

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Appropriations Committee March 19, 2025

CLEMENTS: Good afternoon. Welcome to the Appropriations Committee. My name is Rob Clements. I'm from Elmwood and represent Legislative District 2, which is Cass County and eastern Lancaster County. I serve as chair of this committee. We will start off by having the members do self-introductions, starting with my far right.

SPIVEY: Good afternoon, everyone. I hope y'all are safe in this wild weather that we're having. I am Ashlei Spivey, representing District 13 in northeast and northwest Omaha.

LIPPINCOTT: Loren Lippincott, District 34.

ARMENDARIZ: Christy Armendariz, District 18: northwest Omaha and Bennington.

DOVER: Robert Dover, District 19.

DORN: Myron Dorn, District 30.

STROMMEN: Paul Strommen, District 47.

PROKOP: Jason Prokop, District 27.

CLEMENTS: Assisting the committee today is Cori Bierbaum, our committee clerk. To my left is our fiscal analyst, Kenny Boggs. Our pages today are Demet Gedik and Emma Jones, UNL students. If you're planning on testifying today, please fill out a green testifier sheet located in the back of the room and hand it to the page when you come up to testify. Online position comments must have been submitted on the Legislature's website by 8 a.m. the day of the hearing to be included in the record. If you have submitted a comment online, we ask that you not testify in person today. If you will not be testifying but want to go on record as having a position on a bill being heard today, there are yellow sign-in sheets at the entrance to my left. These sign-in sheets will become exhibits in the permanent record after today's hearing. To better facilitate today's hearing, I ask that you abide by the following procedures. Please silence your cell phones. Move to the front chairs to testify when your bill or agency is up. When hearing bills, the order of testimony will be introducer, proponents, opponents, neutral, and closer. When we hear testimony regarding agencies, we will first hear from representatives of the agency. Then we will hear testimony from anyone who wishes to speak on the agency's budget request. When you come to testify, please state and spell your first and last name for the record before you testify. Be concise. We request that you limit your testimony to five minutes or less. When you begin your testimony, the light on the table will be green. When the

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yellow light comes on, you have one minute remaining. The red light indicates you need to wrap up your final thought and stop. Questions from the committee may follow. Written material may be distributed to the committee members as exhibits only while testimony is being offered. Hand them to the page for distribution when you come up to testify. If you have written testimony but do not have 12 copies, please let the page know so they can make copies for you. With that, we will begin today's hearing with Agency 5, Supreme Court. Welcome, Chief Justice.

[AGENCY HEARINGS]

CLEMENTS: OK. We'll now open the hearing for LB15. Senator Dungan, welcome.

DUNGAN: Thank you, Chair Clements and members of the Appropriations Committee. I think this is my only time in front of you this year. Maybe I've been here before. I don't remember. My name is George Dungan, G-e-o-r-g-e D-u-n-g-a-n. I represent Legislative District 26, which is northeast Lincoln. And I'm here today to introduce to you LB15. LB15 is an appropriation of \$600,000 for fiscal year '25-26 and \$600,000 for fiscal year '26-27 to the Nebraska Supreme Court to maintain the current wages of our court interpreters. We have over 90,000 Nebraskans who speak English less than very well, which is a technical classification. This includes people who are deaf and hard of hearing as well as those who don't speak English as their native language. We have an obligation, statutorily and constitutionally, to ensure that people understand what is happening in court, including witnesses and victims, not just defendants or other folks participating in the system. Every year that I have been here in the Legislature, I have brought this or similar legislation, which our Chief Justice, both current and the former Chief Justice, highlights as an urgent need. I have worked closely with Corey Steel over the last few years on this issue. In 2023, when the Legislature unfortunately failed to act, we actually experienced in the courts of Nebraska a work stoppage, which was detrimental to our court systems. Since then, Mr. Steel has gone to great lengths to increase our court interpreter pay for the first time since the early 2000s. It's not as much as the interpreters wanted to be in line with industry standards, but it did solve the immediate and acute problems that faced this state. This fix is not sustainable within their current budget. If we, the Legislature, do not act, it will put our judicial system in a very precarious position, ultimately costing the taxpayer while jeopardizing public safety. I just want to take a moment to deviate from what I was saying to speak out of experience. So I'm sure many of you have heard me talk about my time in

court, working here in Lancaster County, where I served as a public defender for almost ten years. I still currently sol-- or, work as an attorney in the Lancaster court system. I have had the opportunity and the honor to work with interpreters on an incredibly regular basis. These interpreters do amazing work. And what I mean by that is they are translating not just simultaneously in often circumstances, but they're translating-- or, rather, interpreting-- sorry-- interpreting very complex subjects. In the legal field, we use a lot of complex terminology, as we do in the Legislature, which can get really complicated. But you also throw on top of that complex terminology idioms and sayings, and what they have to interpret is simply just in-- incredibly impressive. A good example of that is oftentimes I will ask for a continuance of a case. The interpreter then has to say what I say exactly in order to do their job. I may phrase that as, Judge, we're asking to kick this down the road for another 30 days. That's a really complicated phrase to interpret accurately while making sure that the intention of my request is conveyed to the client, but also what I said as an idiom has to be interpreted as well. Those are the kind of things that our interpreters have to be certified, essentially, to make sure they actually fully can explain to the client and to the court what's happening. In addition to that, I've had an opportunity to speak with our judges about what happened during the work stoppage that did occur. In my first year, we tried to get into the budget a slight increase to increase the pay to court interpreters. Unfortunately, that was-- that did not make it across the finish line as part of the ultimate budget. And that did lead to the work stoppage. Not every interpreter in the state of Nebraska stopped working, but a vast majority did. And what it resulted in was cases being continued that could have been resolved. When you have individuals who are sitting in jail, for example, whose cases could be resolved with potentially a, a plea or something like that but there's not an interpreter present to interpret for that case, it results in people staying in custody longer, which, at this juncture-- at least in Lancaster County-- cost the taxpayers I think upwards of \$130 a day at this point for cases that could have been resolved. So my point is to say these interpreters serve a very special purpose and one that is very important to the system working as it's supposed to. I also just want to say yet again even though I mentioned it briefly in my written comments how appreciative I am of Corey Steel's effort on this. I have spent hours and hours meeting with him, meeting with the interpreters, essentially acting as sort of a go-between in these ongoing conversations and negotiations. And I think that our court has-- our court system has gone out of its way to try to make ends meet with their current budget. They were unfortunately denied these requests multiple years in a row, being told, you have

cash funds, you can use those cash funds. Well, those cash funds at this juncture-- as I'm sure you heard earlier today-- have been depleted or are otherwise obligated to other programs. And based on my conversations with Mr. Steel and others in the courts, they find themselves at a crossroad-- a crossroad where ultimately they're going to have to make a decision of what to do with these interpreters and the interpreter pay. And what has been clearly conveyed to I think all of the parties involved in these ongoing conversations is, without an increase in this budget, it will likely-- if not certainly-- result in the pay going back down to what it was previously. If it goes back down to what it was previously, it will not be economically viable for these court interpreters to continue doing their job. They can find other work. They're contract employees. They can find other work in other professional fields. And I've spoken with them directly, and they will and can find that other employment. That's going to result in the court system coming to a halt. I know nobody likes these sort of sky is falling testimony. And I'm sure this Appropriations Committee's heard a lot of concern over a number of different areas. But I'm telling you, having spoken to the individuals that work in this field, as well as myself having done this now for a number of years, this is a true urgent concern. The amount of money we're asking for is not a pay increase. The amount of money we're asking for is an increase to the budget in order to maintain the court interpreters at what they currently make. Their pay was increased to keep them on. This allows the courts to continue paying them their current amount. I will tell you that my friends in the interpreter community would like to see it higher. They also understand that that's not possible with the current budget constraints. And so the bill before you, LB15, does represent, I think, a compromise and a desire to continue working under the current system with the hope that maybe in the future they could get paid more. So I will leave my editorializations at that and go back to my script here. Every entity within our judicial system strongly supports this legislation. It's rare for the bar association, defense attorneys, and the county attorneys, and the court administrators to all be heading in the same direction. I think if you look online, you will find a letter from the County Attorneys Association also emphasizing that they support this as well. This comes from the courts, defense counsel, civil attorneys, and prosecutors. So I think that when we all agree about something, it indicates it's usually something relatively important. You're going to hear from a couple of testifiers after me. Unfortunately, due to the weather, we don't have some of the interpreters here that otherwise would be able to explain to you their job and how they got to where they are. I did have passed out to you, I believe, two letters. One of-- both of those are from interpreters who

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I think you've heard from in the past. But those are both individuals who have a lot of expertise on this subject. So I would appreciate it if you take time to read their comments-- if not right now, sometime in the near future. I think it will be educational. And with that, I'm happy to answer any questions that you might have for me. I am also introducing a bill in my committee, Revenue, for Senator Conrad I think in the next five to ten minutes because she was unable to make it today. So I might have to waive closing. So any questions you have I'm happy to answer now.

CLEMENTS: Questions? Senator Spivey.

SPIVEY: Thank you, Chair. And I'll ask quickly. And even if you follow up later because I understand that life. If we don't do this and the interpreters are not there, my first question is, does that open us up to liability since we constitutionally have to do it, which could cost the state or county more money? And then my second question was, is-- are-- is there any request in the Supreme Court's budget? I saw that there was one that we didn't include in the preliminary for \$60,000 but wasn't sure how this played together with that.

DUNGAN: So to answer your first question, absolutely. I think if we don't uphold our statutory requirements, that we ensure language access, as well as our constitutional obligations for due process, it absolutely doesn't only put us in a situation of, I think, general liability, but it also-- at least in criminal cases-- opens up the opportunity for otherwise potentially solid convictions to be subject to appeal. You know, part of the reason we want the court system to work the best it possibly can is it ensures that, at the end of the day, we can have faith in the justice system. And so ensuring that at every step of that process there is proper translation or interpretation services helps make sure that I think the faith in the court system is upheld, which is vital, I think. To your second question, I don't know the answer to that. I believe in the Supreme Court's budget request this was included. I've spoken with Mr. Steel about that, and I think that this was part of their original request. Those after me will likely have a little bit more details about that.

SPIVEY: Yeah. I see some head-- head-nodding.

DUNGAN: I, I can, I can feel it. I can feel it behind me, yes.

CLEMENTS: Are there questions?

DUNGAN: If I may real quick-- I didn't know if I was going to get a question about this. I just wanted to add one last thing. I apologize. I know there's been a lot of questions in the past, as well as comments online about online interpretation services and the advancements in technology. I will tell you that I have personally used those services in the rare occasion that I can't get an interpreter. For example, if a client just shows up in my office and they're only Spanish speaking. I've used things like Google Translate. I will tell you that the interpretation back and forth is subpar, to the point of which that it makes me concerned about whether or not we've actually been able to convey a message. And the reason I know that is not just from my clients having some confusion about what I'm saying, but when they speak in Spanish into the interpreting app and it comes back to me in English, it doesn't make sense. And so it's, it's-- you're having this back-and-forth where we're saying simple things like, are you OK with me requesting or asking for a continuance the next time we come into court? And they read the app and they look at me confused. And then they'll say something back in Spanish and I'll hear what they say and it won't make any sense. And these are very simple things. So I do think technology's great and AI is fantastic and it's a tool that can be an addition, but I do want to just make sure that the, the committee understands that the services these interpreters are providing are very high-level complexity. And so, yes, I think online things can serve as a supplement in certain circumstances but not a replacement. So I just wanted to make sure that was clear on the record.

CLEMENTS: Senator Cavanaugh.

M. CAVANAUGH: Thank you. Thank you, Senator Dungan. I actually was going to ask that. But then I read one of the letters that you presented to us, and one of the interpreters actually discusses that. So Mr. Fennell did discuss that. And I just wanted to make sure that, for the record, he knows that his letter was looked at.

DUNGAN: Yes. And I believe-- I, I've met with him a number of times. I believe he's a Russian interpreter. And so he speaks a language that I think is even a little bit more complex than some of the things we normally see in apps just-- so. I'm sure that these interpreters-- they have amazing stories. I wish more of them could have been here today to speak to you, but unfortunately it is quite literally a blizzard, so.

M. CAVANAUGH: Thank you.

CLEMENTS: Seeing no other questions. Thank you, Senator.

DUNGAN: Thank you.

CLEMENTS: We'll welcome proponents for LB15 next. Good afternoon.

SPIKE EICKHOLT: Good afternoon, Chair Clements and members of the committee. My name is Spike Eickholt, S-p-i-k-e E-i-c-k-h-o-l-t. I'm a lobbyist for Omaha Language Solutions, which is a small company in Omaha. It's actually Kelly Varguez's company, who wrote a letter in support of it. I normally was-- I was not planning on testifying. But unfortunately, as Senator Dungan indicated before, the actual interpreters couldn't make it here. They were going to carpool from Omaha this morning, and that was just not a possibility. I just want to echo a couple things that Senator Dungan said. First, we want to thank him for introducing the bill. In response to what Senator Spivey asked earlier, when the chief spoke on the Supreme Court's budget earlier, he did a request-- an additional \$600,000 per year-- for this purpose. And that's what LB15 also requested, \$600,000 appropriated to the Supreme Court to maintain the current rate of pay for court interpreters. As Senator Dungan said, court interpreters are not employees of the court system. They are independent contractors who are either registered or certified according to court rule to take on and agree to do interpreting cases. In other words, no one can force them to do so. When Senator Dungan talked earlier about a work stoppage, that wasn't, like, a strike or anything organized because they're not employees. It's just-- it simply-- the interpreters just decided, after years of pay not going up, to no longer do state court appointments or requests to do state court cases. And it wasn't vindictive or anything like that. It's just that many of these interpreters have small businesses. They can, they can earn what they were earning working from home, doing medical document review, doing online services. The one-- the people who work in Omaha can go to Iowa and work in the Iowa court systems. The federal court system is there too. But they want to work in the state court system. But simply as a, as a financial reality, the rate needed to be increased. And it was, and we appreciate that. And this bill would just simply maintain that rate where it's been for the last couple of years. It's not only important to make sure that we have qualified interpreters for the reasons that you heard before, but we also are also attracting new interpreters to become certified for availability and for services throughout the court system. Interpreters represent not only people who are charged with a crime. They speak for everyone who has language difficulties, whether it's a foreign language difficulty or whether they're hearing impaired, and as a sign language service or something like that. They represent everyone. So they represent people in civil matters. They represent victims who are victimized in crime. I don't know what the county attorney submitted as

far as our online comments, but I've worked a lot with victims, and one thing that's consistent with victims is, is they want to be heard. And the details of what they say happened to them and what they experienced needs to be translated in a meaningful way. And I just don't think it, it works with AI and machine interpreting. If you look at Mr. Fennell's submission, he actually has done some work with Google and Facebook. They don't use their own product exclusively. They rely on actual interpreters, professional to do their work. And I think that's telling. There might be a point-- and, and many of my clients, the, the people I work with, they do work with machine interpreting and that. There may be a point where AI will get us there, but we're just not there yet. I'll answer any questions if anyone has any. I think I covered the main points. But I-- as Senator Dungan said, you want-- and I think maybe it was a response to what Senator Spivey asked. And that is, if the state's been exposed to any kind of liability, if you will, by sort of-- by cutting costs or doing it the cheap way or no cost way for interpreting, I don't know that state's necessarily liable. It just makes for uncertainty in the process. You want to have it be-- you want to have integrity in the court process itself. The same way you want to have a judge that knows what they're doing, you want to have an interpreter know what they're doing. You want to make sure that the system is working the right way. It might cost a little bit more in the front end, but it will save you so much more money on the back end. Anyway-- and I'll answer any questions if anyone has any--

CLEMENTS: Are there questions?

SPIKE EICKHOLT: --but I want to encourage the committee advise--

CLEMENTS: Seeing none. Oh. Excuse me. Senator Lippincott.

LIPPINCOTT: How many different languages do we need translators for here in the state of Nebraska?

SPIKE EICKHOLT: I think the chief-- either this chief or the, the retiring chief referenced something like 40-some at least, if not more than that. Corey Steel might know. It's probably more than that. But I remember-- when I heard the number of different languages, it was quite-- I was quite surprised.

LIPPINCOTT: 40?

SPIKE EICKHOLT: Yeah. Maybe-- if not even more.

LIPPINCOTT: It's a lot.

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CLEMENTS: Are there questions? Seeing none. Thank you for your testimony. Next proponent for LB15. Welcome back.

COREY STEEL: Thank you. Good afternoon, Chairman Clements and members of the Approt-- Appropriations Committee. My name is Corey Steel, C-o-r-e-y S-t-e-e-l. And I am the Nebraska State Court Administrator. I'm here to testify in support of LB15. I want to thank Senator Dungan for his continued support and advocacy for statewide interpreters who presi-- who provide an essential function for the Nebraska state court system. As discussed following the walkout by not all, but most, of our court interpreters in 2023 over low reimbursement rates, a compromise was reached with the interpreters through negotiations with the help of Senator Dungan. The negotiations included a partial rate increase. And you can see: certified, we're at \$50 to \$75; registered, we're at \$35 to \$60; and noncertified went from \$35 to \$50. And this is for-- per hour with a two-hour minimum. This was an agreement to further explore actual costs needed to sustain interpreters for the courts. To remind you, Chief Justice noted in the State of the Judiciary that the trial courts utilized over 70 different languages this past year. 70 different languages. Now, let me tell you that there could be a language that is spoken in one of our very remote countries, but a tribe less than 60 miles away could speak a very different dialect. And so you have to have somebody with that tribal dialect and not just the language. So we are not only at language. We are looking at tribal dialect when we have to get a certified interpreter. Otherwise, they will not understand the translation. Interpreters are highly skilled and highly demand-- and in high demand. We continue to see increased numbers of limit-- limited English proficient users in our courts. The use of interpreters by trial courts is under federal and state constitutions, federal regulations by the Department of Justice, state statutes, and Nebraska Supreme Court rule. So it's not just one thing that tells us we must use interpreters in our trial courts. There are four overarching regulations or constitution or laws that require us to use credentialing interpreter services. On the second page, according to Department of Justice, limited Engl-- Englis-- English proficient defendants are entitled to the assistance of an interpreter under the U.S. Constitution. And in addition, state courts that receive federal financial assistance through Title V funds and its implementat-- imple-- "implementating" regulations prohibit discrimination based on race, color, national origin in all court programs and services, whether criminal, civil, or administrative. The Supreme Court has affirmed that Title VI prohibit-- prohibits against national origin discrimination, including discrimination against LEP, limited Engwi-- English proficient, individuals on the basis of language. This means

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that courts that receive any federal funding through the Department of Justice-- which we do-- in our court systems and we have a violation and do not provide LEP services to those coming in our courts, those could be taken away. I will tell you, in 2013-14, we were under a DOJ investigation for not adequately providing LEP services in our courts and probation. It took us nearly six years to get out of that DOJ investigation. That is what-- hindsight, we look back, created our very robust interpreter services within our judicial branch. We now provide interpreter services across all of our services in the courts and probation because of this requirement. I've also provided the Nebraska Revised Statute that requires us to use certified interpreters and the Supreme Court rule. So you have those in front of you. The next handout that I've given you is a snapshot of one page that tells you our annual interpreter expenditures in the judicial branch. So you can see from 2020-- fiscal year 2020, it was \$1.2 million. This year, we are projected at our current rate to be over \$2.5 million in interpreter services for the judicial branch. Map down below shows you where, just in the United States, we have to bring interpreters for ca-- court cases in Nebraska. When we have to do that, we have to fly them in, pay for their time. And a lot of the time, if it is a-- if it is an evidentiary hearing that is going to go longer than four hours, we have to have two interpreters. And you talk about a termination of parental rights for a very Indigenous tribe, bringing individuals in for a full day two-day hearing is quite expensive. And it's a federal requirement. And then the other graph gives you further information regarding our interpreters. 173. We've increased certified interpreters this year. We revamped our certification program and our pathways to become certified in Nebraska to increase the number of interpreters that we have in the state of Nebraska. I would be happy to answer any questions the committee may have.

CLEMENTS: Senator Lippincott.

LIPPINCOTT: When you said four hours-- so when the person is acting as an interpreter, they can only work for four hours and then the next person has to come on for shift number two?

COREY STEEL: Correct. Four hours is stretching it. Typically anything over two hours. But we have great interpreters here in Nebraska that they don't want us to have to bring in two. So a lot of the times, they will-- would do that. But if we do full day trials and evidentiary hearings, it's just like sign language. You can't sit there all day and, and do that and back and forth. And this is simultaneous interpretation. Majority of the time it's simultaneous. So as you are talking as I'm sitting here today, somebody is in your ear translating

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at that same time. So you can see how this is a very specific trait and skill that somebody has in order to do this.

CLEMENTS: Senator Spivey.

SPIVEY: Thank you, Chair. And thank you again for being here. Kind of on the flip side of this outside of what we are required to do, it's an opportunity for economic development. Because what I heard you all saying is that these are folks that own businesses. They're 1099s-- and we know that 1099s have higher taxes that they pay. And they'll be responsible for their own health insurance and other things. But it is an opportunity to build an ecosystem of businesses for folks that do this work too. So it is also an investment that way.

COREY STEEL: Correct. Most of our interpreters are independent. Almost all of our interpreters are independent and small business owners. They don't just interpret for the court system. They do interpretation for a lot of other venues: medical translation, interpretation. They'll do a lot of different-- they'll work with a lot of nonprofits. Attorneys will hire them to come in when they do depositions or have their meetings one-on-one. So they do a lot of different-- not just court specific.

CLEMENTS: Senator Dorn.

DORN: Oh. Thank you, Senator Clements. Thank you for being here. My, my question is, is there ever a point in time where the charges are dismissed or the, the case doesn't go-- if, if it's been too long a time they aren't filed or anything, is there ever-- has that ever been the situation because of lack of interpreters?

COREY STEEL: I would have to go back, Senator Dorn, and look at specific cases. Do we have cases that get dismissed because of that issue? Yes. Is it because of an interpreter issue? I don't, I don't know the answer to that. Yeah. I don't know the answer to that. If-- I will tell you that was a concern for the two weeks that we did not have interpreters readily available. That-- do we have cases-- we had our court staff. Do we have any of those cases that are at that point? Because sometimes they're-- they may not have-- there's a statute that says we got to have this case. And so those took precedence. So we had to triage at that point in time. But if it would have prolonged, it would have been very difficult.

DORN: But you don't recall ever--

COREY STEEL: I don't.

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DORN: --one because the statute of limitations ran out and now their-- that, that-- I call it, the charges just go away.

COREY STEEL: Right.

DORN: OK.

COREY STEEL: No, I, I, I don't recall any off the top of my head.

CLEMENTS: Are there questions? Senator Prokop.

PROKOP: I guess along that same thing or same thought process and something I think Senator Dungan mentioned in his opening, how often is it that you see cases appeal that are on, on-- you know, if there's a conviction that takes place but then appealed based on, I guess, inadequate interpre-- interpretation services or someone that doesn't do a good job. I think he mentioned that in his opening. Is that--

COREY STEEL: Right.

PROKOP: Does that happen very often or--

COREY STEEL: I can't recall a case that has been appealed based on inadequate interpretation. What I will say is, have we had to address some interpreters that may not have been interpreting adequately-- that was brought to our attention-- and we've had to address those? Yes. And we have a mechanism in our Supreme Court rule that allows for-- if there is inadequate interpretation. We've had a couple over the years that we've had to pull off of interpretation, go back, retake tests or do some additional education to get them back to proficiency, I'll say. We have had to do that.

PROKOP: Thank you.

CLEMENTS: Are there questions? Seeing none. Thank you for your testimony.

COREY STEEL: One, one quick thing, Senator. It is in our budget request and in this bill. We're not expecting both. Although, if you're gracious, we would take both. But we-- Senator Dungan and I met to say, let's-- he wanted to bring a bill again. And I said I want to have it here so that we make sure we cover it. And whichever way the committee decides, as you can see, our expenditures continue to increase. The \$600,000 is just to get us back pretty much square. We've worked with interpreters to say it is not to give you an additional-- because they came in and wanted \$95. Right? It's not to give you more money. It's to

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get us square. And we'll continue to work futuristically to get further increases to stay with annual adjustments.

CLEMENTS: Senator Spivey.

SPIVEY: Sorry. That just made me-- thank you for that. Do you all-- how often do you negotiate your contractors with the interpreters? Is it--

COREY STEEL: Not as regular as we should. We take a look at it annually and see if we can adjust the rates based on our budget projections. But again, it was-- 2000 was the last increase before the one in 2024.

SPIVEY: So it's been almost 25--

COREY STEEL: Correct.

SPIVEY: --24 years. And then are we competitive to other states with our rate, or--

COREY STEEL: We're in line. We're in line. I will tell you there's been other walkouts in other states. Nebraska kind of was the first. I think there may have been one in Washington, D.C., and then ours followed suit. There's a very tight-knit, national consortium for interpreters. And they started to do this in other states as well. Minnesota had a walkout. Theirs went almost two months. And what have you. So it really-- you know-- and go to the AI. We're working with the Department of Justice. Right now, it is not allowable under the DOJ guidelines to use electronic devices in court systems. You can use phone interpretation-- which we have to do on sometimes-- in-person interpretation, but you can't use artificial intelligence at this time. Until it gets proficient, then DOJ-- but as National Center for State Courts and Conference of State Court Administrators-- which I'm engaged with-- we are meeting with DOJ to change the rules as soon as it gets proficient and tested that it's a potential to use. But it should not be used in evidentiary trials, trials of any kind that are long-lasting, what have you. For those county court or some that are nonevidentiary hearings or there isn't a bearing of somebody having to go to jail, it may be able to be used in the future. But not for those serious types of cases.

SPIVEY: Thank you.

CLEMENTS: All right. Well, we'll treat this bill as a proponent of your budget request.

COREY STEEL: I saved this part to this bill.

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CLEMENTS: Very good. Thank you, Mr. Steel.

COREY STEEL: Thank you.

CLEMENTS: Are there additional proponents?

TIM HRUZA: Good afternoon again, Chair Clements, members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Tim Hruza. Last name's spelled H-r-u-z-a. Appearing today on behalf of the Nebraska State Bar Association in support of the bill. I want to thank Senator Dungan for introducing it. The only things that I might add to the testimony that you've heard today from the perspective of the bar, right, representing judges and lawyers in this, as I believe Senator Dungan and maybe Mr. Eickholt mentioned too during their testimony and the opening in the testimony, is that the interpreter services aren't necessarily always for a defendant who's appearing in court. Right? We're talking about families. We're talking about-- I mean, the one example I dealt with when I was in private practice-- and it's been several years since I've represented somebody actually in court-- but the one example that I, I dealt with where an interpreter was appointed was honestly for the parents of a juvenile who was, who was-- found themselves in the juvenile system. Right? The, the child spoke English, and, and did fluently, but neither the parents did. And when you're talking about parental rights to parent your child and to do those things, it's critical that you have somebody who speaks the language to, to make sure that the justice system works. There's been, there's been some talk about the walkout a year or so, year and a half ago, whenever that was. I would tell you that that put the brakes on a lot of things that are happening in our trial courts across the state, both for lawyers and for judges. And when you talk about the importance of the ability for-- to have access to the court system and for our-- the system to operate efficiently and work, it is, it is absolutely critical so that, one, we don't get behind in those cases. Maybe to your question, Senator Dorn, I can't tell you that I've ever heard of a situation where that's happened, but it is important, right? Your right to speedy trial as a defendant in a case is juxtaposed and buttressed on the fact that you have to be able to understand what you're being charged with and understand what the prosecutor and the attorneys are dealing with. So with that in mind, it, it is imperative to our ability to try cases, to represent clients, to make sure that our justice system operates for both the public and for those who find themselves in it. And we think that funding this appropriation simply ensures that the raise that was given a couple of years ago to avoid the, the halt that we saw, right, in our system's ability to function is maintained and we can continue

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to do that moving forward. I'm happy to answer any questions you might have. I thank you for your time today.

CLEMENTS: Are there questions? Seeing none.

TIM HRUZA: Thank you.

CLEMENTS: Thank you for your testimony. Next proponent for LB15. Seeing none. Any opponents on LB15? Seeing none. Anyone in the neutral capacity? Seeing none. We have-- well, Senator Dungan waived closing, I believe. We do have comments for the record: proponents, 11; opponents, 3; neutral, 1. That concludes LB15. And that inclu-- concludes our business for today.