

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
Transportation and Telecommunications Committee February 10, 2020

**FRIESEN:** OK. Welcome, everyone, to license plate day at the Capitol. Welcome to the Transportation and Telecommunications Committee hearing. I'm Curt Friesen from District 34, and I'm the chairman of the committee. First, I'd ask you to silence all your cell phones and electronic devices. We will be hearing the bills in the order listed on the agenda. Those wishing to testify on a bill should move to the front of the room and be ready to testify. We have two on deck chairs up front there that you can sit in so that you're ready to go when the testifier leaves the table. If you'll be testifying, I'd ask that you legibly complete one of the green testifier sheets located on the table just inside the entrance. Give the completed testifier sheet to the page when you sit down to testify. Handouts are not required, but if you do have a handout, we need 10 copies. One of the pages will assist you if you need help. When you begin your testimony, it's very important that you clearly state and spell your first and last names for the record. If you fail to do that, I will stop your testimony and ask you to do that. We will use a light system in the committee today of five minutes. You'll be given four minutes with the green light, one minute with the amber light, and then when the red light comes on, I'd ask you wrap up your testimony. Those not wishing to testify may sign in on the sheet by the door to indicate their support or opposition to a bill. And with that, I'll introduce my staff. I've got Tip O'Neill is my legal counsel, Sally Schultz is the committee clerk. We have Ashton and Michaela, not here, are the pages. There she is. So I thank them for being here to help things run more smoothly. And with that, we'll start introductions on my right.

**HUGHES:** Dan Hughes, District 44: 10 counties in southwest Nebraska.

**BOSTELMAN:** Bruce Bostelman, District 23: Saunders, Butler, and the major-- majority of Colfax Counties.

**ALBRECHT:** Senator Joni Albrecht, District 17: Wayne, Thurston, and Dakota Counties.

**HILGERS:** Mike Hilgers, District 21: northwest Lincoln, Lancaster County.

**CAVANAUGH:** Machaela Cavanaugh, District 6: west-central Omaha, Douglas County.

**FRIESEN:** Senator Geist is not feeling well today, so she's gone. And Senator DeBoer may join us, if time permits. She might be in a different hearing. So if senators do come and go, they probably have

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different bills to introduce in other committees. So with that, we'll open the hearing on LB843. Welcome, Senator Cavanaugh.

**CAVANAUGH:** Thank you, Chairman Friesen and members of the Tele-- Transportation and Telecommunications Committee. My name is Machaela Cavanaugh, M-a-c-h-a-e-l-a C-a-v-a-n-a-u-g-h, and I represent District 6 in the west-central Omaha area. I am here today to introduce LB843, a bill to create Donate Life license plates. A single organ donor has the potential to save the lives of eight others and improve the lives of 100 more. But despite the incredible lifesaving potential, only 58 percent of Nebraskans are registered donors, far lagging behind neighboring states like Iowa, Kansas and Missouri, each of which have rates of 75 percent or higher. When you consider that a new name is added to the organ donation waiting list every 10 minutes and that every day 20 people on that same list die waiting, the need is clear. LB843's Donate Life Plates would increase visibility and awareness of our organ donor registry and spur conversation about the importance of being an organ donor. Half of all states have license plates encouraging organ donation and they have all seen increasing rates of people signing up to donate life to those in need. It's not often that a specialty license plate will save lives. This is such an opportunity for us. I am happy to work with the committee and the Department of Motor Vehicles on their technical language concerns, and I am happy to answer any questions the committee may have. And I'd just like to say that I just renewed my driver's license and once again clicked the donate organs. So don't go chasing me off the roads, committee members. But it is, it is available now.

**FRIESEN:** Thank you, Senator Cavanaugh. Any questions from the committee? Seeing none, thank you.

**CAVANAUGH:** Thank you.

**FRIESEN:** Proponents who wish to testify come forward. Welcome.

**KYLE HERBER:** Thank you. Mr. Chairperson and members of the committee, my name is Kyle Herber, K-y-l-e H-e-r-b as in boy-e-r, and I'm the president and CEO of Live On Nebraska. Our organization, formerly known as Nebraska Organ Recovery, has been facilitating organ and tissue donation in our great state for the past 43 years. Honoring the decisions of Nebraskans to give life to others is not only a great responsibility, but also a privilege we take very seriously. Last summer, a man named Joe Adams came into my office and wanted to know when we would have a Donate Life license plate in Nebraska. In fact, Joe was quite vocal about his dissatisfaction with the fact that we didn't already have one, as 25 other states already do. You see, Joe's

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life was hanging in the balance, he needed a heart transplant. Four years earlier, he had a massive heart attack. His doctors tried other treatment options, but after two years determined a transplant was the only way he would survive. And sadly, he was not alone. On any given day, 425 people in Nebraska are waiting for a lifesaving transplant, 113,000 across the country. Twenty people in the U.S. die each day because there are not enough organs to meet the need. Thankfully, Joe was not one, was not one of those. I'm happy to share that his wait ended in August. Joe is alive today because his donor, one person, decided that with the ending of their life, another could be saved or healed. 2019 was a record year for donation in our state. More than 900 people gave the gift of life. We call them heroes, the people that knew them best call them mom, dad, friend, aunt, brother, coworker, daughter. Committee members, research suggests that 95 percent of Nebraskans support organ and tissue donation, yet only 58 percent of those eligible to do so have registered as donors. The reality is that many people don't take time to consider donation until it affects them personally. A Donate Life license plate could help us change that. Imagine sitting in traffic on a Saturday morning drive to Memorial Stadium. The car ahead has a Donate Life license plate. A father and a son start a conversation about organ donation. When the son turns 16, he checks the yes box on his driver's license application, making his commitment to be an organ and tissue donor. Or picture Becky VanWinkle watching her daughter's soccer practice from the tailgate of her SUV. She shares the excitement of getting her new license plate and beams with pride as she tells the story of her brothers, John and Robert, who both helped others after their tragic deaths. These are the conversations we need Nebraskans to be having every day. Every opportunity to share a story and connect donation and transplantation to family, friends, neighbors is a chance to reduce the transplant waitlist and save lives. It's also an opportunity to honor the donors and their families who choose, who choose to turn tragedy into hope. Thank you for your time and consideration of this bill. On behalf of Joe and all of Nebraska's donation and transplantation community, I ask you to please vote yes to advance LB843.

**FRIESEN:** Thank you, Mr. Herber. Any questions from the committee? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony. Any other proponents wish to testify? Seeing none, anyone wish to testify in opposition? Seeing none, anyone wish to testify in a neutral capacity? Seeing none. Senator Cavanaugh are you willing to close? We do have numerous letters of support and one in a neutral capacity. Senator Cavanaugh waives closing. With that, we will close the hearing on LB843. Next,

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we'll wait for the senator to come. OK, we will open the hearing on LB903. Welcome, Senator Kolowski.

**KOLOWSKI:** Thank you, sir. Good afternoon, Chairman Friesen and members of the Transportation and Telecommunications Committee. LB903 is a bill to authorize the motor-- the Department of Motor Vehicles to issue license plates recognizing Down syndrome awareness. The Omaha Chapter of Dads Appreciating Down syndrome asked me to introduce this bill on their behalf. Their mission is to assist and support through fellowship and action the fathers and families of individuals with Down syndrome. These fathers have banded together to support each other, their families, and their children. The DADS program, as well as the mo-- the Mothers Connected by Down Syndrome, and GRANDS are connected with the Down Syndrome Alliance of the Midlands. Together, they work to support families and raise awareness of Down syndrome. The DADS organization was not able to reach the statutory threshold to achieve this without a legislative bill. They are confident they will be able to reach that number with an authorize-- authorization in place. This license plate that you have a copy of before you now is not being used to raise funds, just awareness. Because they have already worked with the Department of Motor Vehicles, the design of the plate is already finished. My handout is a copy of that particular design. The delayed implementation date of 2022 is due to the department's request to alignment with the timing of their computer software and system changes. The testifiers to follow will give you information on Down syndrome, their families' unique challenges, and their experience as the parent of a child with Down syndrome. I understand the Department of Motor Vehicles has sent a letter they referred to as technical comments. I urge you to advance this bill and I'm happy to answer any questions.

**FRIESEN:** Thank you, Senator Kolowski. Senator Hilgers.

**HILGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Senator Kolowski, for being here. I just want to say thank you for bringing the bill. I support and I intend to co-sponsor. I have another bill that I have to bring. But as a dad who had a son with Down syndrome, I appreciate all you do and appreciate the organization. So thank you, Senator Kolowski.

**KOLOWSKI:** Thank you.

**FRIESEN:** Thank you, Senator Hilgers. Any other questions from the committee? Seeing none, thank you. Are you gonna stick around for closing?

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**KOLOWSKI:** I will, yes, sir.

**FRIESEN:** OK. Proponents who wish to testify come forward.

**MARK KUECKER:** My name is Mark Kuecker, M-a-r-k K-u-e-c-k-e-r, I'm from Elkhorn, Nebraska. And I would like to thank Senator Kolowski for introducing the bill, Senator Lou Ann Linehan for co-sponsoring, and the committee for allowing us to present testimony today in support of LB903. I'm the proud father of Ellie, a 15-year-old daughter who has Down syndrome. Shortly after her birth, the doctor said she has trisomy 21. At first, it didn't click. Oh, Down syndrome. But we had three healthy boys, what could have caused this? We felt overwhelmed, we didn't know where to turn. We felt completely alone. Over time, we realized our experience and feelings were very similar to many others. They were just as lost as we were when they found out their child had Down syndrome. I serve as president of Dads Appreciating Down Syndrome in Omaha. DADS is a nonprofit which was founded in 2008 when a few fathers started meeting to share their experiences and challenges for the betterment of one another. Actually, Mike Adams is one of the founders of DADS from 2008, along with his daughter Addison, so we're glad they're here. Our mission, as Senator Kolowski said, is to assist and support through fellowship and action the fathers and families of individuals with Down syndrome. We provide monthly meetings, support and advocacy, social activities, education, resources, and camaraderie and friendship. We bring in speakers from organizations like Special Olympics, as well as financial experts to help us understand wills, trusts, and the ABLE Act as we plan for our children's future. The website on the license plate, [downsyndromene.org](http://downsyndromene.org) is dedicated to providing resources for those impacted by Down syndrome, including parents, grandparents, and siblings. The site also provides resources for-- resource information for educators, doctors and those in the medical community, as well as Nebraska business owners who employ individuals with special needs. The current, current resources on the license plate website include the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, Down Syndrome Alliance of the Midlands from Omaha, Dads Appreciating Down Syndrome from Omaha, Northeast Down Syndrome Association from Norfolk, Down Syndrome Association for Families from Lincoln, Down Syndrome Advocates in Action from Lincoln and Kearney. And the website also includes three major national and global Down syndrome organizations to provide additional resources. Our hope is that, through the Down syndrome awareness license plates, we can provide education, support for families, and promote inclusion for all Nebraskans with Down syndrome. We sincerely thank you for your support of LB903.

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**FRIESEN:** Thank you, Mr. Kuecker. Any questions from the committee? Seeing none, thank you for coming to testify. Any other proponents who wish to testify?

**GARY SHADA:** Chairman Friesen and members of the Transportation and Telecommunications Committee, I'd like to thank you for giving myself and others who will or have testified today the opportunity to do so. My name is Gary Shada and my daught-- this is my daughter Kylee.

**FRIESEN:** Could you spell, spell your--

**GARY SHADA:** G-a-r-y S-h-a-d-a, and Kylee is K-y-l-e-e. April 26, 2011, is the day that my wife Deidre and I will never forget. This is the day that our beautiful daughter Kylee was born. The previous nine months of our lives had gone on without a, without a hitch of any kind, and that was quite different compared to my wife's three previous pregnancies. Her first ended with our son being born premature and dying only one hour after his birth. We nearly experienced the same thing with her second pregnancy, but this time the doctors were able to stop her premature labor and on May 13th, 2009, our son Kendall was born. Her next pregnancy after Kendall ended in a miscarriage. When she became pregnant with Kylee, we were doing our best to prepare for the worst, but hoping for the best. As stated earlier, things went as we were hoping they would. So shortly after Kylee was born and I had done my dad duties of calling family to let them know she had entered the world, imag-- imagine my reaction when I walked into my wife's hospital room to have her tell me our little angel has Down syndrome. I'd like to say that I handled it well, but I'd be lying. I placed my hands on my face, walked to the couch on the other side of the room, and began crying. After realizing how selfish my actions were, I walked over to my wife and daughter, gave them each a hug and kiss, held my daughter for a bit, then sat down with my laptop and typed in Down syndrome and started reading. You'd think that the hospitals or doctors would have had some information for us, a pamphlet or two, or at least give us some guidance as we entered a segment of parenthood that not many people have been through, but this was not the case. As I read, I learned about all of the potential issues that kids born with Down syndrome could have. Forty percent will have a heart defect of some kind. The vision and hearing issues, lack of muscle development, which leads to feeding issues, which then creates physical delays, spinal issues that can occur, and that 92 percent of all babies with a pre-- prenatal diagnosis of Down syndrome are terminated. That Down syndrome is the most common chromosomal dis-- condition in the United States and also the least funded. The lists seemed to go on and on, and I've got to say, none of it painted

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a very pretty picture. Here we are almost nine years later, and I would change absolutely nothing. You see, what was never mentioned in those articles that I read is that individuals with Down syndrome love unconditionally. They have an infectious laugh, right on cue, and smile that can brighten the darkest of days. That their accomplishments will have even more meaning to them and that they make everyone around them a better person. Parents of children with Down syndrome have so many roadblocks placed in front of them. LB903 would help alleviate one of them. Seven years ago, my wife and I, along with another couple, started the Northeast Nebraska Down Syndrome Association. It hasn't been, excuse me. It hasn't been easy trying to put on events in rural Nebraska. And a big part of that is because of the lack of awareness. Allowing these license plates would help raise awareness tremendously and help organizations like ours and others to help families with questions, support, and opportunities that they otherwise may not get. Thank you for your time.

**FRIESEN:** Thank you, Mr. Shada. And thank you, Kylee, for being here.

**KYLEE SHADA:** Thank you.

**FRIESEN:** Any questions from the committee? Seeing none, thank you for testifying.

**GARY SHADA:** You're welcome.

**FRIESEN:** Any other proponents?

**LEAH JANKE:** Good afternoon and thank you, in advance, for your time and consideration. My name is Leah Janke, L-e-a-h J-a-n-k-e. I am here today to testify and ask you to vote in favor of LB903. Down syndrome is the most commonly occurring genetic condition, affecting 1 in every 700 births. My eight-year-old son is one of those 1 in 700. I am also here today to represent the Down Syndrome Alliance of the Midlands located in Omaha. We serve over 500 families who have a loved one with Down syndrome and have over 2,500 community members who look to us as a source-- as a resource for a variety of topics related to Down syndrome. One of the main missions of the Down Syndrome Alliance is to make sure no one feels alone at the time of diagnosis, either at birth or prenatally. When I received my prenatal diagnosis of Down syndrome at 22 weeks pregnant, it was incredibly devastating and isolating. I found out about Down Syndrome Alliance of the Midlands from a family friend and instantly dove in headfirst by attending a support group. Witnessing firsthand that life was not going to be that different was such a blessing for me and my family. In 2016, Nebraska passed the Nebraska Down Syndrome Information and Support Act to regulate

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information new families receive at the time of diagnosis. Down Syndrome Awareness License Plates will have a link to the Nebraska DHHS website with this information. The website includes information about each of the Down syndrome organizations located throughout the state. After a decade of hard work and two decades of inequity and funding for our Down syndrome community, the NIH recently allotted \$98 million per year for Down syndrome research. The INCLUDE project focuses on disease and conditions like Alzheimer's, blood cancers, and autoimmune, immune disorders that have a higher prevalence among individuals with Down syndrome, as well as conditions like solid tumor cancers that are rare among individuals with Down syndrome. I am here today to ask that you please vote yes to move this bill through in order to help spread Down syndrome awareness throughout the state. It will help families like mine to not feel isolated in their diagnosis, provide community members an opportunity to find resources and show their support and inclusion of individuals with Down syndrome, and continue to spread awareness on the prevalence of Down syndrome and the need for continued medical research. Thank you.

**FRIESEN:** Thank you, Ms. Janke. Any questions from the committee?

**LEAH JANKE:** Thank you.

**FRIESEN:** Seeing none, thank you for your testimony. Any other proponents wish to testify?

**ANGELA WILLEY:** Senator Friesen and the committee, thank you for hearing this testimony. My name is Angela Willey, A-n-g-e-l-a W-i-l-l-e-y. I'm here today as the mother of a son with Down syndrome and the co-founder of Down Syndrome Advocates in Action Nebraska. I'm from Elmwood, Nebraska, and as I said, my son is 11 years old and his name is Ben, and he was born with Down syndrome. We found out of his diagnosis prenatally at 19 weeks. The diagnosis of Down syndrome was delivered over the phone on a Saturday morning. We knew very little about the condition and we looked to the medical professionals for more answers. However, since the window in which we could terminate was quickly closing, the majority of the information we were given emphasized the worst-case scenario of medical risks associated with trisomy 21 and was biased toward termination. Unfortunately, after speaking with other parents of children with Down syndrome, we have learned that many others also received outdated and biased information when first hearing about the diagnosis. Words such as challenge, risk, burden and termination still tend to dominate the conversations. We hope that by raising awareness, words like valued, achievement, rewarding, blessing, and acceptance are also added to the conversation. Today, my son is 11 years old and in the sixth grade at

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Elmwood-Murdock Public Schools. He is included in the general education classroom for most of his day and participates in band and basketball with his peers. While his speech is not always intelligible, he uses sign language to help others understand what he is saying and enjoys teaching ASL signs to his classmates. I am confident that he is teaching them just as much as they are teaching him. Raising awareness is important. The idea that there can never be too many voices shouting the worth of individuals with Down syndrome was one of the reasons that Down Syndrome Advocates in Action was started five years ago. As an organization, our mission is to advocate for the value, acceptance, and inclusion of people with Down syndrome. With community groups in both Lincoln and Kearney, Nebraska, we understand the need for statewide support for individuals with Down syndrome and their families. This specific population is breaking stereotypes every day, thanks to supportive families, early intervention and inclusive learning environments. People with Down syndrome often have to practice more and work harder to learn new skills. But the weight and extra effort make every milestone a cause for celebration. There are individuals with trisomy 21 who have active social lives, participate in the workforce, live independently, drive cars, get married, and enjoy life. This picture of what life could be like for someone with Down syndrome was never shared with my family by medical professionals. As an organization, we want to make sure that families and the general public hear stories of inspiration and achievement and that our population has an opportunity to be active in the community. These license plates will help raise awareness across the state and hopefully take a positive message to places it has not been before. Please support LB903 and help raise awareness for individuals with Down syndrome and to let families who help support their loved ones know that they are not alone.

**FRIESEN:** Thank you, Ms. Willey. Any questions from the committee? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony.

**ELISSA FUELBERTH:** Hi, my name is Elissa Fuelberth, E-l-i-s-s-a F-u-e-l-b-e-r-t-h I graduated from Lincoln Southwest High School and was even one of the three chosen graduation speakers to speak in Bob Devaney Auditorium and in front of thousands of people. After a year-long job training internship at Embassy Suites with Project SEARCH, I now have a full-time job here in Lincoln at an elementary school as a teacher's assistant. I have been taking classes at Southeast Community College in early childhood education. I also happen to have Down syndrome. My dad is a board member of the Down Syndrome Association for Families of Nebraska here in Lincoln, which is an organization that positively impacts and supports individuals

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with Down syndrome, their families, and others both locally and nationally. I take part in many of the groups, events, and programs that occur throughout the year. Last year, I have the opportunity to sing the Star Spangled Banner as a duet at the Step Up for Down Syndrome Walk, an annual awareness walk in Lincoln with over 1,500 participants sponsored by the DSAF. I stay active in the Lincoln community. I take the city bus to meet one of my best friends at UNL for coffee regularly. I participate in a UNL inclusive community choir, the i2Choir, and also an adult book club that many times meets at a coffee shop just like other book clubs. Both of these programs take place in our Lincoln community as a way to bring awareness about Down syndrome, diversity, and promote inclusion. Just in Lincoln we have hundreds of families who understand what Down syndrome means, but many who do not. The license plates under discussion today will act as yet another way to bring awareness to the Nebraska community by sparking new conversations. This could provide a connection point for new families that have a child with Down syndrome to make sure they can reach an organization in the state to provide them current information for their child's future. I have a great life. I am not sure it will always be easy, but I will keep trying to make a difference with a smile on my face. Thank you for your time.

**FRIESEN:** Thank you, Miss Fuelberth. I'm glad you came and testified. You did a great job. Any questions from the committee? Senator Albrecht.

**ALBRECHT:** Thank you, Chairman Friesen. And Miss Elissa, thank you for being here and representing the Down syndrome plate so well. We have a lot of speakers here today, but you are one busy lady and I'm glad you took time to let us know how you feel about this. So thanks for being here.

**FRIESEN:** Thank you, Senator Albrecht. Senator Cavanaugh. One more question, maybe. Senator Cavanaugh.

**CAVANAUGH:** Hi. I was just going to ask you about your early childhood education.

**ELISSA FUELBERTH:** Yes.

**CAVANAUGH:** You're studying to work in early childhood education. We've had a lot of news stories lately about how we need more people entering the workforce for that. So thank you so much for your interest in that. That's really wonderful. Sounds like, I agree with Senator Albrecht, we're lucky you had time for us today. Thanks for making time for us. That was it.

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**FRIESEN:** Thank you, Senator Cavanaugh. Thank you for coming to testify. Any other proponents wish to testify? Seeing none, anyone who wish to testify in opposition? Seeing none, anyone wish to testify in a neutral capacity? Seeing none, we have letters in support from Jennifer Meints, chairperson of the Nebraska Council on Developmental Disabilities; and a neutral testimony from Rhonda Lahm, director of the DMV. Senator Kolowski, you wish to close?

**KOLOWSKI:** Mr. Chairman, when I first came up, I apologize, I forgot to leave my name here in the record. I'll do that now, if I may. Rick Kolowski, R-i-c-k K-o-l-o-w-s-k-i, District 31, southwest Omaha. I also wanted to share two brief things. Number one, we have an amendment to this particular bill that is a very easy clean up with some language adjustments that had to be made, and we'll be more than happy to share that with the group at a future time. And simply-- the third thing is simply to thank you for the opportunity to do this today, to bring this forward and have this opportunity to take care of these wonderful kids that are part of our world. And as well as, as was seen today, what a great job she did and, and for the parents that have been here today as well. So thank you very much.

**FRIESEN:** Thank you, Senator Kolowski. Any questions from the committee? Senator Cavanaugh.

**CAVANAUGH:** Thank you. Thank you, Senator Kolowski. I just wanted to say thank you because this was one of the most enjoyable hearings, along with the assistance to the testifiers. And I want to thank the kids that are here today and the siblings that are here today supporting their brothers and sisters. So thank you. This was enjoyable.

**FRIESEN:** Thank you, Senator Cavanaugh. Any other questions from the committee? Seeing none, thank you, Senator Kolowski.

**KOLOWSKI:** Thank you. It's as much fun as the 2,400 kids I had daily at Millard West. Thank you.

**FRIESEN:** I can see why. That will close the hearing on LB903. OK, with that, we'll open the hearing on LB921 and welcome Senator DeBoer for being here. And Senator Hilkemann.

**HILKEMANN:** Good afternoon, Senator Friesen and members of the Transportation Committee. I'm Senator Robert Hilkemann, that's R-o-b-e-r-t H-i-l-k-e-m-a-n-n. I represent District 4, and I'm here to introduce LB921, which would allow the Department of Motor Vehicles to design a specially licensed plate known as The Good Life Is Outside

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Plates. I can attest that the "good life" is outside. Because this committee has dealt with specialty plates as recently as last year, and it appears you have a full slate today, I won't get into the weeds of how the statutes currently handle these types of plates. I will just say that LB921 is modeled after language that was provided by Senator Hughes's wildlife conservation plates and others. But this will fund \$5 for alphanumeric or \$30 for personalized message plates to be credit to the Game and Parks State Park Improvement Maintenance Fund for the purpose of trail improvement and maintenance. This request was brought to me by the good folks at Bike Walk Nebraska. Their mission is to cultivate and support safe and accessible active transportation across our state by leading sound policy and advocating for best practices. They work to ensure that biking and walking whether for transportation or recreation works for all Nebraskans. Our great state has hundreds of miles of standalone trails that are used for hiking, biking, walking, and horseback riding. The improvement and maintenance efforts that this funding would support is directed toward those trails under the state's purview and not those within the state park system or cities. Some examples include the Cowboy Trail, which runs along northern Nebraska from Kilgore on the west to Norfolk on the east. Cowboy Trail is 195 miles long, and it's the longest rail to trail conversion progress-- process in the United States. There's a potential for extending this trail from Kilgore on to Chadron. Other examples are the Homestead Recreation Trail, stretching approximately 60 miles from the edge of Lincoln down to Maryville, Kansas, the Chief Standing Bear Trail, and we have the-- also down the Blue River Valley. Obviously, I'm an avid cyclist. I have enjoyed spending lots of times on Nebraska's trails as well as trails across this country. And one of the things that trail riding does over being on the streets and on main highways is certainly for safety for the riders and gives lots of wonderful opportunities. I recently competed my ride across America this summer, and over 300 miles of that was done on trails and not on regular highways. And part of that was like the Allegheny Trail, the Potomac River Trail. The development and the tourism and the small hotels and so forth that had developed along these trails that have been in existence for a long time is incredible. The economic development that could happen with-- as we continue to expand our trail system. I don't know if you're aware, but there is a national rails to trails route that's in place. It includes the Cowboy Trail, it includes going from Lincoln to Omaha. So this is, this someday in America you'll be able to ride from the east coast to the west coast or west coast to east, and you can do it all on a, on a trail and not even have to be on, probably on-- well, there will probably some use of some of the major roads, but for the most part, it will be trail riding and it will be safe for everyone. And that's our hope for the

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future. And I would hope that with this we are, we are adding some funds that we can help to develop these trails. In summary, this bill will provide another way for the public through voluntary choice in selecting a license plate for their vehicle to help support the improvement and maintenance of our trail system across Nebraska. It will better position us for more bicycle tourism across the state and it will make the "good life" for those of us who call Nebraska home even better. I thank you for your consideration. I am aware of the technical concerns that were brought up by the department and I'm happy to incorporate those suggestions. That's easy to do that. So I would take any questions you may have about it.

**FRIESEN:** Thank you, Senator Hilkemann. Any questions from the committee? Senator Bostelman.

**BOSTELMAN:** Thank you, Chairman Friesen. Thank you, Senator Hilkemann, for bringing the bill, I ask assistance specifically to this. But it does open up a little bit on biking. So I'm asked, and I know you bike like a lot, I know it's one of the things you do. So I've been asked about licensing, having bicycles being licensed to use our roads. Have you, has anyone ever talked to you about that? Not that I'm supporting it or not, but I know, especially our truck drivers and others, and we're talk about safety on the road, those type of things. But something along those lines of, not necessarily this bill, but something along those lines would add into maybe sharing and providing funds is what you're talking about.

**HILKEMANN:** Oh, there's been discussions about that. In fact, the Chairman and I had a discussion about that one time regarding this whole issue. One of the things is, is which license are we going-- are we going to require a three-year-old and five-year-old children that ride their bikes on the, on the front streets or, you know, where do we-- where, who do we license? Who don't we license? But--

**BOSTELMAN:** Where I hear it most is highway.

**HILKEMANN:** Yeah.

**BOSTELMAN:** Because the safety concern, which you brought up too. You know, semis going down there with a pod of cattles and they don't have a whole lot of space to come over the hill and there's bicyclists. And how do we help to alleviate those type of situations from coming up? So just curious if that's--

**HILKEMANN:** Senator, I can tell you that I've, I've ridden thousands of miles on our highways, and I will ride a trail over a highway anytime

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if I'm given that option. And it's, it's-- I've actually promised my wife that I probably won't be doing a lot of long road rides in the future, if she would let me finish up the one I just did. So for that very reason.

**BOSTELMAN:** Thank you very much.

**FRIESEN:** Thank you, Senator Bostelman. Senator Cavanaugh.

**CAVANAUGH:** Thank you, Senator, or Chairman. Thank you, Senator Hilkemann. Did I hear correctly that you said you modeled this after Senator Hughes's wildlife license plate bill?

**HILKEMANN:** That's, it's very similar.

**CAVANAUGH:** Well, I just want to say that's one of the most beautifully written bills I've ever read. So I appreciate that you're using that as your model. Thank you.

**FRIESEN:** Thank you, Senator Cavanaugh. Senator Albrecht.

**ALBRECHT:** Thank you, Chairman Friesen. And thank you for bringing this bill. I'm looking at these fiscal notes. There was a revised one from the Game and Parks Commission, I believe. And do they already receive appropriations from the state to take care of these trails or are you just asking to expand some of the trails?

**HILKEMANN:** No, they, they're getting nothing for it now.

**ALBRECHT:** Nothing?

**HILKEMANN:** Right.

**ALBRECHT:** So they just build the trail and hope that somebody comes along and takes care of it? Or I mean, nobody funds it? Nobody funds taking care of them?

**HILKEMANN:** Well, those are-- there are voluntary funding to, for the-- like some of the, for the Cowboy Trail and some of the, like the Wabash Trace in Iowa. That, that's, a lot of that is private funding.

**ALBRECHT:** Really? OK, thank you.

**FRIESEN:** Thank you, Senator Albrecht. Any other questions from the committee? Seeing none, thank you, Senator Hilkemann. Gonna stick around for closing?

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**HILKEMANN:** I'll be here.

**FRIESEN:** OK. Proponents? Welcome.

**JULIE HARRIS:** Hello, I'm Julie Harris, J-u-l-i-e H-a-r-r-i-s, and I'm the executive director of Bike Walk Nebraska. I'd like to first thank Senator Hilkemann for taking up this bill on our behalf. He already kind of outlined our mission and a little bit about what we do in terms of advocating for active transportation, biking and walking in Nebraska, trying to make it safe and accessible for everyone. This is pretty straightforward, this bill does a couple of things. It raises the awareness of active transportation and recreation in our state. A lot of times we hear people saying, well, I don't see a lot of bikes out there. I don't know who, who all these people are. This gives us a chance to sort of raise our, our visual awareness of people that support this in our state. So we're excited about that. And as Senator Hilkemann mentioned, the economic development opportunities, the tourism opportunities for bicycles in Nebraska is a diamond in the rough. And the Cowboy Trail, as he mentioned, is just a blockbuster waiting to happen. When the national rail-trail finally gets up and fully functional, people are going to start biking through our beautiful state. And it's going to be the small rural towns that really are the ones that benefit from this. So it's in our best interest to make sure that our trails are kept in good condition, that we have enough funding to make sure that we can take advantage of everything that-- all the potential that's out there. The Katy Trail that goes across Missouri from end to end is kind of a similar situation to our Cowboy Trail and it, they've done economic development analysis studies on that and they bring in millions of dollars in tourism every year. Millions of dollars. So I don't see why Nebraska would not want to take advantage of something like that. So our beautiful state has a lot to offer. We recognize that our trail conditions can be affected by the flooding. To your point about the condition of the trails, the, the floods that took out Highway 7-- 275 and parts of Highway 20 up in the northeast part of the state have also devastated part of the Cowboy Trail and some of the bridges along the trail. It's a former railroad bed, excuse me. So we need to help Game and Parks every chance we can to give them an opportunity to get those things resolved so that people can stay on the trail and not get out on the highway. I would also just end by saying that your support of this bill would be appreciated. It's a simple way to get some funding coming in. And I'm happy to answer any questions that you have.

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**FRIESEN:** Thank you, Miss Harris. Any questions from the committee?  
Seeing none, thank you for your testimony.

**JULIE HARRIS:** Thank you.

**FRIESEN:** Any other proponents wish to testify in favor?

**ALEX DURYEA:** Good afternoon, Chairman Friesen and members of the Tele-- Transportation and Telecommunications Committee. My name is Alex Duryea, A-l-e-x D as in David-u-r-y-e-a, and I'm the recreational trails manager for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. I'm here today as a proponent of LB921 and want to thank Senator Hilkemann for introducing this bill. Nebraska Game and Parks Commission owns and operates over 600 miles of land trails for hiking, biking, and equestrian use with the assents-- assistance of numerous trail partners like THOR, Cowboy Trail West, and Nebraska Trails Foundation, and including one of our nation's longest rail trails, the Cowboy Trail, as had been previously mentioned. We also advertise over 500 miles of river trail. And while these trails within our state park systems allow users to experience the natural wonders in Nebraska, trails do require maintenance and are not inexpensive to construct. The funds that could be raised by the sale of these plates as proposed in LB921 would be a great use to the agency, as trails are a popular amenity for our park users. The funds raised will be able to be used as matching funds for several federal grant programs, such as the Recreational Trails Program and the Land and Water Conservation Fund, both of which are suited to funding trail projects in Nebraska. An example of a current project making use of these federal funds is actually a design for some ADA improvements to a popular trail leading to the falls over at Platte River State Park. The funds could also be used for many agency trail needs, such as a Fort Robinson trail master plan. Mapping our current trail network, trail signage, annual maintenance, trail amenities, and making accessible improvements to our park trails. Trails are a key amenity at our parks. And since starting this position, many of our area park superintendents have reached out to me, expressing the desire to develop more, more trails at Platte River State Park, Enders Reservoir, Red Willow State Recreation Area, Danish Alps State Recreation Area, Medicine Creek State Recreation Area, Chadron State Park. Lewis and Clark State Recreation, Fort Kearney State Recreation Area, Louisville State Recreation Area, and Branched Oak State Recreation Area-- Recreation Area, just to name a few. So quite a few, quite a few requests. Our park superintendents are hearing user requests for trail development and maintenance at our park areas all across Nebraska. And in my position I hear the need for new trails and improvements for park

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users and internal staff alike on a regular basis and know that these funds will help address some of the trail needs identified here today. I want to thank Senator Hilkemann again for introducing LB921. And with that, I'm willing to entertain any questions.

**FRIESEN:** Thank you, Mr. Duryea. Any questions from the committee? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony.

**ALEX DURYEA:** Thank you.

**FRIESEN:** Any other proponents wish to testify? Seeing none, is there anyone wish to testify in opposition to LB921? Seeing none, anyone wish to testify in a neutral capacity? Seeing none, Senator Hilkemann, you're willing to close. We do have a letter of support from Kristal Stoner, executive director of the Audubon Society. And neutral from Director Rhonda Lahm. With that, we'll close the hearing. He waives closing and we'll close the hearing LB921. Next, we will open the hearing on LB942. Welcome, Senator Hunt.

**HUNT:** Thank you, Chairman Friesen. This is my first time in your committee.

**FRIESEN:** We're a fun committee.

**HUNT:** That's what I hear, that's your reputation. Thank you, Chair Friesen and members of the committee. I have a really excellent bill for you today. My name is Senator Megan Hunt, M-e-g-a-n H-u-n-t, and I represent District 8, which includes the neighborhoods in northern midtown Omaha. And I'm here today to present LB942, which will create a Support the Arts license plate. The design will be selected in consultation with the Nebraska Arts Council and the fees collected will go to supporting the arts in Nebraska. LB942, this bill, creates the Support the Arts Cash Fund, which will go to the Nebraska Arts Council for the purpose of administering grants for creative districts in our state. This bill is actually part of a two-part vision, a two-bill vision that I have for Nebraska. I introduced this bill in conjunction with LB943, which grants the Nebraska Arts Council the authority to propose a plan for certifying creative districts in Nebraska. That bill was heard in the General Affairs Committee earlier this year. It has no fiscal note and it had no opposition. These two bills, this license plate bill and then this other bill that creates creative districts in Nebraska, were born out of an interim study that we did last fall. That study focused on urban development. And what we found through that study was that creative districts can have a really significant economic and community impact, not just for urban development, but for development all over the state. Thanks to the

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work of people in the Nebraska Arts Council, Nebraskans for the Arts, the Willa Cather Foundation in Red Cloud, and others, we were able to identify a couple of approaches to begin harnessing Nebraska's creative communities for people-focused development. We know that arts districts can have a significant impact on cities, attracting businesses, tourists, and local residents to be a central part of the city. And I want to know how we can encourage or incentivize the natural development of these communities through better policy. This bill, this license plate bill, provides a funding mechanism to grow this vision. The sale of Support the Arts license plates will provide the Nebraska Arts Council funds to put aid into communities that receive a creative arts district designation. Creative districts can help revitalize neighborhoods and improve the quality of life for its residents. These districts can bring physical transformation, economic growth, and greater community and cultural cohesion. There are over 300 cultural creative districts in the United States, all over the country, and zero of them are in Nebraska. Nebraska is one of only two states that don't recognize any arts districts in our state, and the other one is North Dakota. So I think that's something that we should agree that we should be a part of. In 2015, the nonprofit arts and culture industry generated over \$165 billion of economic activity, supporting 4.6 million jobs and generating \$27.5 billion in revenue for local, state, and federal government. Cultural tourism is a massive market, 76 percent of all U.S. leisure travelers participate in cultural activities when they travel. We need to embrace the amazing grassroots artists in our state, not just in Omaha and Lincoln, but all over our state, for how much excitement, economic development opportunities and cultural vibrancy they bring to neighborhoods across Nebraska. Another thing I would like the committee to consider is the really successful Passport Nebraska program. I actually learned about this program before I was even running for office from Senator Howard, who makes a point to do this every year. And you receive this passport booklet and it tells you all these cool places that you can go all over Nebraska. And it's become kind of a competitive thing to get into this booklet and promote your business or your cultural destination or your community through the Passport program. So this is something that would work and dovetailed really well with that existing program too. Creative districts allow communities to cluster hubs of economic activity around arts, culture, and heritage. They enhance an area as an appealing place to live, visit, and do business. These districts often complement other nonarts businesses in areas like restaurants, offices, retail, housing, hotels, and lodging. And I think that the longer we wait to do something like this, we're going to be missing an opportunity to support local organizations and support local economies, especially in

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rural Nebraska, and recognize the unique community talents it takes to keep these communities vibrant. So I hope that this committee can understand the importance of this opportunity and vote to advance LB942.

**FRIESEN:** Thank you, Senator Hunt. Any questions from the committee? Seeing none, are you gonna stick around for closing?

**HUNT:** Yes. Thank you.

**FRIESEN:** Proponents who wish to testify on LB942.

**SUZANNE WISE:** Good afternoon, Chair Friesen and members of the committee. I am Suzanne Wise, S-u-z-a-n-n-e W-i-s-e, I'm the director of the Nebraska Arts Council, and we would be the recipient of the revenues from the Support the Arts license plate. I can testify, and this goes back, I think, to a question that, Senator Albrecht, you had earlier about isn't Game and Parks-- isn't that part of--they have money already to do trails? We don't have any extra dollars in our budget. We have approximately \$2.1 million for between 500 and 600 grants annually. And those are matching grants, but we can only fund those at between 40 and 50 percent. So for every dollar that's requested, potentially we give them between 40 cents and 50 cents. So clearly we're at a level that there has to be a revenue source to assist with the cultural districts. I also would like to note in the bill itself that, should the cultural district bill not advance quite as quickly if this one does, the money will be used for the preliminary work in creating the cultural districts. So there would be similar use of the money. But I am with Senator Hunt in agreeing that a cultural district designation is really the best thing to do. But if that does not happen, the funds from the license plates would be very specific to community development, and that's both urban and rural. You may wonder how we came up with the number in our-- the fiscal note. I got educated very quickly on specialty license plates and we feel that potentially there could be about the same number as the current mountain lion plates. And we had several reasons for thinking that. One, that is a broad designation, "Support the Arts" is a very broad designation. And it's not just for people that work with art organizations or artists, musicians themselves, but all of you know that in high school you're basically either in sports or you're in band. And there is a lot of interest, and that has again been unsolicited by us, by the arts educators across the state who said, oh, man, I'd buy one of those in a second. And so would the families of 10 kids that are in my theater class. So we figured that out, we kind of looked at the license bill, license plates for the mountain lions and thought, you know, I think we could be roughly similar. So

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that's where we came up with that figure. We hope that they will be very attractive. After all, this is the arts. So we kind of-- I told the committee about the cultural districts, that we've been kind of analyzing all the different colors of color-- of cars and pickup trucks and make sure that this license plate would have complementary colors so that everyone would want to purchase one. So we would work with the Department of Motor Vehicles and we would actually have artists submit designs that could be potential for this license plate, and I think would be kind of fun to do. And we're very excited about it. So with that, I'll answer any questions.

**FRIESEN:** Thank you, Ms. Wise. Any questions from the committee? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony.

**SUZANNE WISE:** Thank you.

**FRIESEN:** Welcome.

**DOUG ZBYLUT:** Hi. Good afternoon, Chairman Friesen and members of the committee. My name is Doug Zbylut, D-o-u-g Z-b-y-l-u-t, and I am the executive director of Nebraskans for the Arts. It's a statewide arts advocacy organization with artists, arts organizations, arts-related businesses, and arts educators as our members. And I come to support LB942. And I'm going to be brief, one of the things that I thought about when we have this bill is the way that it fits into the Nebraska blueprint and our initiative, you know, the statewide initiative to attract and retain folks in the state. And there was an article in the Omaha World-Herald that says: time to seize opportunities. That was a few weeks ago, talking about Nebraska blueprint. And I see that this license plate bill, that it's one of the ways to do that, along with LB943. We see it as a traveling billboard for the state. When people see it, everybody's looking at these different kind of license plates when you're driving around. And so folks will be able to see that, see that we do support the arts and that it's, and that they know that we have communities that are vibrant. We also want to support the bill. I work with a lot of communities across the state, and so it will really help in their community development. One example is, even like when I leave here, I'll be stopping by in Ashland. If-- I don't know if people have been through Ashland. That, you know, several years ago the downtown was kind of boarded up somewhat. But then one of the small business owners there, Laura Capp, with the Postscript stationery store there, they said, well, why don't we try to do an art walk. And now that event they do four times a year and it attracts a couple of hundred people on a Saturday to go there. And that's created then-- they've now gone to an art festival that they close off a street and go on there. And but one of the things she told me when we

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were talking about this type of bill was, you know, I'm a small business owner. I have a hard enough time having marketing dollars just for my business. And, you know, if there was some source, you know, that we could get cooperative marketing dollars where the group of us can help promote, you know, these kind of events, would go a long way to doing that. Also, getting a recognition of being a creative district would also help attract people there because they'll be able to see, because they say somewhere around 60 percent of people when they travel, one of the things they want to do is find a cultural attraction. When they see this that they say-- they see, oh, there's a certified creative district. I know that there's gonna be some things there, probably a brewery, a restaurant, and you know, things to do there. So that's why we see the importance of these, this bill and heartily endorse your support of it.

**FRIESEN:** Thank you, Mr. Zbylut. Any questions from the committee? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony.

**DOUG ZBYLUT:** Thanks.

**FRIESEN:** Any other proponents for LB942? Seeing none, anyone wish to testify in opposition to LB942? Seeing none, anyone wish to testify in a neutral capacity? Seeing none, Senator Hunt, you're welcome to come forward to close. We have numerous, page and a half full of letters in support.

**HUNT:** Thank you again. I wasn't going to say anything else, but I want to thank Suzanne Wise and Doug Zbylut for coming to advocate for this. And I want to thank the 45 people who submitted letters in support completely unsolicited by me. I mean, I know you guys know me and you know that I hustle on a lot of my bills and, you know, get some support together. And this one, I really, I did not drive this support. This is organic from communities around Nebraska, from communities like Norfolk, Chapman, Beatrice, Valentine, Red Cloud, McCook, Kearney, Norfolk, Grand Island. Policies like this are going to be great for my district. They're going to be great for midtown Omaha, where we already have a thriving arts community. But it's going to be even better for these parts of Nebraska that are getting started, that can take advantage of this facilitation from the Nebraska Arts Council for things like marketing plans. And thinking about sustainability for their districts, thinking about the resources that they need in order to have sustainable creative endeavor, endeavors that are a little bit like a business, because artists are entrepreneurs too. And sometimes they need support to, to operate and be successful. And that's what we should be giving our cities. In Nebraska, we have a great history of the arts from our First Nations

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and our Native American communities to these grassroots groups that are popping up all over the state. And like I said, with 300 different arts districts already recognized across the country, none of them being in Nebraska, I think that's a shame. And we should work together to change that this year. Thanks.

**FRIESEN:** Thank you, Senator Hunt. Any questions from the committee? Seeing none, thank you, Senator Hunt. With that, we'll close the hearing on LB942.

**ALBRECHT:** Senator Friesen, go ahead with LB1088.

**FRIESEN:** Thank you, Senator Albrecht. Members of the committee, my name is Curt Friesen, C-u-r-t F-r-i-e-s-e-n. I represent District 34 and I'm here to introduce LB1088, a bill relating to specialty license plates. This is a simple bill that allows holders of specialty license plates, or commonly called organization plates, to be issued personalized message plates. Currently, only alphanumeric plates are allowed for holders of these plates. Some of the organizations that have plates include the Nebraska Cattlemen, the Corn Board, Creighton University, University of Nebraska Omaha, and Ducks Unlimited. These organizations had to submit 250 prepaid applications to the DMV before the organization plates could be issued. This requirement would not change relative to the original issuance of organization plates. This bill would allow message plates to be issued after the original requirements were met. The message would be limited to five characters, and as the bill is drafted, the initial application and renewal of message plates would cost an additional \$20 to the \$70 fee required for alphanumeric plates. This fee is in addition-- this additional fee would be credited to the DMV Cash Fund. We're not adding any new plates with this bill, we're simply allowing personalized plates for holders of organization plates. I urge you to support LB1088.

**ALBRECHT:** Thank you, Senator Friesen. Will you wait for close? Any questions? Senator Cavanaugh.

**CAVANAUGH:** So thank you, Senator Friesen. If I were to get one of these plates today, I could not get a Cattlemen's plate that says "moo"?

**FRIESEN:** You may be able to if it isn't taken before you get to it.

**CAVANAUGH:** OK. Thank you.

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**ALBRECHT:** Any other questions? Seeing none, we'll take the first proponent.

**STEVE EBKE:** Good afternoon, members of the Transportation and Telecommu-- Telecommunications Committee. My name is Steve Ebke, and that's spelled S-t-e-v-e E-b-k-e. I'm a farmer from Daykin, and I'm here today representing the Nebraska Corn Growers Association, testifying in support of LB1088 with an exception that we would seek to remove the \$20 additional fee that is in, currently in the bill right now. And we do thank Senator Friesen for introducing LB1088, which would allow for two types of organizational specialty license plates: alphanumeric and personalized message. Currently, organizational specialty license plates are limited to an alphanumeric combination assigned by the Department of Motor Vehicles. And in my handout, I just-- that's the latest that we could find that provided kind of a listing of the specialty plates that are available today. It does show the distribution of the fees and those that are allowed to have personalized messages versus just alphanumeric. I'll also add that LB563 that the Governor signed last May that came out of this committee made some changes to that listing. Some of the fee allocations will be different in the future beginning January 1st of 2021. There are some additional plates that have been added that will be available to the citizens of Nebraska as of that date. Right now, they're, they're not within the listing that if you go to the DMV website and look for specialty plates, you won't find them there. But after January 1st of 2021, you will. So it's just kind of give you a flavor of what's available. Organizational specialty plates are approved by the Department of Motor Vehicles after a nonprofit organization completes an application, submits a minimum of 250 prepaid applications from members for purchase of the specialty plate, and a payment of \$17,500 is, is submitted to the DMV. And that's the minimum \$250 or-- 250 plates times a \$70 fee. There are two specialty plates, the Huskers Spirit Plate and the Nebraska 150 Plate that allow for personalized messages. The annual fee for those plates is \$70 where they-- whether they are alphanumeric or personalized message. Most of the specialty plates previously created by legislation and the specialty plates within the bills you heard about today allow for personalized messages, usually for an annual fee of \$40. LB1088 would provide purchasers of organizational specialty plates the opportunity to obtain a personalized message plate, and it creates consistency within the opportunity afforded-- or with the opportunity afforded purchasers of other specialty plates. There is no fiscal note to LB1088. The Department of Motor Vehicles indicates the cost of manufacturing the personalized message organizational specialty plates will be absorbed within their appropriation. So I ask you to consider

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the following, that there are two other specialty plates that can have special personalized messages for an annual fee of \$70. Most of the other specialty plates can have personalized messages for an annual fee of \$40. The proliferation of specialty license plates has created significant inconsistency of opportunity for personalized messages. And again, there is no fiscal note for LB1088. Nebraska Corn Growers Association members think it's reasonable to allow organizational specialty plate purchasers to have a personalized message on their plate, and we would ask the committee to advance LB1088 with the removal of the \$20 additional fee to General File or incorporate such language within other legislation the committee advances to General File, so I thank you for your consideration and I'll try to answer questions that you might have.

**ALBRECHT:** Thank you, Mr. Ebke. Do we have any questions from the committee? Seeing none, thank you for being here.

**STEVE EBKE:** Thank you.

**ALBRECHT:** Next proponent. Seeing none, any opponents wishing to speak? Anyone in a neutral capacity? Senator Hughes was coming up. And we have no letters, and Senator Friesen will waive closing. Thank you very much. It's closed.

**FRIESEN:** OK, and with that, we'll open the hearing on the LB1139, Senator Wishart.

**WISHART:** Well, good afternoon, Chairman Friesen, members of the Transportation and Telecommunications Committee. My name is Anna Wishart, A-n-n-a W-i-s-h-a-r-t, and I represent the great 27th District in west Lincoln. I'm here today to introduce LB1139. LB1139 provides for the issuance of Pets for Vets license plates beginning on January 1st, 2021. Applicants for these plates pay an annual \$45 per plate fee, of which \$35 is deposited into the Pets for Vets Cash Fund, which is established by this bill. This effort is to-- is a creative way that does not take any general funds to help Nebraska veterans with fees associated with adopting a shelter pet. Studies have shown the benefits of owning a companion animal, especially for veterans who suffer from PTSD and who are experiencing other lasting negative effects from their service. In 2018, Nebraska euthanized almost 4,000 cats and dogs. And it is my goal to decrease this number by connecting these animals with people who could benefit from their pet ownership. I anticipate this will be a popular license plate. I myself plan on getting one if it goes through because it helps men and women who have served our country and rescue animals. With that, I'm happy to answer any questions.

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**FRIESEN:** Thank you, Senator Wishart. Any questions from the committee? So after we get this one done, should we put a cap on the number of personalized plates?

**WISHART:** Well, it seems like we've answered that question by saying no and continuing to bring personalized license plates. Honestly, if you were to ask me this two years ago, I would have said yes. Since then, I find it's actually a creative way for groups to be able to fund important initiatives. And it seems pretty clear from reading through the statutes that there is sort of a failsafe. If that group is unable to sustain it financially, then it just no longer exists.

**FRIESEN:** Thank you, Senator Wishart. Any other questions from the committee? Seeing none, proponents who testify in favor of LB1139. Seeing none, is there anyone wishing to testify in opposition to LB1139? Seeing none, anyone wish to testify in a neutral capacity? Seeing none, Senator Wishart waives closing. We have one letter of support from Terry Werner, executive director of the Nebraska Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers in Lincoln. With that, we will close the hearing on LB1139. Thank you. With that, we'll close the hearings for today.