocate for children-- for childcare providers. I work with childcare center owners across the country, helping them build sustainable businesses, improve operational efficiency, and navigate complex fina-- financial and regulatory challenges. I have had the privilege of speaking on stages and conferences worldwide, sharing strategies to help providers strengthen their programs and better serve children and families. I'm here today to testify in strong support of LB339. LB339 is a critical step forward in ensuring that childcare providers across Nebraska receive the timely and accurate financial information they need. This bill would require Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services to provide an annual summary report of claims reimbursed for each licensed childcare provider who receives subsidy payments. This report, due by February 1 each year, would consolidate essential data into one accessible and comprehensive document. Right now, no such report exists. Instead, providers like myself must spend hours, sometimes days, sorting through excla-- explanation of payments, or EOPs, statements on the DHHS website, manually extracting and compiling data to complete necessary forms, and printing hundreds or thousands of pages of EOPs such as tho-- such as those required for the School Readiness Tax Credit. Personally, I have already spent over six hours on this process and have yet to, to complete it. Even after all that effort, there is no guarantee that my data is accurate. This inefficiency is not just frustrating. It is unnecessary and places an undue burden on childcare businesses that are already operating on thin margins. While Nebraska has made some improvements to the childcare subsidy portal in recent years, the system is still difficult to use and not adequate for providers' needs. For example, it does not keep a running total of claims submitted, forcing providers to manually total each entry with a calculator as they input the claims. If it times you out, that's a whole separate issue. Good luck. You have to start over. This creates additional work and increases the risk for errors. There's no built-in mechanism to provide alerts for providers if there's a typo in the calc-- calculation. LB339 would significantly reduce these challenges and provide an accurate and easily accessible record for providers. For many childcare providers, this additional administrative work takes valuable time away from running our programs and supporting our staff. Most importantly, providing care for children we serve. I'm going to cut to the chase. Throughout my work as a coach for the childcare center owners around the country, I have seen firsthand how other states have developed far more efficient and provider-friendly systems for managing childcare subsidies. Nebraska is falling behind.

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FREDRICKSON: You are at time.

APRIL BENDER: Yes, I am.

FREDRICKSON: Thank you for your testimony.

APRIL BENDER: Thank you.

FREDRICKSON: Any questions from the committee? I, I have one. So I, I appreciate the clarification from the senator's amendments here. So my understanding is-- so this is information DHHS already aggregates currently. The idea with this would just be to be able to send this information to per-- to each individual childcare subsidy provider for tax purposes and-- is that sort of the, the goal here?

APRIL BENDER: That's correct. I provided some examples of the EOPs.

FREDRICKSON: I saw that. Yeah. That seems burdensome.

APRIL BENDER: Yes. And as-- so for myself, just to complete the tax readiness credit form, I have to go through every single child every single month and add up how many days they were served and how many children were served. And I have to either print all of those then to send with the form in order to send it to the Nebraska Department of Revenue just to get the approval or denial to be able to then send it in with my tax-- when I complete my taxes.

FREDRICKSON: Got it. So--

APRIL BENDER: Yes. So there's no total. There's no-- you know, the data that is needed for the tax credit form would easily be accessible by DHHS.

FREDRICKSON: Sure.

APRIL BENDER: Correct. And then monthly, we're not provided-- or, as we input a claim each month to do our billings, we're not provided with any totals then either, dollars and cents, number of days we billed, number of students, anything like that.

FREDRICKSON: So, so currently, it's, it's, it's a-- I assume safe to say this is a significant administrative burden.

APRIL BENDER: Absolutely.

FREDRICKSON: OK.

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APRIL BENDER: Yes.

FREDRICKSON: Thank you. Other questions? Senator Hansen.

HANSEN: Thank you. How is this information provided to you when the state gives it to you? Is it in paper form? Is it online? Is it emailed to you?

APRIL BENDER: It's not provided at all.

HANSEN: OK. All right.

APRIL BENDER: So we would love for it to be provided. But the, the ones that are in front of you, the EOPs, those are provided to us after the payment has been made or in the process when the payment is on its way via ACH is how we receive it. And it's on the portal exactly how you see it in front of you. Yeah. But the end of year is not provided to us at all.

HANSEN: OK. Yep. Thank you.

FREDRICKSON: Other questions? Seeing none. Thank you for being here.

APRIL BENDER: Thank you.

FREDRICKSON: Other proponents for LB339? Welcome back.

KATIE BASS: Thank you. Vice Chair Fredrickson and members of the Health and Human Services Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Dr. Katie Bass, spelled K-a-t-i-e B-a-s-s. And I'm the Policy Research Manager at First Five Nebraska. First Five Nebraska is a statewide public policy organization focused on promoting quality early care and learning opportunities for Nebraska's youngest children. I'm here today to testify in support for LB339 and want to thank Senator Hallstrom for introducing this legislation. So we've talked a little bit about what the bill would do, but ultimately it's an end-of-year summary, right, of the total number of children that were provided care by age group, the number of days that were billed by age group, and then an aggregate amount of subsidy transactions between the department and the provider. We think that this is important for a couple of reasons. First of all, there's already a system, as April was just mentioning, where the department does provide kind of that back-and-forth transmission of information between provider and the department. So we think that will help. But one of the things that we found when we were talking to providers about their EOPs is that they're going to have to go through each

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single line of data, and that sometimes they can get an EOP the next month that can conflict with the EOP they received in the previous month, right? Certain payments could be rescinded, and so they would have to square that somehow. So childcare providers have been expressing frustration for years about these administrative burdens towards the Child Care Subsidy program. This really peaked, though, with the nonrefundable tax credit. And I gave you a little handout today that kind of shows how that application process works for the nonrefundable tax credit. I think one of the things that April mentioned is they have to go by hand and count, right? I want to then say, in addition, the Department of Revenue is going to have to go by hand and verify their counts. Right? They have to send in all of those EOPs. So we're doing a lot of manual work, both for the provider and also for the Department of Revenue. And then I turned too many pages. So, so I also want to say, though, that this is not just related to the tax credit. Last summer's auditor's report highlighted the lack of adequate controls at NDHHS to prevent billing errors. Providing a monthly accounting of days and partial days billed and the number of children served would allow both NDHHS and childcare providers to recognize and rectify outliers that can occur from any manual data entry process, which is our current process, right? It's a manual process. So we believe a report of data already collected by NDHHS that summarizes providers' annual building-- billing will provide accountability and an opportunity for checks and balances. Providers can also utilize this for end-- this end-of-year report to square their subsidy billing records at the end of the year, for their School Readiness Tax Credit applications, and for other end-of-year tax purposes more generally, also increasing accountability measures at the Department of Revenue. Thank you for your time and consideration on LB339. And I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

FREDRICKSON: Thank you. Any questions from the committee? Seeing none. Thank you.

KATIE BASS: Thank you.

FREDRICKSON: Other proponents for LB339? Seeing none. Any opponents to LB339? Anyone here to testify in the neutral capacity? Seeing none. Senator Hallstrom, you're welcome to come close. While you come up here, we did have online comments for LB339. We had 2 proponents, 0 opponents, and 1 in the neutral capacity.

HALLSTROM: Thank you, Senator Fredrickson. Just in closing, I appreciate the attention of the committee to this issue. And I'm kind of a little bit torn. Sometimes you bring legislation and you want to

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get people's attention to make sure that you can change some, some practices. And I think I, I would confirm that Mr. Clark has in fact talked to somebody at the Department of Health and Human Services. I found that out when I went to sit down. And I think the department is, is interested and eager to do something administratively to change this. The other fly in the ointment that we might have is if you look at that comment submitted by Ms. Barrett, she indicates that within the next year they are going to have some changes that are handed down from the federal level that are going to change what they need to report. In other words, they report partial days and full days. And so we may either have some issues that, that come into play there. We don't know when those changes are going to be made. I would suspect that the changes may not impact the reporting that we would have for this particular year. And we may have to make some changes in the language, you know, either come in next year if we pass the bill and make the changes to reflect what they actually have to report on a going-forward basis or massage the language now to make sure that it's broad enough that they're reporting the, the partial and the full days or whatever information they're required to report in the future. So we will work with that. I guess I would probably for a short period of time not it-- not request that the, the committee kick the bill out, allow us to talk with the department and see exactly where, where we need to go on this. But I, I-- again, thank you for your attention.

FREDRICKSON: And any questions? Seeing none. Hopefully the fiscal note stays good.

HALLSTROM: It's a good one now.

FREDRICKSON: That'll end our hearing on LB339. We will move on to the hearing for LB46. Senator McKinney. Welcome.

McKINNEY: How you doing?

FREDRICKSON: Good. Good to see you.

McKINNEY: Good to see you as well. All right. Good afternoon, Vice Chair Fredrickson and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Terrell McKinney, T-e-r-r-e-l-l M-c-K-i-n-n-e-y. I represent the 1-- 11th Legislative District in north Omaha. We're here today to discuss LB46, which requires the Department of Health and Human Services to establish a Restaurant Meals Program. Access to nutritious meals is a basic need, but for some people who receive SNAP benefits, cooking at home isn't always an option. This includes individuals that are homeless, elderly, or have disabilities. They may

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not have a kitchen or, or the ability to cook their own meals. LB46 would allow certain SNAP recipients to use their benefits to buy prepared meals at par-- at participating restaurants. By allow-- by allowing SNAP beneficiaries to use their benefits to purchase prepared meals at participating restaurants, we can ensure that everyone has access to nutritious food regardless of their circumstances. This legislation is necessary for many reasons. LB46 is geared towards fighting hunger and addressing food insecurity. Food insecurity remains a significant challenge in Nebraska, with many individuals of families struggling to access adequate nutrition. This program ensures that those who cannot cook at home still have access to healthy meals. It also promotes healthy-- it also promotes health and improving nutrition. Access to nutritious food is essential for overall health and well-being. Having the option to buy hot and prepared meals can help SNAP recipients make better food choices, supporting long-term health. This is-- this not only benefits their physical health, but also contributes to disease prevention. It also supports local businesses. This program isn't about individuals introducing restaurant meal, meals program within SNAP, can also-- it, it also can have positive economic impacts, proli-- particularly for local restaurants, especially in rural communities. By expanding the pool of potential customers to include SNAP beneficiaries, participating restaurants can increase their revenue and support local economies. No one should go hungry just because they lack a kitchen or have health challenges. Everyone deserves access to, to nutritious foods regardless of their circumstances. By implementing a Restaurant Meals Program within SNAP, we uphold principles of equity and inclusion by ensuring that all individuals have the opportunity to nutritious-- to nutri-- to nutritious-- to, to nourish themselves adequately. I'm messing up today. I've been in meetings all day, so. I apologize. But it also streamlines access to benefits. Not everyone could buy groceries, store food, and cook meals. This program removes those barriers, making SNAP benefits more useful for those needs. Simplifying the process of accessing SNAP benefits can help ensure that eligible individuals receive the support they need in a timely manner. This streamlining of access to benefits not only improves the efficiency of the program, but also enhances the overall well-being of SNAP recipients. This bill is a win-win solution. It helps individuals strengthen communities and supports local businesses. It's a commonsense way to make sure the most vulnerable have access to food. And thank you for your time. And with that, I'll answer any questions. Thank you.

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FREDRICKSON: Thank you, Senator McKinney. Any questions from the committee? I have one. So I see you, you, you passed out the-- this information from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. So it sounds like, like there's federal guidelines in place. Other states do this currently, is that--

McKINNEY: Yes.

FREDRICKSON: --correct? OK.

McKINNEY: Yup.

FREDRICKSON: And they have-- OK. Perfect. Sounds good. Thank you.

McKINNEY: I believe there's nine states participating currently.

FREDRICKSON: Yeah, it looks like it's-- nine.

McKINNEY: All right. Thank you.

FREDRICKSON: Thank you. We'll now take proponents for LB46. Welcome.

GLADYS HARRISON: Good afternoon. I don't have a fancy, typed-up statement for you, so hopefully you'll remember my beautiful face and everything that I say to you. My name is Gladys Harrison, G-l-a-d-y-s H-a-r-r-i-s-o-n. I'm the owner of Big Mama's Kitchen and Catering. We're a restaurant-- second-generation restaurant in Omaha, Nebraska. Big Mama was my mother. My mother loved her community and my mother loved to feed people. And my mother felt that there was enough for everyone if we choose to make enough for everybody. I have a customer that comes into my restaurant every day. Her name is Dee [PHONETIC]. Dee is disabled. And she lives about three blocks away. And she rides in a mobile wheelchair. And sometimes Dee has money to pay for a meal and sometimes Dee doesn't. My mother taught me that if someone came in and they were hungry that I was to feed them. So on the days that Dee doesn't have any money, I'd feed Dee for free. And every day she's like, Ms. Gladys, I really appreciate you for feeding me. And I, and I wish-- can I, can I pay you with my food stamp card? I'm like, no, Dee. You can't pay me with my food-- with your food stamp card. If we had the ability to be able to prepare meals that Dee could purchase, Dee could eat a healthy meal at least once a day and be able to pay for it and not feel the shame or the embarrassment or me-- for-- of me having to prepare a meal for her. Where our restaurant's located, we're on 30th and Patrick, we are in the heart of an urban area. However, the problem with food insecurity is a problem that's all across our state. We have poor people in rural areas in Nebraska,

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right, that may have a restaurant in their town, but not a grocery store. Right? Just a 7-Eleven or a, or a Cubby's or a Casey's. And they can take that food stamp card and go there and buy, you know, the highly processed food that's there. Right? And may pass right by a nice restaurant that's cooking real food at that they could potentially get a meal at. There are so many people in our communities who don't have a means to prepare their meals. Right? And so here-- I've listened today to all of the proposed bills. And what I think that you all are here for is to create opportunities for us as community members to solve our community's problems. And this bill would help solve the problem of people who are unable to cook for themselves, have the inability to cook for themselves, and it would also allow businesses like Big Mama's to be able to provide meals for people and to create some jobs. That's what I want to do. I want to create some jobs where people can have living wages, where they can pay their childcare provider, right, and not need state assistance and allow the assistance to go to other people. I appreciate your time and thank you.

FREDRICKSON: Thank you for your testimony. Any questions from the committee? Senator Riepe.

RIEPE: Thank you. Thank you for being here. I know you've been very patient and waiting. My question is--

GLADYS HARRISON: My grandson's been more patient than me. He's been quiet this whole time.

RIEPE: He's been a good young man.

GLADYS HARRISON: He's been a trooper.

RIEPE: My question is this, you say that you have the one gentleman, I think, that comes-- if SNAP programs were available, how much volume do you think you would see on, say, a given day or week or whatever period of time? I'm just trying to get an idea.

GLADYS HARRISON: In the neighborhood where the restaurant's located, we have a senior apartment complex that has 150 units that's just two blocks away. In the area where the restaurant's located, there is a large number of elderly people. You know, 30th Street has a lot of older homes and a lot of older people and disabled people. And so-- I don't have any numbers. We've already started our, I call it a perma-- prepared meals program. We've already started it. So you can come to the restaurant now and, and reach into our grab and go case and get

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something to eat. We're in our third week of it. And most of the people that coming by are folks coming over on their lunch hour, you know, and want to get something quick to grab. But with the potential of the senior housing unit that's two blocks away, there's another one that's on Lake Street, I could imagine that we could feed anywhere from 30 to 40 people a day at a minimum if we were able to have a program where folks could use their SNAP benefits.

RIEPE: Would that crowd out or compromise your regular customers?

GLADYS HARRISON: No, because these are grab and go. So we will have prepared all these already, and the customer's just really coming in and grabbing it. Or we would-- we even would like to do, like, a service where they could buy, you know, a couple of two or three days or a week's worth of meals. Yes. And the restaurants have been slow, particularly this time of the year. So we could use, you know, the extra work so I don't have to lay people off.

RIEPE: Would a requirement be that the individual who's going to consume the meal, he or she picks up his own, or could they send someone over to get their lunch?

GLADYS HARRISON: Well, that's all up to, I guess, how the bill is written.

RIEPE: Do you--

GLADYS HARRISON: I know--

RIEPE: --have a recommendation?

GLADYS HARRISON: What are my recommendations? Well, so on Amazon, you can use your food stamp card. And Instacart, you can use your food stamp card to have somebody brings groceries to you. So how come this bill couldn't allow the same thing for a person that doesn't have a, a, a, a car and is unable to walk and come and get a meal?

RIEPE: I'm glad to hear your opinion.

GLADYS HARRISON: Well, thank you.

RIEPE: And thank you again for being here. Thank you, Chairman.

GLADYS HARRISON: You're welcome.

FREDRICKSON: Other questions? Senator Meyer.

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MEYER: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to thank you for coming in today and highlighting this problem. At the risk of sounding like I'm testifying, I apologize. I, I currently have a bill that identifies that in our Meals on Wheels program and our senior program, we have about \$4 million shortfall right now. And we have a waiting list for Meals on Wheels for our senior citizens. And we are closing some senior meal centers simply because they can't afford to stay open. So I appreciate what you're doing and I think there's, there's definitely a need for this. So thank you for coming in today.

GLADYS HARRISON: You're welcome. Thank you.

FREDRICKSON: Other questions? Seeing none. Thank you for being here.

GLADYS HARRISON: Thank you. You're welcome.

FREDRICKSON: Other proponents for LB46? Good afternoon.

RICH OTTO: Good afternoon. Vice Chair Fredrickson, members of the Healp and-- Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Rich Otto, R-i-c-h O-t-t-o. I'm testifying in support of LB46 on behalf of the Nebraska Hospitality Association and our restaurant members. As Senator McKinney did say, this does establish the Restaurant Meals Program under the SNAP program, which is a federal program. And we can look at the fiscal note, but most of these dollars are covered by federal dollars. Just some state dollars to implement it. This does allow elderly, disabled, and homeless individuals to utilize their SNAP benefits at participating restaurants. The hospitality organization recognizes the crucial role of having nutritious, prepared meals to ensure food security in our most vulnerable populations. LB46 presents an opportunity to tre-- address this key gap in food assistance to those individuals while also helping local businesses. So first, it does establish food access to elderly, disabled, and homeless individuals. Often, it's tough to get around. Kitchens. You're homeless, obviously. It's very difficult to prepare a meal even if you are a SNAP recipient. The benefits of hot, nutritious meals is invaluable to their well-being. I did want to touch base on the states. I know Senator McKinney said at least nine states have done this, which is great. We've shown that this is a proven model that can work. We do want-- I did want to point out the Illinois model. So Illinois implemented thi-- this as a pilot program first. I'm not disagreeing that people need access to prepared meals across the state. But Illinois did it in a couple counties. So there is some flexibility from the committee, the Legislature, the state where you could implement this as a pilot program in Douglas County, Lancaster

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County, Hall, wherever you see fit and roll it out-- and then potentially roll it out to the state after a successful pilot program. So just wanted to mention Illinois did do that. It is a possibility. Quickly, on the fiscal note, these are federal dollars. The program does-- is eligible for 50% match on that. So I think it was only, like, \$42,000 annually to implement this. I feel-- I know we're watching every dollar, but that seems like a small amount to implement this to help those most vulnerable. Happy to answer any questions you may have.

FREDRICKSON: Thank you. Any questions from the committee? Senator Riepe.

RIEPE: Thank you, Chairman. Mr. Otto, thank you for being here. Do you understand-- am I reading this-- I'm looking at the fiscal note. Here, it says, contain-- elderly and disabled members of-- or homeless individuals to have the option. Is that limited to that particular--

RICH OTTO: Correct. So my understanding on the federal rule is you have to be 60 or over, homeless, or disabled to qualify.

RIEPE: OK. Thank you. Thank you, Chairman. That's helpful.

FREDRICKSON: Thank you. I have, I have one question. I see on the federal requirements-- so it speaks to how the restaurants themselves would have to get approval from the state to provide a signed agreement for this program. Would that be-- are there federal guidelines that outline that or would that be up to us as a state to sort of promulgate the requirements? Or do you have any sense of that?

RICH OTTO: There are some federal-- so it is up to the state. I believe the state has some ability there. It is voluntary on the restaurant's basis. So they can-- have to apply. I think there is some potential negotiation that can go back and forth between the state on what the amount the restaurant can charge for the meal, but that's about what-- the main focus is probably what the, the cost is that the restaurant can, can charge.

FREDRICKSON: Sure. Other questions? Seeing none. Thank you for being here. Other proponents for LB46? Welcome.

JOYCE BECK: Thank you. Vice Chair Fredrickson and leaders of the Department of Health and Human Services. My name is Joyce Beck, J-o-y-c-e B-e-c-k. And I am an A-- AARP Nebraska volunteer. And I am testifying today in support of LB46 and on behalf of AARP Nebraska. According to an AARP PPI study in 2022, nearly 11.8 million adults

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ages 80 and over lack consistent access to enough food for active, healthy life due to inadequate financial resources. This means that nearly one in ten adults have food insecure, and the prevalence of food insecurity increased 25% for this age between '21 and '22. Food insecurity has significant negative impacts for older adults, particularly on their health. Older adults who are food insecure are more likely than food-secure counterparts to have limitations on their activities of daily living, have conditions like diabetes and depression, and experience heart attacks. For these reasons, food assistance for lower income, older adults is essential. My mom, for example, struggled with food insecurity. Her \$785 a month Social Security check barely covered her housing and utilities. She often chose between food and medication, making it necessary for me to cover for some of the utility costs. I have heard people say that, why don't people save more for retirement? How did they get into this situation? But it's very difficult to do that when neither one of my parents made much over minimum wage. SNAP is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and it is the U.S.'s largest antihunger program. Nationwide, it helps millions of people who are at risk of food insecurity. According to the 2021 AARP PPI report, in 2019 in Nebraska, the program provided help in purchasing food for over 71,000 people. 28,000 of them were 50-plus households. Currently, SNAP benefits can also be used to purchase food products that need to be prepared and consumed at home. Thus, individuals on SNAP cannot purchase hot food at the grocery store or at a restaurant with their benefits. As an example, this means that they cannot buy a hot rotisserie chicken that you find in the grocery stores. For most people, these restrictions work. But for SNAP recipients who are elderly, disabled, or experiencing homelessness, they might not be able to purchase food that is already prepared. It poses a real challenge. These--

FREDRICKSON: And that is your red light. If you wouldn't mind wrapping up your thoughts.

JOYCE BECK: These challenges include having physical barriers to preparing food for themselves, struggling to use cooking safety, lacking access of cooking facilities, and some-- lacking access for safety and effective food storage. So thank you to Senator McKinney for introducing the legislation and for the opportunity to comment.

FREDRICKSON: Thank you for being here. Any questions from the committee? Seeing none. Thank you.

JOYCE BECK: Thank you.

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FREDRICKSON: Other proponents for LB46. Welcome.

KATIE NUNGESSER: Thank you, Vice Chair Fredrickson and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Katie Nungesser, spelled K-a-t-i-e N-u-n-g-e-s-s-e-r. And I'm representing Voices for Children in Nebraska in support of LB46. I don't want to repeat a lot of what's been said about how important this access to food is, but we really wanted to be here today to highlight the impact on kids, which might not immediately come to mind when you read this bill. But we know that there are 3,500 families with children that are homeless in Nebraska-- at least 3,500-- and over 2,200 more at risk of becoming homeless. For families without that kitchen and the ability to-- the ability to purchase ready-made meals could mean the difference between going to bed hungry or nourished. We talked to one Nebraska mother who shared her experience at a homeless shelter, and they had a day-- a rule that during the day you had to leave as long as the weather was decent with your kids. So she would put them all in a wagon every day after breakfast and they would hit the town, they would ride the bus, go to the park. And she spoke about how hot-- it could be hard to get back because they would let her in for lunch. So a lot of times with those young kids, she was using her SNAP card to buy dry goods at the gas station, things like that. But she talked about protein specifically being, like, a hard, a hard thing to access. And so she spoke about how much it would mean to be able to stop off at a restaurant, things like that, and make sure her young kids had a little bit of protein and maybe some other hot foods. The other group that we wanted to highlight was that according to the Center on Budget and Policy, we know that more than 30% of SNAP participants in Nebraska live in a household with a senior or a person with disabilities. This does include children. Some of these kids might have parents that can prepare meals some days, and then there's other days that it's just not able to happen for different reasons, with disabilities or other barriers. And so it would just be one more tool to allow them to make sure that they're not just getting a meal, but they're getting something nutritious, not just grabbing something they don't have to prepare out of the cupboard because of barriers. So this does not replace that traditional use of EBT at the grocery stores. I think anyone that's able to buy that food and prepare it would probably do that because it would stretch their dollars farther. But it would just really make this more of an inclusive program so that people weren't falling in the gaps. You spoke about Meals on Wheels too. I've had family members on that. I think it's just a one meal a day. And so this would-- that would allow that flexibility to cover those other hours. And really quick, Senator Riepe asked about other

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people being able to grab that food. On the current SNAP application, there is a part where you can have an authorized user. So if that became a part of this, someone could fill out if they were unable to maybe leave their home or something, that hopefully it would work out that they could use that authorized user option to allow someone else to swipe their card. So that is everything I have today. Thank you, Senator McKinney, for bringing this. And I'm available for any questions.

FREDRICKSON: Thank you. Any questions from the committee? Senator Quick.

QUICK: Thank you, Vice Chair. So on the disability side, is that for anybody-- like, covers all forms of disability?

KATIE NUNGESSER: The way that we read it-- and my knowledge of the SNAP program is I-- they would most likely-- that household because they don't separate on your card, like this \$100 is for Mom and this is for the kids. It's all one allotment. So depending on how this goes through, I would assume that it would be the same way that the whole household would be eligible. And given that that adult is feeding those kids, that's where we see we just can't imagine they would say, like, split that money because that parent is responsible for feeding those kids also and they need that. Does that answer your question?

QUICK: And then there's some individuals who, who have maybe a developmental disability or in-- intellectual disability that are on their own having their own apartment. And as, as long as [INAUDIBLE] qualify for SNAP benefits, they would be eligible for this even though they're not 60 or--

KATIE NUNGESSER: Yeah. It, it says disabled and elderly. So curious how, you know, the state and DHS would line that up. I don't know if it would be like some of their other ways that they say that, you know, the fed-- federal government has recognized you as disabled or if you're over a certain age. So I'm guessing there'd be those restrictions so that-- I don't think anyone would lie about being disabled, but there's some paperwork trail there to say this person has been verified that they have this need.

QUICK: OK. All right. Thank you.

FREDRICKSON: Other questions from the committee? Seeing none. Thank you for being here. Other proponents for LB46. Welcome.

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MEGAN HAMANN: Thank you. Vice Chair Fredrickson and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Megan Hamann, M-e-g-a-n H-a-m-a-n-n. And I'm the Senior Community Organizer for Food and Nutrition Access at Nebraska Appleseed. Nebraska Appleseed's a nonprofit, nonpartisan legal advocacy organization that fights for justice and opportunity for all Nebraskans. I'm here today to testify in support of LB46. I know you've heard a lot about this bill already, but I'd like to share a couple of pieces that maybe haven't been touched on as much. In my role, I often speak directly with families who are struggling to afford sufficient food. An inability to access hot meals is one of many barriers I hear about on a consistent basis. Implementing a SNAP Restaurant Meals Program in Nebraska is a new, important way to make sure SNAP benefits are actually fulfilling their intended goal of helping recipients access adequate nutrition. Generally, the SNAP program only allows participants to purchase cold, unprepared foods. Foods that are hot at point of sale, including things like rotisserie chicken, side dishes, or a sandwich are expressly excluded. For many elderly and disabled SNAP recipients, food purchase, cooking, and preparation are challenges that can be complicated by an inability to carry heavy bags of groceries, open jars, safely use a knife, stand for long periods of time, or complete other tasks. For homeless SNAP recipients, preparing food purchased with SNAP benefits may struggle with storage, lack of refrigeration, lack of access to clean water or sanitary space. Consider something as simple as a low-cost, high-protein food like a can of beans. While eating a can of beans can seem basic for some of us, purchasing that can requires the ability to get to a store, a can opener to open the can of beans, the ability to use that can opener, as well as a heating element to warm them up. Similar challenges exist with frozen chicken, ramen noodles, or even a watermelon. The SNAP Restaurant Meals Program increases these specific groups' options for accessing meals. Passing LB46 would ease hunger and support food insecurity in Nebraska-- food security in Nebraska and also local businesses. The public-private partnership built into the Restaurant Meals Program increases options for very vulnerable populations and fuels local economies through supporting restaurants. There are currently nine states across the country that offer the Restaurant Meals Program. I also wanted to clarify related to the questions asked earlier. Our understanding is, with the Restaurant Meals Program, it's only available for households where all members are over the age of 60, disabled, or experiencing homelessness. And I'm available for any questions. Thank you.

FREDRICKSON: Thank you for your testimony. Questions from the committee? Senator Riepe.

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RIEPE: Thank you. For purposes of clarification, example was given to us that a mother would take her children and be able to then-- and it sounded like what you just said, all participants have to be over the 60 age.

MEGAN HAMANN: That--

RIEPE: So only the-- in that case, only the adult, if she was over 60, would be eligible, not the children.

MEGAN HAMANN: That--

RIEPE: Is that right?

MEGAN HAMANN: That is our understanding.

RIEPE: OK. I'm just--

MEGAN HAMANN: Yeah.

RIEPE: --trying to get clarification. The other thing that I, I, I was a little bit interested in is-- it talks here about restaurants and food trucks. My, my initial thought when-- I thought you go to a restaurant it's a sit-down, maybe a warm meal, you know, some broccoli on there if you can tolerate it. But it sounds like either pick up, run and go. Or food trucks might be just cold sandwiches. Is that right? I'm just trying to get a feel for it.

MEGAN HAMANN: Yeah. So I, I think when we say hot meals, we also mean prepared food. So the temperature could vary a little bit in that process, but essentially would be eliminating any of the barriers that people currently experience when it comes to the preparation components that often make things-- even, like, a sandwich-- more difficult for people to access.

RIEPE: I think it's just my own bias of when I think-- hear the word restaurant--

MEGAN HAMANN: Yeah.

RIEPE: --I have a certain image or thought.

MEGAN HAMANN: Yeah.

RIEPE: But you, you've clarified that. I appreciate it. Thank you. Thank you, Chairman.

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FREDRICKSON: Thank you. Other questions? Senator Meyer.

MEYER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just for clarification purposes, I think the scenario that was mentioned before was a mother that was homeless with children that would have breakfast at, at, at a facility, leave for the day. So she would probably qualify for that-- this program because you mentioned homelessness and over 60 or disabled, I think. So--

MEGAN HAMANN: Correct.

MEYER: --would, would they-- would they qualify then, the mother with children that would be homeless? Do I understand that they would be--

MEGAN HAMANN: Yes. So all members in the household would be experiencing homelessness and therefore would qualify. So I think that that's really the, the parameter, is if all members of the household, which would be different than a family where maybe a grandmother is living with their adult children. Right.

MEYER: Thank you.

FREDRICKSON: Other questions? Seeing none. Thank you for being here.

MEGAN HAMANN: Thank you.

FREDRICKSON: Other proponents for LB46. Seeing none. We will move on to opponents. Anyone here to oppose LB46? Welcome.

ANSLEY FELLERS: Thank you. Thank you, Vice Chair Fredrickson and members of the committee. My name is Ansley Fellers, A-n-s-l-e-y F-e-l-l-e-r-s. And I'm here today in opposition to LB46 on behalf of the Nebraska Grocery Industry Association. We completely understand what Senator McKinney is trying to do and appreciate his comments. I would also like to state for the record that he's probably not surprised to see me here. I didn't have a chance today to talk to Senator McKinney about some of our other food security projects and our general opposition to this particular bill. Sorry. I do try to do that. Some of our grocer members have hot food stations and restaurants in or attached to their stores. Still, there's only a set amount of funds to go around. And with calls for even more cuts, we believe we should do our best to ensure SNAP dollars are stretched as far as possible. Due to overhead and labor, meals catered or purchased at a restaurant are necessarily more costly. Even at a concessionary price, a restaurant meal would cost \$11, much higher than what you'd find in a grocery store or supermarket and almost twice as much as the

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average \$6 per person per day each SNAP recipient, recipient gets. There are convenient, prepared takeaway items in a grocery deli case when folks are short on time or in a hurry. There are also items in a grocery store that require no kitchen prepara-- kitchen preparation, can opener, et cetera, which are SNAP eligible. They just don't count toward a grocer's SNAP agent's elig-- eligibility. That is a staple food standard. In order to be an approved SNAP agent, grocers have to carry a lot of low margin but affordable products, which restaurants would not. Grocery stores operate on a 1% to 2% margin. And I would just note, although there are a large number of SNAP-authorized gas stations and C stores, SNAP spending nationwide at those locations was less than 6% in 2023. We agree with Senator McKinney. We need to do more to address food security. We don't necessarily think restaurant meals are the answer, but we're happy to work with him and other proponents as well as the committee on alternative solutions. Thank you. I'd be happy to answer any questions.

FREDRICKSON: Thank you. Any questions from the committee? I have one. It, it soun-- so it sounds like the-- part of the concern, if I understood correctly, was, was primarily kind of the fiscal perspective. And you mentioned the \$11 fee for the meal. Is that based on the promulgation of the rules of how this is actually administered in the states that have this or--

ANSLEY FELLERS: Partly. Partially. That came last year from some testifiers that indicated, you know, that they assume that if you can-- so part of this is that a restaurant has to offer-- I-- maybe-- you know, you remember that-- that they have to offer some sort of concessionary price and they have to meet other standards approved by USDA. But I-- that was based on that average in the testimony.

FREDRICKSON: OK. I certainly don't want to speak for the restaurants, but just out of, out of curiosity, if they were to provide a concession-- concessionary fee that was lower than that, would that remove the opposition or is that, is that the sticking point or is there--

ANSLEY FELLERS: I, I still think, based on the margins my members operate on and the fact that we are required to stock a lot of other products, the 36 to 40 staple products and a number of them that a restaurant would not-- plus again, just the, the general sense that there isn't that much to go around and I think there are continued calls for cuts, we'd probably-- just in the interest of transparency, we'd probably still be opposed. But it would be interesting to see if, you know, a restaurant could buy it down to that \$3 to \$5 range.

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FREDRICKSON: Thank you. Other questions? Seeing none. Thank you.

ANSLEY FELLERS: Thank you.

FREDRICKSON: Other opponents to LB46? Seeing none. We will now move on to comments in the neutral capacity. Seeing none. Senator McKinney, you're welcome to close. While you come up, we did have some online comments for LB46. There were 56 proponents, 9 opponents, and 0 in the neutral capacity.

McKINNEY: Thank you.

FREDRICKSON: Welcome to close.

McKINNEY: Sounds like the people of Nebraska agree with me. Just in conclusion, I think that the Restaurant Meals Program is a good thing to help out our elderly population, our disabled population, and our homeless population to address food insecurity, promoting dignity, and, and just making sure that all Nebraskans have access to meals, especially prepared meals. Because we have people in our communities who do not have access to hot meals all the time or are not in the, in the, in the right spaces or living conditions to cook food all the time. So I think we should do things as a body to make sure we could do things to just provide that type of access. I know there were comments about who is eligible. According to the, the, the sheet I handed out, which is on the Fed's website: elderly, you have to be 60 years and older; disabled, receives disability or blindness pay-- payments or receives disability retirement benefits from a governmental agency because of a disability considered permanent; homeless or a spouse of a SNAP client who is eligible for the program. The Feds have guidelines, but the, but the state could craft the rules around the program and can accept individuals who, who would like to apply-- who would like to opt into the program. As far as the grocers, I guess they don't-- for me, when I heard that, it's-- they don't want competition. And I looked on the website and, you know, Hy-Vee for one, you know, they have meals for \$12, \$11.99, \$10.99 or more. And that's just one entree. So to say dis-- these, these meals would be-- would have to be discounted-- anybody that would opt into this program would have to discount the meals. So I don't-- I get the opposition because they trying to pro-- it's, it's more competition, I guess. But from my perspective, I'm trying to make sure that the people who live in food deserts who don't have-- let's think about rural Nebraska, for example, who just have access to Dollar General, which is a, is a problem. They don't have a lot of-- a lot of grocery stores in, in a lot of rural spaces. They just have a bunch of Dollar Generals and

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Family Dollars. They don't have those grocery stores, but they do have restaurants that they could go to to get a prepared meal. We should be providing access to them. We should try-- we should try to find ways to help them. My community, for example, we have a grocery store closing. We have a-- we have one or two others, but we have one closing that a lot of elders in my community frequent that don't have adequate transportation and the bus lines don't go to. So where are they going to go to now? That's what I'm thinking about when I think about this bill. I'm not thinking about protecting somebody's bottom line. I'm thinking about those seniors and those disabled individuals and those homeless individuals in my community that is actually increasing way too much to count at this point. That's what I'm thinking about when I, when I think about this bill and why I think it's very important. I know they're thinking about protecting their bottom line and competition, but I'm thinking about the people of Nebraska. And I, I think that's what we should think about. And that, that's why I think you guys should support this bill and we should move it forward because I think it's common sense to help people. So thank you.

HARDIN: Questions? Senator Meyer.

MEYER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I don't know a great deal about the SNAP program. So I, I-- just for clarification purposes, I believe I heard it mentioned that there's a \$6 a day per lim-- per person on use of the SNAP.

McKINNEY: I'm not sure on the--

MEYER: I may have misheard something.

McKINNEY: Yeah, I'm not on this committee, so I'm not that detailed on the program. I know, like, each month individuals get a certain amount on their EBT cards. So I don't know what the breakdown is per day. Because de-- depending on your household, you get a different amount. So I'm not sure on that.

MEYER: And, and, and once again, I, I'm not sure either. So I, I was thinking that if, if, say, a homeless mother and four children, if a \$6 per person was the limit-- which I don't know how that could be enforced, quite frankly-- but, but just one hot meal would pretty much wipe out their daily opportunity for additional--

McKINNEY: True. And--

MEYER: --additional meals.

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McKINNEY: If it-- and that's why I think it's important to note that if somebody-- if a restaurant opts into this, they have to negotiate with the state on those prices, so whatever prepared meals they are offering. So just to be-- so it wouldn't just be every meal in the restaurant that these individuals would have access to. It would be certain meals that are approved by the restaurant that, that is accepted by the state. It would-- wouldn't just be just go look at the menu and you could just order up. It would, it would be these select me-- meals. Yeah. So I think whatever-- based on whatever's negotiated with the state, I, I-- yeah.

MEYER: All right. Thank you.

McKINNEY: No problem.

HARDIN: Other questions? Will you be with us at the end?

FREDRICKSON: This is the end.

HARDIN: We are at the end. Will I be with you at the end?

MEYER: You are.

McKINNEY: Probably not. I'll be stuck in Judiciary.

HARDIN: I left your committee. And, and you--

McKINNEY: Yeah.

HARDIN: We do that. We do that. So. Thanks.

McKINNEY: No problem. Thank you.

HARDIN: This ends LB46 today. And we had-- did we already announce these?

FREDRICKSON: Yep.

HARDIN: Cool. What else did I miss? We are now turning our attention to LB102. Senator Spivey.

SPIVEY: Good afternoon, Chair. You, you just-- you made it back for the best part.

HARDIN: I'm so fortunate. Thank you for joining us.

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SPIVEY: Absolutely. Did you want me to wait for the rest of the senators or go ahead and get started?

HARDIN: We'll get started. We'll, we'll, we'll wait for the, the shuffling to end here in just a few seconds. So we'll chat. And they won't take us much longer. And then we'll be about ready.

SPIVEY: Sounds good.

HARDIN: When you're ready, take it away.

SPIVEY: Thank you, Chair Hardin. And it's nice to see you all, the rest of the committee members for HHS. It's definitely different being on this side. I used to come and testify as a policy advocate, and now I'm here for-- representing District 13. So I am Ashlei Spivey, A-s-h-l-e-i S-p-i-v-e-y. As I mentioned, representing District 13: northeast and northwest Omaha. I am here today to introduce LB102, which makes some much needed changes and updates to Nebraska's Aid to Dependent Children program, or ADC. The Aid to Dependent Children program is Nebraska's direct cash assistance program funded by the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families block grant. It's commonly known as TANF. LB102 updates the Aid to Dependent Children's program by ensuring that the cost of living adjustments occur annually instead of every other year. It also increases the eligibility threshold and benefit levels to better reflect modern living costs for Nebraska families. LB102 changes ADC benefits and eligibility calculations to be adjusted every year to account for inflation in aligning-- in alignment with other public benefit programs like SNAP, childcare subsidies, which I know that y'all have been hearing a lot about today as well. With heightened inflation, there really is no reason for leaving the state's lowest income families and their children behind. The ADC eligibility and benefit level calculation is based around the standard of need, which is meant to represent a typical household's monthly costs for food, clothing, home supplies, utilities, laundry, and shelter. And I say meant to because the current standard of need is inadequate, and it does not even come close to reflecting the monthly amount nec-- necessary for basic survival. I literally went to go buy eggs yesterday and they were \$6 a carton, if y'all didn't know, so. This really raises a standard of need, which determines eligibility and benefits amounts. This results in an increase to the maximum benefit from \$376 to \$623 for an individual and then \$160 to \$393 for every additional person. On average, as we were looking at the numbers, for an individual, that would be about \$561 under LB102. Again, this leverages available federal TANF funds. So Nebraska receives about \$56.6 million annually

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from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or TANF, block grant, which has accumulated a \$115 million reserve as of September 2024, which can only be used for TANF-related purposes. And so LB102 is a really great policy because it brings this-- the ADC program in line with other assistance programs and ensures that Nebraska's lowest income families are not left behind due to rising living costs. Every other major benefit program in Nebraska, like we talked about, is annual-- is looked at annually for inflation. So again, the goal is to make this annual versus every two years. And the current standard of need is outdated, and it does not accurately reflect the costs of basic necessities. Just for some comparison, we were looking at this and, in 1996, Nebraska's maximum monthly benefit for a household of three was around \$364. And so we have not kept up with inflation across our state. As we know, is that at a h-- at a all-time high. And our ADC benefits remain stagnant, which, again, is impacting some of our most vulnerable families, especially women and children, among us. Nebraska has the financial resources to fund this type of policy without increasing state spending because TA-- the TANF fund is specifically designed for this purpose. As we think about the importance and the community benefit of this policy of LB102, it really prevents deep-- deepening poverty and hardship. And this is really meant to strengthen economic mobility. It provides adequate assistance to families so they can move towards self-sufficiency rather than staying trapped in poverty. And as a reminder, there are work and school requirements. So this is giving folks what they need while they are navigating this point in time in life to ensure that they have adequate income to be able to become self-sufficient. And then there's also long-term cost savings. This ensures that families receive the support that they need and really reduces emergency services, lowers long-term health care costs, and improves educational outcomes for children in poverty. And so I wanted to address and kind of talk through some of the fiscal impacts, which is also represented in the one-pager that I handed out. There is also a back to that that has what the spending of that fund has looked like. I'm just giving some of the feedback from DHHS. So as I mentioned, Nebraska receives about \$56.6 million annually from the TANF block grant. The state has only spent the full amount twice since 2017. DHHS has underspent the TANF block grant by about \$10 million from fiscal years 2018 to '23. So again, we see the result of that being that the TANF rainy day fund has almost \$115 million in reserves since September of 2024. And these funds are for specific reasons. They have to be used for TANF-related purposes, which I really believe they should be invested in the lowest income families and children, which this bill addresses. There was a note in the fiscal-- a note in the fiscal note just around the impact

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into other subsidies or other programs that provide support. And so I wanted to give an example around the emergency assistance fund. The last fiscal year, the fund spent about \$135,000, which is actually an increase from previous years. But that specific line item with-- within the TANF fund is used for emergency situations that may threaten the well-being of an eligible child or family to a stable environment. And so if you think about that, only \$135,000 was spent. There is room because of that reserve that if there are increases because of the eligibility being expanded that we have the funds already in the state to cover that. So spending and the potential impacts within other supportive line items should not be an issue. The current budget spend for our TANF fund is about 26%. In LB102, this bill would increase that to about 68% of the TANF budget. So again, when we think about how these funds are used, other programs that would be using these funds, there is room in the budget to ensure that LB102 can be successfully implemented. And then the last thing I'll add before I take questions is that the effective date being a year out would really give DHHS time to reevaluate the funds, the intentions of the funds, and how they are used so that we can make and prioritize, again, the best decisions within these dollars, which is the investment in our moms and children and some of the most vulnerable families among us. And so I encourage your support of LB102. And I will be happy to answer any questions.

HARDIN: Questions? Senator Fredrickson.

FREDRICKSON: Thank you, Chair Hardin. Thank you, Senator Spivey, for being here and bringing this bill. Question for you. So one of the goals of LB102 is to sort of reevaluate yearly as opposed to every two years. Do you have any sense on how we compare to other states? Is it, is it pretty common for other states to evaluate this yearly or-- how, how do we compare just--

SPIVEY: Absolutely. Great question, Senator. Yes. So most assistance programs are looked at every year. So this is a best practice. It's normal because of inflation costs and reassessing where that family is. So we would be on par with some of our neighboring states. And I believe there are 18 other states that-- or, 26. Let me double-check my notes on that, because I have how many states are looking at this annually for TANF. And I can give you that number so you can have that specific information around looking at it annually versus every other year. So it would put us on par.

FREDRICKSON: OK.

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SPIVEY: But I'll definitely grab that number as I'm-- as we wrap up these questions.

FREDRICKSON: Thank you.

HARDIN: Other questions? Senator Riepe.

RIEPE: Thank you, Chairman. Thank you for being here. I'm trying to understand more TANF. And are all of the ones on the backside of your page here, were all of those, to the best of your knowledge, because of legislation that created funds that were then listed here?

SPIVEY: Yes. So what is on the back of-- and thank you, Senator Riepe, for that question. This is pulled from our fiscal office around the usage of the TANF fund. And so the TANF fund can only be two specific items. And this is just showing for the fiscal years '22 to '24 inside of that fund what was used. And so a lot of that is through legislation and just the appropriate uses of the funds because they're federal. So the federal guidelines outline what we can use it for. And then as a state, we apply that to specific programs and areas. And so some of the things that were named within the fiscal note to just be mindful of, for example, would have been the, the emergency assistance program, which shows-- that, that was that \$47,000 in '22 actuals. '23 actuals was \$118,000. So for that-- and then 2024 it totals \$135,000. So you can just kind of see how the funds are being used because, again, one of the-- the things that I wouldn't think makes this bill so successful and on par with where we are in this more fiscal conservative environment is that there is not a fiscal impact in the same way to other programs that might be utilizing this specific fund because we have the reserves. And so I just wanted to be able to provide some of that historical data because I know we are all thinking about the fiscal impacts of what we are passing right now.

RIEPE: Thank you.

SPIVEY: Absolutely. Thank you, Senator Riepe.

HARDIN: Other questions? Will you be with us?

SPIVEY: I sure will. To the very end, Chair Hardin. Thank you very much.

HARDIN: Proponents, LB102. Welcome.

KATIE NUNGESSER: Hello again. Thank you, Chairperson Hardin and members of the Health and Human Service Committee. Again, I'm Katie

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Nungesser, spelled K-a-t-i-e N-u-n-g-e-s-s-e-r. Representing Voices for Children in Nebraska in support of LB102. Children must have their basic needs met to grow and thrive. For kids living in poverty, every extra dollar in the family's bottom line counts. The ADC program in Nebraska helps family cover those essentials and helping ensure stability and opportunity for parents and children. Almost 60-- 60,000 children in Nebraska are living in poverty. And out of those, 25,000 of those are living in extreme poverty. This program was designed to help these families specifically. It's only helping those, like, lowest of the low families in that income bracket. Sorry.

Unfortunately, the formula calculating the eligibility for ADC has not been updated since 2015. This bill is trying to implement those annual cost of living adjustments to help with that, and additionally it adjusts the ADC eligibility and benefit calculations to better reflect the real financial needs of families. One of the reasons why we're so interested in this bill is the strong child welfare prevention strategy. Investing in public benefit programs is a powerful strategy for preventing child welfare involvement and promoting family stability. An estimated 85% of families investigated by the child welfare agencies earn below 200% of the federal poverty line. We know that each additional \$1,000 that states spent annually on public benefit programs per person living in poverty is associated with a 4.3% reduction in child maltreatment reports. More so, they found that cash assistance increases reduces CPS investigations by 11% to 20% annually and up to 29% reduction in CPS involvement for kids of color. This is good for Nebraska children and also for the Nebraska General Fund, which covers most of the cost of that child welfare system. This bill also encourages economic mobility. It helps with that benefit cliff effect. It gives families a little bit longer of a-- to be on there. And one of the things I wanted to talk about was I was actually a recipient of that program. I lived in Scotts Bluff County when I applied. And I can tell you that having that cash assistance was super important to me because I could plug it in where I needed. A single mom in Lincoln, I had different needs. I had different resources. Being in that rural area, it was just so imperative to have that cash to plug in exactly where I needed it. I had things like WIC, but I don't know a lot of people know this, WIC doesn't cover the formula for the whole month. And so it was covering things like baby formula, diapers. You needed gas because you had to get to Scotts Bluff from the small town I was in to even participate in much of the program. And so although there's all these other helping programs, they don't meet those specific needs for some of those families. And it's so important to give them that cash to help make those decisions. So we would say that LB102 is a necessary policy change that prioritizes the

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well-being of Nebraska's children. It's responsive to economic realities, and we can ensure families have the support they need. We want to thank Senator Spivey for bringing this pro-kid policy and respectfully urge you to vote yes on LB102. I'm available for any questions.

HARDIN: Thank you. Questions? Seeing none.

KATIE NUNGESSER: OK.

HARDIN: The next proponent, LB102. Welcome.

SIERRA EDMISTEN: Hi. Chairperson Hardin and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Sierra Edmisten, S-i-e-r-r-a E-d-m-i-s-t-e-n. And I'm a single mom of four in Hastings, Nebraska. I'm also a former user of ADC. I wanted to talk to you today about what ADC did for me and how it really helps Nebraskan families. When I was pregnant with my second son, I was on bed rest. This was something new to me. My parents had instilled a strong work ethic in me. And I have always worked as either a babysitter or a paper girl, even starting at age 12. So to be on bed rest and unable to work was very difficult, not only in dealing with not working, but then the fear of not being able to afford living with my oldest son. My now ex-husband worked, but he didn't make enough working two jobs to be able to afford everything we needed without my income. And then we found out about ADC. ADC was a blessing for my family. While things were still really tight, we were able to make it through with very little debt. If we didn't have ADC, we would have had massive amounts of debts, unable to pay it. While we were lucky in that aspect, not everyone is. ADC, while helpful, doesn't keep up with the rising cost of living. For example, if ADC would have kept increasing with the cost of living from 1996, the maximum pay-- payment for a family of three should be \$744 a month, not the \$552 a month that it's currently at. This is something that should seriously help Nebraskans, something that's actually needed. I know just how helpful ADC was to me when I was down and struggling. That's why I will always fight for others to be able to access this time-limited service that is so vital. It's mind-blowing to me that Nebraska has a 50-- that Nebraska has \$115 million in a rainy day fund when thousands of Nebraska families are struggling to make ends meet. We need to do better and put our tax money to good use. Please pass LB102 out of committee. It is much needed. Thank you.

HARDIN: Thank you. Questions? Seeing none. Thank you. Proponents, LB102. Hi there.

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MADLINE WALKER: Hi. My name is Madeline Walker, and I'm the Human Trafficking Program Coordinator with the Nebraska Coalition to End Sexual and Domestic Violence. M-a-d-e-l-i-n-e W-a-l-k-e-r. I'm here to testify in support of LB102 on behalf of the Nebraska Coalition and the 20 domestic violence and sexual assault programs across the state of Nebraska. Financial hardship increases a person's risk for experiencing domestic violence and human trafficking. Financial abuse occurs when an abusive partner limits their victim's ability to earn money and sabotages their credit. It's very common in domestic violence and human trafficking. Lack of financial resources is, is a primary reason that survivors choose to stay with their abuser. Survivors with dependent children have more financial obligations and therefore face a greater barrier to leaving their abuser. Direct financial assistance is a lifeline for survivors and their children as they leave it-- as they leave an abusive situation. However, research shows that low levels of financial benefits actually increase women's dependence on others. And for survivors of intimate partner violence and human trafficking, this could mean that they need to reconnect with their abuser in order to seek their sup-- their financial support to make ends meet. The changes proposed in LB102 would make the Aid for Dependent Children program responsive to changes in the cost of living and ensures survivors and all Nebraskans living in poverty are able to meet their basic needs. For many survivors, adequate direct financial assistance is a difference between relying on their abuser and going on to lead self-determined lives. The Nebraska Coalition to End Sexual and Domestic Violence recognizes that direct financial assistance is critical to the recovery and long-term safety of survivors and their children. And we support the changes proposed in LB102. Thank you for your time and consideration.

HARDIN: Thank you. Questions? Senator Ballard.

BALLARD: Thank you, Chair. Thank you for being here. Thank you for your work. How do-- so, so working with the department, how do survivors of domestic abuse-- how do they-- confidentiality with making sure that the department knows they, they do not have the resources with a former partner?

MADLINE WALKER: Yeah. So this would be for somebody probably who's-- after they've left their partner and they're trying to support their family independently. The effects of financial abuse-- they, they may have already also been in poverty before their abusive relationship, because that's a risk factor for abuse. But it could also be the case that the abusive relationship, their abuser destroyed their finances and now they're living in poverty after leaving. So they would still

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just apply for ADC like anyone else when they're living independently. This just-- increasing those benefits would help make sure that they are able to remain independent and get their financial needs met without having to return to their abuser.

BALLARD: OK. Thank you.

MADLINE WALKER: Yeah.

HARDIN: Other questions? Seeing none. Thank you.

MADLINE WALKER: Thank you.

HARDIN: Next proponent, LB102. Welcome.

TAYLOR GIVENS-DUNN: Thank you so much. Good afternoon, Chairperson Hardin and members of the HHS Committee. Once again, my name is Taylor Givens-Dunn, T-a-y-l-o-r G-i-v-e-n-s-D-u-n-n. And I am the Policy and Power Building Manager at I Be Black Girl, the first and only reproductive justice organization in the state of Nebraska that centers black women, femmes, and girls. And we are here today in support of LB102. The changes outlined in LB102 would provide a sense of support to families experiencing poverty and would be especially critical for black women in Nebraska who disproportionately experience economic hardship due to systemic barriers to wealth accumulation, wage inequities, and a lack of access to supportive resources. Both nationally and in our state, black women are more likely to be the primary or sole providers for their households, yet they are consistently paid less than their white counterparts and overrepresented in low-wage industries with little job security. As a result, they are more likely to rely on programs like ADC to bridge that gap between wages and the cost of necessities such as rent, childcare, and transportation. By failing to update ADC eligibility and benefit levels to reflect the real cost of living, Nebraska's forcing families-- particularly black women-led households-- into impossible financial decisions. An outdated and inadequate safety net keeps families trapped in cycles of poverty rather than providing the temporary stabilizing support that ADC was designed to offer. LB102 would move Nebraska in the right direction by bringing ADC benefit levels closer to a more sustainable level, ensuring that the families are not left struggling with inadequate assistance. At I Be Black Girl, we understand that every family, regardless of race, zip code, or income, deserves a real opportunity to build stability and security for themselves and their children. Updating ADC eligibility and benefits is not just a policy change. It is an

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investment in the well-being of families across our state, particularly those who have been historically excluded from economic opportunity. We'd like to thank Senator Spivey for her commitment to families across our state. And we'd urge this committee to advance LB102. I'm happy to answer any questions.

HARDIN: Thanks. Questions? Seeing none. Thank you.

TAYLOR GIVENS-DUNN: Thank you so much.

HARDIN: Proponents, LB102. Welcome.

DIANE AMDOR: Good afternoon, Chairperson Hardin and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. I've got my notes all backwards here. My name is Diane Amdor. I'm a staff attorney at the Economic Justice Program at Nebraska Appleseed. We support LB102 because TANF funds should be used to, to make sure that Nebraska's lowest income families with children--

HARDIN: I'm sorry. Can I have you spell your name?

DIANE AMDOR: Oh, sorry. Diane Amdor, D-i-a-n-e A-m-d-o-r.

HARDIN: Thanks.

DIANE AMDOR: We believe that TANF funds should be used to make sure Nebraska's lowest income families with children can meet their basic needs. As others have noted, ADC is the TANF-funded program that provides direct cash assistance to Nebraska families living in extreme poverty. We know that there are differences of opinion on how we get there, but I think that everyone in Nebraska would agree that no child in this state should go hungry or be homeless or have inadequate clothing. It is possible to reduce child poverty in our state by making some important changes to Nebraska's ADC program while also being good stewards of taxpayer dollars. We are very appreciative that this committee and the Legislature as a whole have spent a significant amount of time in recent years taking a closer look at how Nebraska spends our TANF dollars, as outlined in detail in my written testimony. A few key highlights. Nebraska's TANF rainy day fund balance on September 30, 2022 was over \$110 million. The following year, it went up to nearly \$126 million. At the end of 2024, that balance was almost \$115 million. Nebraska has started making some progress towards spending that down. Unfortunately, the approach that has been taken thus far has failed to spend down the fund as rapidly as predicted and has resulted in a shift in the way Nebraska spends TANF funds: a shift away from prioritizing direct cash assistance and

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an increase in the use of TANF funds for indirect supports and programming. The state of Nebraska has \$115 million sitting in a fund whose primary purpose is to assist needy families so that children can be cared for in their own homes. At the same time, we have nearly 24,000 children living in extreme poverty in our state. This is not only a failure to responsibly steward taxpayer funds; this is unconscionable. Statutory changes are required to make changes to ADC eligibility and benefit levels. It is time for the Legislature to act to ensure that direct cash assistance is a top priority for our state's TANF expenditures by passing LB102. Nebraska Appleseed appreciates Senator Spivey's leadership on this issue, and we would be more than happy to work with all interested parties to find a fiscally sustainable approach to adjusting the ADC eligibility and benefit levels. We urge this committee to advance LB102 to General File to ensure that ADC benefit levels are adequate to help Nebraska's lowest income families with children make ends meet. Thank you for your time. I would be happy to answer any questions to the best of my ability.

HARDIN: Thank you. Questions? Senator Riepe.

RIEPE: Thank you, Chairman. I'm going to ask you to repeat what the TANF balance at this time. Did you say \$150 million?

DIANE AMDOR: \$115 million.

RIEPE: Only \$115 million. OK. Thank you.

DIANE AMDOR: Tell that to someone making ends meet with less than \$1,000 a month, right?

RIEPE: Yeah. Thank you.

DIANE AMDOR: Thank you.

HARDIN: Other question? Senator Fredrickson.

FREDRICKSON: Thank you, Chair Hardin. Thank you for being here and your testimony. Do, do you have any thoughts-- you know, that, that is quite a significant chunk of money to be sitting on. Do, do you have any thoughts of what have been barriers in our state to getting that money out? So for example, this bill obviously would help with that process, I imagine. But do you have any thoughts on any other barriers to that?

DIANE AMDOR: Really, one of the biggest ones is that increasing those eligibility and benefit levels. It, it does draw down the money pretty

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fast when you do that. So there has been a, a reluctance to modify those levels and take that approach and instead choosing to spend it on programs or indirect supports. Quite frankly, in my opinion, that reluctance comes from stereotypes and fears around giving direct cash assistance to our state's lowest income families. I think there are a lot of stereotypes around the type of families and the types of people who participate in those programs. They're, they're rooted in harmful, outdated stereotypes. And I think there are probably a lot of comments that you all received in the online portal from individuals who are impacted by this. And I, I hope that you have the time-- I know you are very busy, especially on days like this-- to read them or to reach out to people in your districts who-- just to put a human face on this. Sierra and Katie are able to be here and, and testify on these bills today, but most people who are getting by almost \$1,000 a month, they don't have the ability to come and hang out at the Legislature for the afternoon. And, and I think it's honestly because of stereotypes and prejudices against our state's lowest income people that is one of the biggest barriers to spending down that money. We don't trust poor people to have money. We don't believe that they have the ability to do this.

FREDRICKSON: And if and when we, we don't get that money out, is-- do we as a state risk losing those funds?

DIANE AMDOR: At this time, the TANF block grant is one that carries over year to year. That's why we've been able to accumulate this large amount. I think someone mentioned earlier with the Child Care Development Block Grant, that one does not roll over. I think maybe they-- federal government learned their lesson with block grants and said, oh, let's maybe not do that or states will just sit on this money and not spend it sometimes. So at this time, that money is just there.

FREDRICKSON: Thank you.

DIANE AMDOR: Yep. Thank you.

HARDIN: Other questions? Senator Meyer.

MEYER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Is there a formula to establish the amount of money that Nebraska gets-- is it based on population or percentage of economic needs, people and economic needs? And, and just to piggyback on what Senator Fredrickson was asking, if we don't draw down these funds, if we don't utilize these funds, is there the opportunity to lose those funds?

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DIANE AMDOR: So to your first question, Nebraska-- I think someone mentioned earlier-- we get around \$56 million each year in that federal block grant. That amount was set back in 1996 when the PRWORA-- I can never remember what that acronym actually stands for-- the build welfare reform bill that happened in the 1980s.

MEYER: We had a balanced budget then. That was easy.

DIANE AMDOR: Mm-hmm. Yeah. So that was set at that time based on a percentage of the amount of funds that each state had received in 1996. That money at the federal level-- that hasn't been adjusted for inflation since then-- that doesn't take anything into account that has happened since 1996.

MEYER: Well, from a fiscally conservative standpoint, I'm glad we haven't increased it, the federal spending at that-- on that particular item. Also, if we-- the second part of the question, if we don't utilize these funds in some fashion, it, it does not appear that we're in, in danger of losing going forward based on a formula from 1996. So. OK. Thank you.

HARDIN: Senator Quick.

QUICK: Thank you, Chairman. So I know earlier we got into something on [INAUDIBLE] the childcare subsidy. So you could use some of these TANF dollars in place-- you know, instead of using General Fund dollars. Do you know if that's possible or are there just limits put in place for certain things?

DIANE AMDOR: So I think in the chart that Senator Spivey provided that has Nebraska's actual TANF expenditures for the last few years, one of the line items on there is childcare subsidy. And so the state is able to transfer-- I think it's 30% of our annual childcare block grant-- or-- sorry-- our TANF funds to be transferred to the childcare block grant. And so I believe this past year we did that. And then-- so. I'm going to stop rambling. Does that answer your question?

QUICK: Thank you.

DIANE AMDOR: You're welcome.

HARDIN: Other questions? Seeing none. Thank you.

DIANE AMDOR: Thank you.

HARDIN: Proponents, LB102. Welcome.

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GARRET SWANSON: Thank you. Chairman Hardin and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Garret Swanson, G-a-r-r-e-t S-w-a-n-s-o-n. And I'm here on behalf of the Holland Children's Movement in support of LB102. In May of last year, the Nebraska Examiner reported a quote from our governor, Jim Pillen. Governor Pillen said, green light. Pedal to the metal, referring to capturing federal, federal dollars to be used here in Nebraska. With LB102, we have an opportunity to put to use more federal dollars to help Nebraskans that need it. I commend the Department of Health and Human Services for del-- developing a spending plan that can fully expend the \$115 million sitting in the TANF budget. However, cash assistance levels still leave recipients living in poverty. According to research conducted by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, increasing TANF cash assistance is critical to fighting poverty. With high inflation the last few years, TANF benefits in most states are at the lowest value since 1996, when it was implemented. Since 2001, 15 states-- including South Dakota, Wyoming, Texas, and South Carolina-- have increased the amount of benefits given, with several states like Wyoming and Texas adding reoccurring adjustments to their TANF benefits. What Senator Spivey wants to do isn't something new. Policymakers across the country are moving in this direction because of the responsible desire to keep families out of poverty. In the fiscal year 2020, states spent 22% of TANF funds on basic assistance. That is down from 71% from 1997. This committee and Legislature have already ex-- expanded programs like SNAP to aid low-income Nebraskans. It's time for TANF and ADC to catch up by implementing a new formula to better serve Nebraskans as, during the height of COVID-19, no adjustment happened between 2021 and 2022. So senators, let's put the pedal to the metal and use federal funds where they'll be the most effective: with the Nebraskans that need it. Thank you.

HARDIN: Thank you. Questions? Seeing none. Thank you.

GARRET SWANSON: Appreciate it.

HARDIN: Proponents, LB102. Opponents, LB102. Anyone in the neutral on LB102? Welcome.

JOHN MEALS: Good afternoon, Chairman Hardin, members of the Health and Services Committee. My name is John Meals, J-o-h-n M-e-a-l-s. And I am the Chief Financial Officer for the Department of Health Human Services. And I'm here to testify in a neutral capacity for LB102. Some of this is going to be a repeat, but I'm going to read through it. ADC, or Aid to Dependent Children, is funded by the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or TANF, block grant, along with state

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funds. The ADC payment amount is 55% of the standard of need for the household size. The current max payment an individual receives in Nebraska is \$376. LB102 would increase this payment to \$623. And as referenced in our fiscal note, the total cost for this change is roughly \$20 million a year. DHHS receives approximately \$56 million annually from the federal TANF grant. And per federal TANF regs, states may carry over this unspent TANF funds, creating the TANF balance. As of October 1, 2024, Nebraska had a total TANF grant balance of about \$114 million. This is down from \$125 million in October of 23, which is also down from \$132 million in October of 2022. And that kind of represents the peak of the TANF balance, in '22. Nationally, 24% of TANF funds go to states' cash assistance programs. Currently, Nebraska expands approximately 26% of our annual TANF grant on the ADC payments for families' basic needs. And then we spend about 20% on the Employment First program. That is a mandatory work program for ADC work recipients-- or, ADC recipients, providing training, education, and employment preparation. The remaining TANF grant funds are spent on a variety of programs and services for impoverished families, as well as some administrative costs. In DHHS's most recent TANF expenditure plan, which was published in October of '24, outlines all of the programs currently utilizing TANF funding. This includes the federally required programs like the aforementioned ADC and Employment First, as well as statutorily required programs like the Child Advocacy Centers, or CACs; the court appointed special advocates, or CASA; and then funding for the food banks. The spending of TANF funds has exceeded the annual TANF grant-- grant amount each of the last two years. And based on the current expenditure plan, the TANF grant balance will be depleted somewhere within fiscal year 2028. If additional funds are allocated for existing or new programs, then obviously the TANF grant balance would be depleted earlier. Thank you for your time. And I am happy to answer any questions you have for me.

HARDIN: Thank you. Questions? Senator Fredrickson.

FREDRICKSON: Thank you, Chair Hardin. Thank you for being here and for your testimony. So, so I asked this from another testifier-- I don't know if you were here. But I just kind of-- can you maybe educate us a little bit more on the, the fund being where it is today? It looks like there's been progress made in terms of getting some of the dollars out, which is great. But can you speak to if there's been other barriers of getting those dollars out and--

JOHN MEALS: Sure. Again, I completely acknowledge where the department was from around 2017 or so through 2022 when the grant balance was growing, you know, pretty much every year. But in the last two fiscal

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years, it has been spent down, you know, from the peak at around \$132 million down to \$114 million. The other thing to note in there is that that doesn't really include any of the statutorily required programs. So-- excuse me-- in LB814, which was the original budget bill for the current biennium in 2023, the Legislature put in place, you know, money-- they earmarked money for the food banks, for CACs, and for CASA. The department requested state plan amendment approval from the feds, and it took almost a full year for that approval to come. So in the '24 spend-down, which was around \$11 million, that doesn't really include anything from those. So you're really going to see an accelerated spend in the current fiscal year because what was earmarked in LB814, the original budget bill, was \$10 million for food banks and then \$8 million for CACs-- so that's \$18 million. CASA's a smaller program. It's \$250,000 a year. So if everything else is level and we spend down \$11 million in the current year-- which we planned to do. There was a couple of programs that were increased like JAG, the Jobs for America's Graduates. But if everything else is pretty much level and you just add those statutorily required programs, we're going to spend down closer to \$30 million this year as opposed to just the \$11 million.

FREDRICKSON: OK. And the-- in your testimony, you, you talk about the balance being depleted within fiscal year 2028. Is that operating on the assumption that we'll continue to receive approximately \$56 million annually from federal government?

JOHN MEALS: Yes, sir.

FREDRICKSON: OK. All right. Thank you.

JOHN MEALS: Yep.

HARDIN: Other questions? Senator Riepe.

RIEPE: Thank you, Chairman. I had a question. In your comments, you noted a mandatory work program of-- how many hours a week would that be? Or is there a standard or a requirement?

JOHN MEALS: Let me see. I have a TANF plan. I don't know off the top of my head. Employment First. I don't, I don't have it written down, but I'm happy to get you that information, Senator.

RIEPE: Just curious.

JOHN MEALS: Yup. I can get that for you.

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RIEPE: Thank you.

HARDIN: Are there questions? Thank you.

JOHN MEALS: All right.

HARDIN: Others in the neutral, LB102. Seeing none. Senator Spivey.

SPIVEY: Thank you--

HARDIN: Welcome back.

SPIVEY: Thank you, Chair Hardin and the rest of the HHS Committee members. And thank you to everyone for their testimony today as well. I know it can get long sometimes, so I appreciate the engagement on such an important topic. As I mentioned, LB102 is a commonsense policy. It does not increase the fiscal spending of the state, but it really updates the Nebraska's Department of Health and Human Services eligibility and benefit level calculation in the amounts for some of our lowest income families. And as we heard from two people that specifically used this benefit, it can be life-changing, right? And I would also say that the amounts that are in here for the increase are also still not substantial enough. Right? So this is chipping away to make sure that people have a little bit more. As we know, rising costs continue to happen, whether it's for shelter, sup-- home supplies, things for their kids. I will also mention-- and I appreciate the testimony from Health and Human Services. I am always willing to work with the department, especially on important programs like this. The-- some of the nonstatutory programs that are added into this fund are not in-- again, not in statute and at the directive of the Legislature. That was at the discretion of HHS. And so I think as a body we have a responsibility for how the funds were laid out by the feds and who is most vulnerable and needs the dollars to be re-- able to really direct the funds to those initiatives versus other programs that were decided at the discretion outside of this body. So I just wanted to lift that up as well. But again, I am open to answering any additional questions that you all have. I hope that you all will support LB102. I think we will be able to see the difference that it will make in some of our most vulnerable families, especially moms and children, as we know that there is an intentional push across our state to support working families. And thank you again for your time.

HARDIN: Final questions? Senator Riepe.

RIEPE: Thank you, Chairman. Again, thank you for being here. I'm not saying it's wrong, but the jump-- looks like it's going from \$376 to

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\$623. Is this because it's-- is this-- how-- when's the last time this was increased?

SPIVEY: Pardon me, Senator Riepe. Are you looking at the one-pager that has the-- what it would increase it to under current law and then--

RIEPE: I'm looking at the document that the department-- DHHS presented.

SPIVEY: OK. I'm sorry. I apologize. I do not have tha--

RIEPE: Did he not give you a copy?

SPIVEY: It's-- no, he did not.

RIEPE: Well, shame on him.

SPIVEY: I know. It's OK. It's OK because I have what we wrote in the bill, and I wrote it down of what it would increase it to. So that's no worries. So what we have for individuals, it-- currently, the max benefit is \$376. The max benefit would jump to \$623. But the max benefit doesn't mean that's what that person gets. So that's just the cap of-- like, the, the top number what-- they would potentially be eligible to get. On average--

RIEPE: They'd be eligible, but not necessarily-- that's-- OK.

SPIVEY: That's what they receive. Exactly. And then for every additional person that is on that benefit, it goes from \$160 to \$393. And so I put on the one pager as an example just to kind of get an idea. So if you are looking at a family of four, under our current law they would have to have a net income of less than \$1,100 a month-- so what they're bringing in-- to be eligible for a maximum payout of \$640 a month. That's current law. Under LB102, for that same family of four, they would ha-- they would be able to have a higher net income of \$2,300 per month, and then they will be eligible for a max payment amount or benefit of \$1,200 per month. But again, that's just what they are eligible for, not necessarily what they would receive. And that is in that-- on the synopsis page kind of towards the bottom, if you all want to-- just to see the example that we gave, just to have, again, some context.

RIEPE: Thank you.

SPIVEY: Thank you. Of course, Senator Riepe.

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HARDIN: Other questions? Seeing none.

SPIVEY: Well, thank you.

HARDIN: Thank you.

SPIVEY: I appreciate your time today.

HARDIN: This closes our hearing for LB102. We have 104 proponents online, 2 opponents online, 0 in the neutral.

SPIVEY: Chairperson Hardin can I just make an amendment to that? So we actually read through the comments, and there's not two opponents. One person actually says, I support the bill, but I think they just misclicked and put opponent. So there's actually only one, so.

HARDIN: Thank you for the clarification.

SPIVEY: Thank you, Chairperson.

HARDIN: We will move to LB192. And our very own Senator Quick is here today.

QUICK: Thank you, Chairman Hardin and fellow members of the Health and Human Services Committee. I am Dan Quick, D-a-n Q-u-i-c-k. And I represent District 35 and Grand Island. And I'm here today to introduce LB192. This bill would maintain Nebraska's current eligibility for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, which was formerly known as food stamps. This is needed because SNAP eligibility in Nebraska was significant-- significantly decreased starting October 1 of this year because of the sunset provision currently in statute. In action, will mean 10-- will mean 10,000 Nebraskans will have a harder time feeding themselves and their families, plus thousands more would become newly in danger of SNAP benefits cliff. We all know the cost of living has gone up. Inflation, inflation has been the worst it's been in 40 years, pushing prices of goods and services through the roof. We all feel this pain, especially at the grocery store. While many of us can absorb the new cost, thousands of Nebraskans are put in the position where they simply don't have enough money to meet their needs. SNAP is helping the most vulnerable among us to, to feed themselves and their families through tough times, as it has done for the last 85 years. LB192 maintains Nebraska SNAP's current-- SNAP gross income limit, which was increased in 2021 from 130% of the federal poverty level to 165% and which has sunset provision in place for October of 2025. One of the most important aspects of an increased SNAP gross income is that it shrinks

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the SNAP cliff effect. The cliff effect happens when SNAP household earnings improve-- for example, through a raise or more hours at work-- and that change makes that household ineligible for SNAP benefits. For example, a worker in a three-person household may be offered a raise to-- of-- at work of \$1 per hour. That increase in income may push that household over their gross income threshold for SNAP by \$20. Instead of stepping down that household's \$200 SNAP benefits in proportion to new earnings, all benefits may be cut entirely. The best way to address the cliff effect is to increase the SNAP gross income limit. By increasing the gross income limit, families can earn more and still qualify for SNAP but also deduct more expenses and remain on the program while stepping down benefits. It is for this reason that the Legislature made the decision to raise the SNAP eligibility level in 2021 to what is-- what it is today. SNAP benefits are paid 100% by the federal government, and, and administrative costs are split 50/50 with the state. According to the fiscal notes, continuing SNAP costs the state \$0. Additionally, SNAP benefits, totaling an estimated \$12 million per year, will flow directly through grocery stores, supporting local economies, farmers, producers, and others. Towns in our state-- towns in our state, large and small, benefit greatly from this extra boost in spending. A USA-- USDA study estimates that for every \$1 in SNAP, \$1.54 is returned in economic, economic impact. It makes sense to pass LB192 to not only support working Nebraskans trying to get ahead, but to stimulate the economy by-- economy by shrinking the cliff effect and injecting millions into local businesses and producers. Now is not the time to kick people off a food benefit in our state. We must pass the bill this year to ensure that hardworking Nebraskans are not facing future in-- few-- food insecurity. And I would add to that. I know our food banks in Grand Island. I know they are stretched to the limit. I mean, even at my church they bring in-- they-- there's always requests to bring in more food for the food banks because even with what we have now, people are always accessing our food banks. And if we would change this back to the-- to what it was previously for the, for the SNAP benefits, you would see more people accessing our food banks and how that would really affect some of our, our communities across the state, so. With that, I would appreciate the committee's vote to advance this bill to General File. And I'm happy to take any questions. Thank you.

HARDIN: Thank you. Questions? Will you-- wait. Senator Riepe has one.

RIEPE: Is this the bill that Jen Day carried last year?

HARDIN: [INAUDIBLE]. LB84? Yeah.

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RIEPE: Oh, OK. Thank you.

HARDIN: Will you be with us at the end?

QUICK: I will.

HARDIN: Thanks. Proponents, LB192. Welcome.

REBECCA JACOBSEN: Good afternoon, Chairperson Hardin and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Rebecca Jacobsen, R-e-b-e-c-c-a J-a-c-o-b-s-e-n. I'm a born and raised Nebraskan and have spent the majority of my life working and living in Gothenburg. I'm a single parent to a seven-year-old little firecracker who is wise beyond her years. And I work as the Career and Community Coordinator at Gothenburg High School. I am responsible for the administrative side of the school lunch program. I am here to speak in support of LB192 in a personal capacity and through my experience in what I encounter every day at work. LB192 keeps SNAP income eligibility in Nebraska in place as it stands today. Without it, thousands of hardworking Nebraskans are going to lose benefits and have an even more difficult time feeding their families. In the spring of 2023 when my now ex-husband left me and our daughter, I was faced with maintaining a mortgage, school expenses, home expenses, and basic living costs on a full-time job at \$18 per hour. I applied for SNAP benefits-- benefits that I pay into. After speaking with a case manager, I was able to get approved for \$189 per month in benefits. That little bit of relief allowed me to find some much needed breathing room on a budget that was very tight. While receiving SNAP, my daughter also received free breakfast and lunch at school. This was a part of-- another part of the puzzle that allowed relief. I utilized SNAP benefits for four months. It was a stopgap for me until I was able to negotiate a salary. While my salaried position has helped a lot, my budget is still incredibly tight. I cannot be more direct when I say that making it more difficult for families to receive SNAP benefits would be extremely detrimental to the children and families that I work with every day. Food insecurity amongst school-aged children is real, and it is heartbreaking. It truly keeps me awake at night. I see it every day in the student who picks up extra fruit and vegetables before they leave the lunchroom to ensure they have something at suppertime. I see it in the student who is exhausted and having a hard time focusing. When you are hungry, you have a hard time staying on task and regulating your emotions. Children are no different. Kids who are distracted in the classroom because they are hungry create a domino effect for their fellow classmates, teachers, paras, and school administrators responsible for handling behaviors

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from something that could have easily been prevented through a benefit being extended. SNAP helps make sure kids get to eat. I need to also be clear that the children I'm speaking of are the children of hardworking people in our community who cannot make ends meet, like the single father of one who makes \$40,000 per year working full time and does not qualify for benefits because he makes too much money. He's the dad that called me in a panic after receiving notice that his daughter did not qualify for even reduced price meals at school because his income was too much. He did not know how he was going to afford to feed her. The reality is that when you add up the increasing cost of living, it is more and more difficult to ensure that there's enough to provide. Kids should never have to worry about where their next meal comes from or if they're going to be able to eat between Friday at lunch and Monday at breakfast. And parents should not have to worry if they're going to be able to feed themselves or their children. That is the reality that we are facing right now. Especially right now, we cannot afford a reduction in SNAP benefits. Access to the SNAP program ensures that parents can feed their children and children don't have to be preoccupied with adult problems. It is imperative that LB192 pass, and that's why I'm here asking you today to vote this bill out of committee. Our families and children literally depend on it. Thank you for your time.

HARDIN: Thank you. Questions? Seeing none. Thank you.

REBECCA JACOBSEN: Thank you.

HARDIN: Proponents, LB192. Welcome.

TIM WILLIAMS: Cool. I made it. Good afternoon, Chairman Hardin, members of the HHS Committee. My name is Tim Williams, spelled T-i-m W-i-l-l-i-a-m-s. And I am here on behalf of the food banks in Nebraska: Food Bank for the Heartland and Food Bank of Lincoln. Combined, we serve every county across Nebraska, working together with nearly 655 pantries, religious institutions, meal providers, and schools to ensure that every Nebraskan has access to healthy and nutritious foods. Today, we're here to provide testimony in support of LB1-- LB192 concerning SNAP credit eligibility. Food insecurity in Nebraska is at historic levels. From the latest data provided by Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap report, nearly 260,000 Nebraskans are considered food insecure, one in five in which are children. These rates are disproportionately seen amongst our rural Nebraska counties. Changes in these food insecure levels are highlighted in food insecurity heat maps which have been handed out to you all. You will see that the level of food insecurity has jumped in Nebraska from 10%

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to nearly 14% of the entire population in just one short year. Our neighbors are still feeling the effects of years of increased inflation, and in turn we and our partners are seeing an increased attendance and need for food-- for emergency food assistance. At the food bank level, our food banks, including our network partners, served approximately 2.6 million individuals across the state during fiscally-- fiscal year '24, and that number is not expected to lower during the current year. A graph highlighting this dramatic increase dating all the way back to 2018 has also been handed out to you. The charitable food system cannot meet this growing need alone. To, to support this work, Food Bank for the Heartland works with the Department of Health and Human Services to implement the SNAP outreach plan in collaboration with our nine outreach partners under that plan, one of which is Food Bank of Lincoln. We provide-- work to provide education and application assistance for SNAP. We do this at the operation of an assistance hotline and in-person education and application assistance for those who, who, who are eligible for this target benefit. In fiscal year '24, the food bank and those partners under the plan submitted a total of 5,772 applications. Last quarter-- so the tail end of calendar year '24-- we had a 61% approval rating for those applications that are continuing to implement new and innovative strategies to increase that, that percentage to make even higher. So I often describe our work that we do with a three-legged stool analogy. We source and distribute food-- through the food banks through three sort of unique buckets: our purchasing power, how we bring in donated food, and our government support nutrition programs. If even one of these legs begins to wobble, it creates an unsustainable environment that creates harmful barriers to neighbors in need of food assistance. If this bill does not pass, the government leg will wobble. It'll open an even greater burden on the charitable pantry system to fill in the gaps. It is with this in mind that we at both food banks offer endorsement for LB92. We have taken a collaborative and community-centered approach to meeting the needs of our neighbors. In tandem with our staff outreach and our broader network partners, we aim to eliminate hunger across our state. SNAP is an integral component of this collaborative approach. SNAP is seen as one of the most effective tools to reduce food insecurity and allows our neighbors freedom and flexibility to meet the nutritious food needs of their individual families. So we stand in firm support of LB192, to allow gross eligibility for SNAP to remain at its current level of 165% of the federal poverty level. With that, I will take questions.

HARDIN: Questions? Senator Riepe.

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RIEPE: Thank you, Chairman. Seems a bit ironic. We brag in Nebraska that we serve or feed the nation or-- and yet we have these issues of-- should we provide more incentives to-- for our farmers to grow more vegetables and less corn?

TIM WILLIAMS: I mean, I think we-- we're always a proponent, right, of-- and we work with our local farmers and producers, right, to make sure that we keep as much food in Nebraska as possible. I, I don't think anyone would disagree that we would want to-- we want to make sure that we are supporting our local farmers to keep in that sort vein of healthy, nutritious foods to make sure our neighbors get Nebraskan food as well.

RIEPE: OK. Thank you.

TIM WILLIAMS: Yeah.

RIEPE: Thank you, Chairman.

HARDIN: The map that you--

TIM WILLIAMS: Maps. Sure.

HARDIN: --that you, that-- and that's quite a dramatic change.

TIM WILLIAMS: Correct.

HARDIN: That was during COVID. '21 to '22 I think is when the data is from. Do you have a sense of what it looked like even from this last year? I mean, it-- did it generally go up?

TIM WILLIAMS: Yeah. So if you look at the, the graph, the-- that need as well, right? So if you, if you even look at '21 and '22 numbers, those are lower than what we've seen in the past couple of years. So while these food insecurity numbers, right, are from '21 and '22-- and that's because of just federal data just lagging behind-- the need has only increased beyond the COVID years and has honestly only gotten worse. And one thing I like to use for some of my colleagues that were in the food bank world during the last recession in 2008 is it took roughly ten years for food banks and our partners to sort of see those numbers or those-- that need number to come back to pre-2008 or pre-recession number. And so in the past handful of years and since-- in 2019, we had historic floods and we had COVID and then we've had inflation. It's been arguably crisis after crisis after crisis where we haven't really been able to rebound. And so I don't even know when that ten-year period, right, would start if we're doing-- if we're

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going to start with the ten-year analogy. So that's why I would, I would argue that those numbers are only going to continue to grow.

HARDIN: Can you give us a sense of-- and I'm sorry if I missed it-- about individual contributions versus corporate ones where maybe it's, you know, the grocery stores or that kind of thing. Can you give us a sense of what that division or makeup looks like between individuals contributing versus corporations saying we'll hand this over type of thing to--

TIM WILLIAMS: Sure. I don't have an exact breakdown, but I can follow up. But-- I-- we do work-- we have a, a really strong philanthropic community that supports that food bank. And we work really strongly and collaboratively with sort of corporate donors as well that, that provide food. So it's, it's, it's a healthy mix. I don't know. I can't say which one outweighs. I will say we are doing really good work to improve on how we bring in donated food both through our retail rescue program and through corporate donors as well so that we're making sure that we as the food bank are doing our due diligence and-- so that we have skin in the game as well. Which is why I, I-- that-- I harp back on that three-legged stool sort of analogy. We're, we're putting a lot of things in place as the-- at the food bank level to make sure that we are supporting our partners, which is why we would encourage and need also support on multiple levels, including from a state government in order to, to, to eliminate food insecurity as well.

HARDIN: Do you have the capacity, at least here in Lincoln, to do refrigerating?

TIM WILLIAMS: I will defer to my Lincoln counterpart on that. Yeah. And I, I will say at Food Bank for the Heartland, we are-- if you are in Omaha and you want to drive past 84th and L, we are in the, the process of building a brand-new facility that will greatly increase our ability for cold storage and dry storage as well. So we are-- we have seen the need and are, are doing, again, our due diligence to, to meet that need at a, at a physical location, right? But I can follow up with you regarding the Lincoln stuff.

HARDIN: OK. Thank you.

TIM WILLIAMS: Yeah.

HARDIN: Other questions? Thanks for being here.

TIM WILLIAMS: Cool. Thank you. Yep.

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HARDIN: Proponents, LB192. Welcome.

JOYCE BECK: Thank you, Senator Hardin and members of the Health and Human Service Committee. My name is Joyce Beck, J-o-y-c-e B-e-c-k. I am an AARP Nebraska volunteer. And I'm testifying today in support of LB192 on behalf of AARP Nebraska. It is the policy of AARP that food benefits should be increased to ensure nutritional adequacy and prevention of malnutrition in the most vulnerable Americans. AARP Nebraska supports LB92, a bill to address the cliff effect of the Supplemental Nutrition Assis-- Assistance Program by allowing working families to advance in employment and in training programs and to realize greater earnings or new, better paying employment without the immediate loss of the vital support of, of SNAP. SNAP helps put food on the table of 73-- 72,000 Nebraska households. And on average, it provides \$6.22 per meal for a household with an adult age 50 or older in Nebraska. The average monthly SNAP benefit in Nebraska for adults 50 and older is \$185 a month. According to a 2024 AARP public policy report, in, in 2020, over 2 million households participated in SNAP. 2-- 28,915 of the 2-- 20 million were Nebraskan households with adults aged 50 and older. Inflation and rising food prices are stretching household budgets in ways that make it harder to put food on the table, some-- something many workers and retirees working on fixed incomes already know that all too well. Older adults often face challenges as they age, such as experiencing a mental crisis, job loss, or death of a spouse or older loved ones that may result in financial instability and make it difficult to afford food. SNAP is critical to our aging population, as it-- and often is a safety net that enables older adults to put food on the table. For people living on a tight budget, including many older adults on fixed incomes, higher food prices can be a significant impact on a household's budget. As people struggle to make ends meet, food insecurity continues to be relevant in our state. Thank you to Senator Quick for introducing the legislation and thank you for the opportunity to comment. We would ask you to support LB9-- LB192 and continue the benefits as established through LB108 and advance the bill to General File.

HARDIN: Thank you.

JOYCE BECK: Welcome.

HARDIN: Questions? Seeing none. Thank you.

JOYCE BECK: Thank you.

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HARDIN: LB192, proponents. Welcome.

ANSLEY FELLERS: Thank you. Thank you, Chairman Hardin and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Ansley Fellers, A-n-s-l-e-y F-e-l-l-e-r-s. And I'm testifying today on behalf of the Nebraska Grocery Industry Association and the Nebraska Hospitality Association in support of Senator Quick's LB192. Our associations engage on this issue in part because the employers we represent have employees turn down more hours and more promotions because the increase in earnings put their SNAP benefits at risk. As you know, Nebraska has the fifth lowest unemployment rate in the country. Going backward on income eligibility exacerbates our labor squeeze and to some extent discourages individuals becoming self-sufficient through employment by triggering an aggressive and arbitrary termination of benefits. Additionally, the SNAP program, while seemingly costly, is efficient. For every one meal provided at a food bank, the SNAP program provides nine. Most households redeem their monthly SNAP benefits quickly, and according-- I said-- you-- Senator Quick said this in his opening-- there's a one and a half return for every dollar spent. Participation and costs also ebb and flow with the economy. In upturns, participation and costs go down; and during downturns, they go up. We also continue to see innovative ideas and new solutions in SNAP, including ways to encourage fresh food purchases and helping families who qualify for free and reduced school lunches with summer meals. The majority of SNAP-authorized retailers, about 80%, are locally owned businesses. For retailers across the state, SNAP purchases can account for a significant portion of sales. For our members, it's everywhere from 5% to 30%. While the cliff effect will not be truly eliminated by the passage of this bill, the cliff becomes a lot smaller and a more manageable step. I would also like to mention after conversations in the interim, we did explore transitional benefits or methods of stair-stepping folks down off SNAP. Missouri actually passed such a law, but it seems they're in a quandary right now because the federal government won't cover the cost and the state cannot. This might be something we have to work with our federal delegation on to truly help resolve the cliff effect all together as opposed to continually trying to mitigate it. In the meantime, by min-- by maintaining the gross income limit of 165% the federal poverty level, LB192 would allow employees to grow their income to a more reasonable level before losing SNAP benefits. The state should be rewarding work, not punishing modest increases in income with losses of SNAP benefits. I would also like to state for the record, Senator Riepe, those cornfields feed a lot of the meat we eat. That's

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important. We would ask the committee advance LB192. And with that, I'd be happy to answer any questions.

HARDIN: Thank you. Senator Ballard.

BALLARD: Thank you, Miss. Thank you. Thank you for being here. Can you unpack that Missouri stair-stepping law for me?

ANSLEY FELLERS: Yeah. So they tried for SNAP and for childcare. They tried to do a sliding scale where you don't lose your access to SNAP immediately when your income goes up, just like you wouldn't lose your access to childcare subsidies, all of those sorts of things. It makes a lot of sense. It's an issue we've talked about for a long time-- not necessarily at the Grocers, but others have talked about in Medicaid. It's a big problem. It's probably a problem that we need to start working on federally before states can do anything. It just seemed like-- I think Missouri maybe was going to get tasked with a \$400 or \$500 million cost and the federal government wasn't initially, at least as far as I've seen, going to help them pay for it. I think that's a bummer and something that we should look into.

BALLARD: Thank you.

ANSLEY FELLERS: Thanks.

HARDIN: Other questions? Seeing none. Thank you.

ANSLEY FELLERS: Thank you.

HARDIN: Proponents, LB192. Welcome.

LERESSA JOINER: Hello. Good afternoon, Chairperson Hardin and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Leressa Joiner, L-e-r-e-s-s-a J-o-i-n-e-r. And I live in Omaha, Nebraska. I'm a 51-year-old mother of three children, ages 30, 32, and 34. And I would like to share my strong support for LB192 because there have been many times in my life where I've relied on SNAP benefits to feed my family. I know there may be those among you that may feel hesitant to maintain the current eligibility threshold because you're concerned about cost or worry that SNAP discourages individuals from working. This couldn't be further from the truth. SNAP ensures that people can afford to eat while they work towards sustainability. Without it, families like mine have had to make impossible choices between food, rent, groceries, gas, and other household expenses. When I relied on SNAP, it wasn't because I wanted a handout. It was because I needed help. SNAP allowed me to put healthy meals on the table for myself and my children while

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I worked hard towards improving my circumstances. At 17, I became a teen mom-- a reality that could have easily derailed my future. But I was determined to graduate high school and pursue a college education so that I could build a better life for both myself and my child. I balanced full-time classes with a part-time job, stretching every dollar I earned and every food stamp dollar-- as they were called at the time-- as far as it would go. I went on to graduate high school, start college, get married, have two additional children, and ultimately get divorced all by the age of 23. During that time, I found myself trying to stretch meals for my household as I had watched my mother do when I was growing up. I became a master at creating what I called chef's surprise, which was really nothing more than leftovers dressed up with a few new ingredients. This generally meant that I would add cheese or a few other spices in an attempt to fool my kids into thinking that we were eating something fancy. Let's just say that they were not fooled and they were not impressed. But they also understood, like I did at their age, that we ain't got no food to waste. People who've never experienced food insecurity cannot fully comprehend the stress of not knowing if you can consistently put food on the table for yourself and your loved ones. Receiving SNAP benefits gave me the peace of mind that I needed during those rough patches in my life, and I will forever be thankful for that. Today, I stand before you as a business owner and a productive resident of the state of Nebraska, and I am proof of what happens when we invest our resources into the residents of our local and statewide communities. As lawmakers, I know you face difficult decisions, but maintaining SNAP eligibility shouldn't be one of them. I urge you to consider the long-term impacts on our families, our communities, and our state and vote to pass LB192 out of committee. Thank you.

HARDIN: Thank you. Questions? Thank you.

LERESSA JOINER: Thank you.

HARDIN: LB192, proponents. Welcome back.

SIERRA EDMISTEN: Thank you. Hi. My name is Sierra Edmisten, S-i-e-r-r-a E-d-m-i-s-t-e-n. And again, I'm a working mother of four young children from Hastings, Nebraska. I'm here today to share my support for LB192 because I believe families should never have to struggle or worry about feeding their children. The first time I remember food insecurity being a real issue was when I had moved out of the house and was pregnant with my oldest. There were many times where I skipped meals with my husband. He would eat one day and I would eat the next. Once we had SNAP in the third trimester, when they

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counted the baby as a person, we were able to eat at least once a day. After my son was born and off of formula, we were back to eating every other day for a while so we made sure he could eat. This lack of nutrition, my doctor told me, is the reason my second pregnancy was so rough. Again, I was on bedrest at 20 weeks after I almost lost my second son due to the lack of nutrition. Once I hit the third trimester again, we were able to get more help and take a couple of raises. With my increased household size, things started to look up for my family. SNAP has been a key resource for my family. We had to be careful at past jobs, watching our wages and managing raises in order to keep SNAP and afford food. We had to turn down many raises because it meant making sure our family was fed. For example, when I worked as a daycare teacher, I got a \$0.50 raise. I should have celebrated that. However, when SNAP recertification happened, that caused our SNAP benefits to be cut back \$200 a month. The extra \$80 a month I made couldn't make up for the \$200 that we lost that my family relied on for food. There was no way to account for that loss in the budget. We ended up frequenting many food pantries multiple times a month and borrowing money from family just to make things work. Now I am proud to say I am no longer on SNAP. In 2023, I was able to get a different job and finally make enough to have a living wage. But the transition was a struggle. Again, the amount I was losing in benefits were more than what I was gaining in my paychecks for a good six months. I ended up needing food banks and family help to survive until I got another raise and was finally able to feed my kids. SNAP was a lifeline when my family needed it. Without it, I don't know what we would have done. When the gross income limit increased the first time around and protected us from losing SNAP, I could finally work to better my situation instead of spending hours stressed about how to feed my children their next meal. This bill is so important to me because I know what it's like to need SNAP. If we don't pass LB192, thousands of Nebraskans will lose SNAP and will be devastated. They will be in the same boat I was in: stressed, worried, unsure of where to go. No parent should have to worry about where their kid's next meal will come from. LB192 is a necessary protection against that risk. SNAP should be a temporary support that can help you get to a better spot. However, when you keep losing more in benefits than you gain in income, that becomes impossible. For all these reasons, I ask that you please support LB1-- LB192 by passing it out of committee.

HARDIN: Thank you. Questions? Seeing none. Thank you. Proponents, LB192. Welcome.

CARLIE JONAS: Hi. Good afternoon, almost evening, Chairman Hardin and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Carlie

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Jonas, C-a-r-l-i-e J-o-n-a-s. And I'm testifying on behalf of the Center for Rural Affairs. Due to lower wages, fewer job opportunities, and limited food access, there are higher rates of food insecurity in Nebraska's rural counties. And as we've heard from others today, not acting to maintain the current income eligibility for SNAP would have adverse consequences on food security in our state. As Senator Quick stated, the USDA estimates that for every \$1 in SNAP benefits of-- \$1.54 in economic activity is generated. Last year, Nebraska received \$332 million in SNAP benefits, which had the potential to generate an estimated \$511 million in economic activity through the multiplier effect, as illustrated in the handout provided. When SNAP dollars are spent at the grocery store, they ripple through the broader food economy, which is important in a rural state like Nebraska, where agriculture and food production are major industries. SNAP dollars spent by both rural and urban residents help sustain every stage of the food supply chain, from farming and processing to labor and distribution, and finally retail in stores. In our rural communities, SNAP has a major economic impact even at a small scale. Independent grocery stores, which are more, more common in these areas, rely on SNAP as key revenue stream. Dollars spent in these stores have a significant impact on local economies. Studies have found that 48% of local purchases are recirculated back into the community. And additional-- additionally for households receiving SNAP benefits, the portion of their food budget covered by the program allows them to afford other essential expenses like purchasing cleaning supplies or refilling prescriptions. And-- I'm running out of time here, so I'll skip down. The backside of the handout ill-- illustrates the economic impact SNAP has in your districts here in Nebraska and how the multiplier effect comes into play. So that's the constituency of your districts and how they contribute to local, state, and national economy. And with that, SNAP is not just a lifeline for individuals and families. It's an economic stimulus program that directly benefits the entire state. And we hope to see you to vote to advance LB192 out of committee. Thank you.

HARDIN: That was a very thoughtful presentation. Thank you.

CARLIE JONAS: Thank you.

HARDIN: Other questions? Comments? Senator Fredrickson.

FREDRICKSON: Thank you, Chair Ballard-- or-- Chair Ballard. Why am I saying that? Chair Hardin. Thank you for being here and for your testimony. This is really effective. I love that you broke this down in the back. I think that's, that's a really-- paint, paints quite a

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picture for all of us kind of in our constituency, so. Thank you for being here and providing, providing this.

CARLIE JONAS: Yeah. You're welcome.

HARDIN: Any other questions? Seeing none. Thank you.

CARLIE JONAS: Thank you.

HARDIN: Proponents, LB192. Hi.

ERIC SAVAIANO: Hi there. Senators, my name is Eric Savaiano, E-r-i-c S-a-v-a-i-a-n-o. And I won't spend too much time even referring to what I wrote, but I'll say a couple of things specific to this, this conversation that might be good reminders. One thing is that we have worked with a national nonprofit to analyze Nebraska's population and the gross income level that captures the most people that could be eligible for SNAP as it increases. And the 165% federal poverty level is really that sweet spot where people are most able to get the deductions that move them from-- through that gross income level door through the net income level door of 100% of the federal poverty level. So that's important to know. We are doing what we can with 165%, and it works in Nebraska. The other thing I'll note is that the cost, as, as described in the Legislative Fiscal Office's fiscal note, is \$0. And we're excited to see that the Department of Health and Human Services created a fiscal note that has-- that notes \$0 to continue this. And it's not actually been part of past fiscal notes. And so it's, it's good news. And it is something that should go into your decision-making moving this forward. And I think that's really my main points. I guess I'll note too-- what I did write mostly is that SNAP is a work support and it supports people by advancing it past the cliff effect, helping people get over that cliff effect. You'll see a chart and that the majority of folks who can work do work on SNAP all in there. Thank you.

HARDIN: Thank you. Questions? Seeing none. Appreciate it.

ERIC SAVAIANO: Thank you.

HARDIN: Proponents, LB192. Opponents, LB192. Those in the neutral, LB192. Senator Quick. We had online: 123 proponents, 6 opponents, 0 in the neutral.

QUICK: Yeah. Thank you, Chairman Hardin and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. And I think-- well, you know, one of the things I would-- I do want to talk about in-- inflation has affected

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how, you know-- not just us, you know, of, of us that, that can go buy our groceries and, and, and-- it, it's affected our paychecks as well. But SNAP benefits, it-- it's reducing the amount that actually they're being-- they're able to purchase with that-- with their benefits. So even-- how do I want to say it? Even as they are, they're receiving that benefit, they're getting fewer groceries as they're going there to, to the grocery store and being able to, to provi-- provide for their families. I know in, in Grand Island we have a lot of programs that are, you know, still helping people that can-- that are, that are most vulnerable. We have the-- our schools are working. We got food lunch programs, free and reduced meals. We got the summer programs to send meals home with kids. We've got several food banks. I know there was some questions about maybe, maybe the farmers could grow something different. But we have community gardens in Grand Island where people can go and maybe they can just pick produce for themselves. And that's really a great thing to have in our community. It doesn't provide everything that people need, but they can maybe go pick tomatoes or things like that and, and some other the-- other vegetables. I was on the Heartland United Way Board in Grand Island and I know we did food drives and collected a lot of food, especially at the Husker Harvest Days. They would bring in a lot of food. And I can't even remember how many pounds of food they had. I think it was up in the, you know, close to a ton of food or something like that that they collected. And then they would, would distribute that to the food banks in our four-county area. Of course there's a lot of the nonprofits that also have their own food banks and do food drives. Our church does one. Personally, I have-- I donate to our church for our food bank and we've taken food in. We've gone to-- even when we go to one of the grocery stores in our community, they have where you can buy-- you can pick up a bag, you can purchase food, you put that in that, that bag, and then they will give that to someone. So I think, you know, with our partnerships with, with our, you know, retailers in town and some of the big businesses, they donate a lot of money. That, that helps with those things. But I think keeping these SNAP benefits at the level that they, that they are currently is really important. And reducing them down to where they were at previous levels will be devastating for the-- for our most vulnerable in our communities. So with that-- and I was really thankful I didn't have a fiscal note. I will be honest. So thank you for that. And I hope we can advance LB192. So thank you.

HARDIN: Thank you. Questions? Comments? Seeing none. This concludes LB192.