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LB 729

SENATOR CROSBY: Senator Landis.

SENATOR LANDIS: Thank you, Senator Crosby, members of the Legislature. This bill creates a couple of fees that are put into a fund administered by the Commission of Public Advocacy. They will contract with service providers around the state, those service providers will be nonprofit entities who, in turn, provide legal services for the poor, meaning those who are up to 125 percent of the federal poverty guideline. In Nebraska we have had a \$600,000 cut in federal funding, and we anticipate that that will proceed with those cuts and eventually, given the revolution in Congress, probably mean the end of legal services in Nebraska altogether. This is meant to be a response to that, which is why I think it's a Speaker priority, since it is that continuation of service occasioned by federal action. The fees are a \$2 fee on the dockets of cases in juvenile and district court, and cases over \$15,000, and the cases in those courts, and \$25 on proceedings to modify decree of dissolution of marriage, of child support, child custody, or visitation. The total amount of money raised by the fees is roughly \$900,000. Those will be distributed to service providers throughout the area of Nebraska by region. The current system that we have, which has been cut and with offices closed, now finds that they, even with their diminished number of lawyers, that they were serving 16,000 low-income families last year, in 1995, the last set of data, and that will be cut down because of the cut in federal funds, which are eventually designed to go out altogether. There, because of the limited services now, one out of five requests for help can be met, four requests, even though eligible, are not met because of the limitation on services. There is no General Fund impact, it is supported by the Nebraska State Bar Association, the Nebraska Appleseed, a private corporation on legal services, and the various existing legal service agencies around the state. The Judiciary Committee has basically rewritten the green copy of the bill. I'm going to ask Senator Brashear, in a moment, when it's his turn, to identify the committee amendments, just to recap the provisions. But again, to tell you what those provisions are, this is an increase of some court fees of the kind that I listed, it is the sending of that money to a fund administered by the Commission on Public Advocacy, it is then a granting of that money to nonprofit entities throughout the state to provide legal