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Appropriations Committee
March 12, 2013

[LB126 LB569]

The Committee on Appropriations met at 1:30 p.m. on Tuesday, March 12, 2013, in Room 1524 of the State Capitol, Lincoln, Nebraska, for the purpose of conducting a public hearing on LB126 and LB569. Senators present: Heath Mello, Chairperson; John Harms, Vice Chairperson; Kate Bolz; Danielle Conrad; Bill Kintner; Tyson Larson; John Nelson; Jeremy Nordquist; and John Wightman. Senators absent: None.

SENATOR MELLO: Good afternoon and welcome to the Appropriations Committee. My name is Heath Mello from south Omaha, representing District 5, and am Chair of the Appropriations Committee. I'd like to start today off by having members do self-introductions, starting to my left, your right, with Senator Kintner.

SENATOR KINTNER: Bill Kintner, Legislative District 2, which is south Sarpy, Cass, and a little bit of Nebraska City.

SENATOR NORDQUIST: Jeremy Nordquist from District 7, downtown and south Omaha.

SENATOR NELSON: John Nelson, District 6, central Omaha.

JOHN HARMS: John Harms, 48th District, Scotts Bluff County.

SENATOR WIGHTMAN: John Wightman, District 36, all of Dawson and Custer County and a small part of Buffalo County.

SENATOR MELLO: Sitting next to Senator Wightman is Senator Danielle Conrad, representing the 46th Legislative District in north Lincoln.

SENATOR BOLZ: Senator Kate Bolz. I'm proud to represent District 29 in south-central Lincoln.

SENATOR MELLO: And sitting next to Senator Bolz is Senator Tyson Larson, representing the 40th Legislative District, which is northeast and north-central Nebraska. Assisting the committee today is Anthony Circo, our committee clerk, and Jacob Fricke, who is a junior at Nebraska Wesleyan and is our committee page. Assisting us from the Fiscal Office today is Doug Nichols. In the corner of the room you will see some yellow forms. If you're planning on testifying today, please fill out the form in its entirety. It helps us keep an accurate record of today's hearing. When you come up to testify, please give Anthony the yellow sheet. When you sit down, please tell us who you are and spell your first and last name for the record. If you have any paper handouts, please give them to Jacob before you begin. We ask that you have 11 copies, but if you do not have 11 copies, Jacob will make additional copies for you. If

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you're here today and are not planning on testifying but want to be on the record as having been here, there's a white sheet on the back table. We ask that you sign in on that sheet, tell us your name and address, the bill number, and if you are here in support or opposition. We will hear bill testimony in the following order: first, the introducer of the bill, followed by supporters, those in the opposition, neutral testimony, and ending with the closing statement by the introducer. We will be using a five-minute light system. There are lights at the front of the table. When you start, the light will turn green. When the yellow light comes on, that is your one-minute warning. And when the red light comes on, we ask that you wrap up with your final thoughts. At this time, I'd ask all of us, including senators, to please check our cell phones and make sure they're on silent or vibrate mode. And with that, we will begin today's hearing with LB126 from Senator Amanda McGill.

SENATOR MCGILL: Good afternoon, Appropriations Committee. Like you said, I am State Senator Amanda McGill, A-m-a-n-d-a M-c-G-i-l-l. I represent District 26 in the Nebraska Unicameral, and I'm here today with LB126. LB126 would do two things. First, it would provide a specific appropriation to the Court Appointed Special Advocate Fund. Second, it would make some small changes to legislation passed by the Unicameral two years ago that created a grant program administered by the Nebraska Supreme Court to provide grants to those who are training and recruiting volunteers under the Court Appointed Special Advocate Act. The legislation we passed two years ago provides that grants could be utilized for expansion of CASA programming into counties not already served, as well as provide dollars to develop innovative programming. First, as to the appropriation, LB126 would direct \$500,000 in General Funds to the CASA Fund in each year of the biennium. Last year, we provided a total of \$100,000 in fiscal year '11-12 and \$200,000 in fiscal year '12-13, for a total during the biennium of \$300,000. The Judiciary Committee received a report from CASA in December, and I and the rest of the committee seemed satisfied with the outcomes in the use of these dollars over those two years. Second, the small changes in the original legislation: First, we are suggesting that under this bill...well, all these suggestions are mainly housekeeping. First, they would ensure that General Funds could be utilized to fund the program along with grants and donations, gifts, and bequests. When we passed the bill two years ago, we utilized a specific funding source in the Commission on Public Advocacy Cash Fund. We need to make these changes so that that fund is not the only source of revenue for CASA grants. Second, we removed some of the minimum threshold dollar amounts, which both CASA and the Supreme Court agree are not necessary. And third, it allows the Supreme Court to receive certain reports in a more appropriate time frame. Each of us is aware of the enormous need to do all we can to address the issues surrounding abused and neglected children. The issues that are facing families in this state are daunting. However, one of the bright spots that I have found in my efforts to examine these issues is the beneficial role that CASA volunteers play in our system. CASA volunteers do an extraordinary job for us throughout the state, acting in many cases as the child's only constant in a sea of change. It is the CASA volunteers who provide them

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with the consistency that we expect from those who work with our most vulnerable youth. Two years ago I indicated that in order to have successful outcomes in these cases, that we need to have two things. First, we need to have more CASA volunteers working throughout the state in those cases where they are truly needed. And second, we need to expand the CASA volunteer program into those counties across the state where they currently do not reside. The CASA Fund does this and you will hear some of their outcomes in testimony following mine. For instance, CASA is now in more counties; there are more volunteers out there; we're seeing some positive impacts. And so I appreciate your time today, hope for your support, and look forward to letting the folks behind me come up here and tell you about the work they've done in the last couple of years. [LB126]

SENATOR MELLO: Thank you, Senator McGill. Are there any questions from the committee? Senator Conrad. [LB126]

SENATOR CONRAD: Thank you, Senator McGill. I know this has long been a priority issue for you and it's no surprise to see you back before this committee in regards to this issue. I think last time it actually came through the Judiciary Committee... [LB126]

SENATOR MCGILL: It did. [LB126]

SENATOR CONRAD: ...rather than the Appropriations Committee. But because of the budgetary implications, we were in communication. [LB126]

SENATOR MCGILL: This is a more appropriate place for it. [LB126]

SENATOR CONRAD: I could not agree more. With that being said, if you could describe just maybe for some committee members or refresh my recollection, because it's been a while since I've sat through a juvenile court hearing, what a typical court hearing might look like in terms of the players. Because we'll have...the parents may have an attorney, the children may have a guardian ad litem, the state might have an attorney present. There might be other representatives. How do you see the role of a CASA volunteer either complementing that system or...? I'm just trying to get a sense, because the taxpayer is picking up the salaries for a lot of the players in that room, and then really why is this necessary on top of that expenditure, I guess? [LB126]

SENATOR MCGILL: Yeah. Well, in a perfect world it wouldn't be, and we arguably have a lot of problems in our guardian ad litem system and for a variety of reasons and roadblocks. We've had trouble making changes to that, particularly in Douglas County where there are significant problems. But we see...the evidence you'll hear following me shows how much more streamlined the court process is when there's a CASA volunteer involved. The kids are shown to find permanence significantly more swiftly than when there isn't one. When it comes to all of those other people at play, unfortunately, our

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caseworkers turn over a great deal and, therefore, youth are getting three or four or ten different caseworkers; whereas, their CASA volunteer is the same person with them that whole process. Guardians ad litem, because there aren't as many of them as there should be, in that case too, their caseloads are very high and so they're not spending the personal time with the youth that they should be, and so that's where the CASA volunteer is building those relationships and again getting out of the system more quickly. [LB126]

SENATOR CONRAD: Okay. And your appropriation, these grants wouldn't pay the volunteers, so to speak, because they're volunteers. They serve without compensation. But it's more kind of like a "train the trainers" kind of idea. [LB126]

SENATOR MCGILL: The management of the volunteers. And that's what's needed in the counties we've expanded into, is somebody there to organize the volunteers, manage them, train them. And I'm sure the folks following me can be even more specific. [LB126]

SENATOR CONRAD: Yes, of course. Thank you. [LB126]

SENATOR MELLO: Senator Harms. [LB126]

SENATOR HARMS: Senator McGill, thank you very much for coming. I'm a very strong supporter of CASA. I've seen what it's done in my community. And without CASA a lot of the youth would just not get the attention they deserve and need. And the fact that you brought out very clearly is that we have so many caseworkers, there's turnover, and they get burned out, to be honest with you. And so that caseworker is the only stable individual that this child has all the way through, usually. So I've seen some just marvelous things take place for CASA. And to be honest with you, without it I think our program where I live would be in serious trouble. It's just not the hope for these kids having long-term involvement with a teenager or the child, however you want to look at it, CASA gets right in the middle of this and stays right with that kid and makes sure that things are happening the way they ought to happen and making sure that the courts are dealing with the child appropriately and the Health and Human Services dealing with it. It's just a marvelous program and I support it very strongly, and thank you very much for introducing this legislation. [LB126]

SENATOR MCGILL: And, in many, I've met plenty of youth who have been in the system who had that CASA volunteer was their mentor who they're still friends with, who are involved in their weddings now, and they wouldn't be where they are if it weren't for that volunteer. [LB126]

SENATOR HARMS: I agree with you. [LB126]

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SENATOR MELLO: Senator Wightman. [LB126]

SENATOR WIGHTMAN: Thank you. Thank you for being here. How many counties...you may have said that figure but I missed it, have them, do you know even? [LB126]

SENATOR MCGILL: And I don't know the answer to that off the top of my head, I'm afraid. The folks behind me will be able to tell you that though. It is more since we started this program or started putting in some state money a couple years ago. [LB126]

SENATOR WIGHTMAN: Do any of the smaller counties coordinate and maybe have some of the same volunteers or not (inaudible). [LB126]

SENATOR MCGILL: I think some of them work together to organize their volunteers. I don't know which of them go across county lines but I'm pretty sure there are counties that work--yeah--that group together for management purposes and efficiency. [LB126]

SENATOR WIGHTMAN: Okay. Thank you. [LB126]

SENATOR MELLO: Senator Nelson. [LB126]

SENATOR NELSON: Thank you, Senator Mello. Thank you, Senator McGill, for coming. I read the very beginning of your testimony. You said something about...and I think you're referring to a provision that recognized the fact that CASA raises funds independently. Now what...could you repeat what you said about that, enabling them to continue to do that? [LB126]

SENATOR MCGILL: Well, in the statute we passed two years ago through the Judiciary Committee and on the floor had the Public Advocacy funding as the only source for this expansion into the counties. And so we want to open that up now so that donations and other grants can be used for the purposes of what we're trying to accomplish here. [LB126]

SENATOR NELSON: Of going into additional counties, is that what you're saying? [LB126]

SENATOR MCGILL: Um-hum, um-hum. [LB126]

SENATOR NELSON: All right. Thank you. [LB126]

SENATOR MCGILL: Thank you. [LB126]

SENATOR MELLO: Senator Bolz. [LB126]

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SENATOR BOLZ: Hi. It seems to me that this is a really smart, strategic investment and that it's doing a good job of helping us deal with the increased caseload in our child welfare system. I'm sure that the needs are kind of endless. You know, these are high-needs kids. Can you tell me how you arrived at the dollar amount that you're asking for? It seems that you probably were strategic about that and the great needs in the system. [LB126]

SENATOR MCGILL: Well, working with the great CASA folks and their game plan moving forward, you know, we knew a couple years ago we couldn't come in and ask for, you know, a dollar amount like this and try to incrementally, you know, prove, you know, how the program is increasing in its effectiveness. And you know, frankly, the CASA folks are the ones who initiated this dollar amount and said, hey, will you work with us on this? And so they felt it was the appropriate dollar amount to further their program in the ways they would like to see it. [LB126]

SENATOR BOLZ: Thank you. [LB126]

SENATOR MCGILL: And I felt it was a reasonable dollar amount as well. [LB126]

SENATOR BOLZ: Very good. Thank you. [LB126]

SENATOR MELLO: Seeing no further questions, I have one question, Senator McGill, and it deals I think more just I know and understand that this subject area was in the Judiciary Committee two years ago. Moving forward after this biennium, is this something that you see will need a continual Appropriations bill every two years, or is this something that maybe after this year or between this year and next year, between yourself and maybe some of the CASA organizations are working on maybe a more consistent funding stream? That may be General Funds too, but are you looking at something outside of the one-time appropriation over the biennium? [LB126]

SENATOR MCGILL: Well, I think it is something we'll have to look at, or at what point have we trained the people that we need to have trained or maybe not need as much money again. That certainly should be part of the discussion. And I know two years when we were asking this money, I remember being on the floor with Senator Heidemann and discussing the fact that they need to prove that the money is being used wisely, as well. And so we actually, at that point in time, decided two years was appropriate to then have to come back to the committee and prove that the program deserves the money. And I know that a strong evaluation is in the works, as well, for us moving forward. [LB126]

SENATOR MELLO: Okay. Thank you. Seeing no further questions, thank you, Senator McGill. That will lead us to proponents of LB126. Good afternoon. [LB126]

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CORRIE KIELTY: (Exhibit 1) Good afternoon. Mr. Chairman and members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Corrie Kielty, C-o-r-r-i-e K-i-e-l-t-y. I'm the executive director of the Nebraska Court Appointed Special Advocates--or CASA--Association. We'd like to thank Senator McGill and we'd like to thank you for your consideration of LB126. I'm going to provide you, and it's coming around now, with an overview of what we've used the state funding for over the last two years and our plans for continuing to serve and expand our services to children who are abused and neglected. We also have two local program directors here who will follow me, who will talk more specifically about local programs. In that, we have provided you with an executive summary, that looks like this, of what we've done with the CASA Fund over the last two years. You will see we have begun building an infrastructure with two years of funding. We ask that you continue the state funding with LB126 so that we may not only continue to serve the 1,326 children that are currently assigned to a CASA volunteer by Nebraska judges, but to continue expanding costs of programming so that every child in Nebraska who needs one has a CASA volunteer. CASA recruits, trains, and manages volunteers assigned by judges to speak for children in the court system. CASA volunteers work with the children and provide regular reports to the judges in cases of abuse and neglect. The first CASA program was started in Nebraska in 1986. In your executive summary, you also have a map of the 22 programs in the state that provide services to 37 counties. Four of those counties were added due to the funding received from the Nebraska CASA Fund over the last two years. In fiscal year 2011-12, the CASA Fund provided \$100,000, and \$200,000 in fiscal year '12-13. Of this, \$10,000 was kept each year by the court to administer the fund. Of the remaining funds, Nebraska CASA has recruited and trained more volunteers to serve children, provided additional mandated training to volunteers and program staff, expanded CASA into additional Nebraska counties, and is working with the UNO School of Social Work to obtain better data outcomes for our program, making it more efficient and cost-effective. Eighty percent of the Nebraska CASA Fund has been designated for grants to local programs. These grants subsidize the recruitment and training of new volunteers. New volunteers must have 30 hours of training per Nebraska statute and for National CASA standards before serving children. In addition, current volunteers must have 12 annual hours of education to continue serving as a volunteer. We increased the number of volunteers statewide from 412 in 2010, to 634 in 2012. These grants have also allowed us to expand into additional counties. CASA of South Central Nebraska is now serving Webster in addition to Adams, Clay, and Nuckolls Counties. Seward County CASA has expanded into Jefferson County, and they've also changed their name to Southeast Nebraska CASA Program, because they have plans to expand into at least three more counties. New local programs are also being funded. Cheyenne County has a new program that has trained its first class of volunteers who are serving kids, and has another training planned this spring. And in Lincoln County, they began their program in 2012, and by the end of the year they had 18 volunteers trained and the judge was beginning to assign those to children. Saunders County CASA restarted their program

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right before these funds began, and so that happened prior to the funding. But what the funding allowed is for them to have three classes in the first two years. So they're serving many more children than they would have been able to, much more expediently than they would have been able to without these funds. All of this growth allowed CASA to increase from serving 1,158 abused and neglected children in 2010, to 1,326 children in 2012. Now although we are serving 168 more children than we were two years ago, unfortunately, we still have 1,665 children waiting for a CASA volunteer just in the 37 counties that we have programs. Recruiting, training, and retaining volunteers is not the only way we have utilized the CASA Fund. Nebraska CASA has a contract with the University of Nebraska-Omaha Grace Abbott School of Social Work, and through this partnership we have reviewed years of data and published reports to incorporate improvements into our programs. We have developed a new logic model to measure the individual outcomes of children served by CASA, and we are working with judges and county attorneys not only to expand into counties we do not serve but to ensure their feedback for current programs is incorporated into program development. Finally, I'd like to address the cost benefits to our state as a result of CASA programs. National studies and one conducted by Creighton University on the Douglas County CASA Program have extrapolated the cost analysis to the Department of Health and Human Services based upon children who are assigned a CASA volunteer. A child served by a CASA volunteer spends, on average, four to five months fewer in care than a foster child without a CASA volunteer. If every child had a CASA volunteer, that reduced time in care is estimated at \$12.5 million per month, which is a \$50 million to \$60.4 million annual savings to the state of Nebraska. Now this is based on a 2009 study using 2009 figures only on the cost of housing foster children, not other costs to the state of Nebraska. Children in care with CASA volunteers have fewer placement changes. These children also reenter the system at a very low rate of anywhere of between 1.4 percent to 9 percent. Children in the system without a CASA volunteer reenter at the rate of 16 percent. CASA is an incredibly cost-effective program. In fiscal year 2010-2011, the average cost to serve a child for us was \$1,295. The funding in LB126 provides Nebraska CASA programs with the opportunity to continue these needed cost-effective services for abused and neglected children and also to grow our services. There were 4,313 children in Nebraska foster care in mid 2012. Half had experienced four or more placement changes in their lifetime according to the Foster Care Review Office. We ask you to advance LB126, allowing Nebraska CASA to expand our services, reducing costs to the state and ensuring abused and neglected children have a voice. We will save the state funds in reducing placements of children and we will provide abused and neglected children with a safe and stable adult who will help them find loving and permanent homes. [LB126]

SENATOR MELLO: Thank you, Ms. Kielty. Are there any questions from the committee? Senator Harms. [LB126]

SENATOR HARMS: Thank you very much for coming. You know, when I look at your

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map, for example, when I look at rural Nebraska, which I'm most familiar with, when I look at Morrill, Box Butte, and Dawes County, and I know there's some...from the data that I've seen and other data that I've seen, there's some serious issues in those particular counties. Is there any way that you could actually develop a program that's multicounty rather than have it all organized out of one county but having a coordinator that would coordinate Morrill and Box Butte or Dawes, or Box Butte and Dawes? Have you done that anywhere? Are all these independent? [LB126]

CORRIE KIELTY: No. Several of our programs serve multiple counties. [LB126]

SENATOR HARMS: Okay. [LB126]

CORRIE KIELTY: Our programs are autonomous so they are controlled at the local level and we just provide them with assistance; so they make those decisions. But many of them serve up to four...or now we're moving into more counties. And we would look more at the geographic area than anything else, because obviously it's not cost-effective when you start looking at them having to travel long distances and being so far away. But that would be a part of our goal is to have...because in many of those counties, as you know, they don't serve a large population. So we would want to use our resources to the best that we can. [LB126]

SENATOR HARMS: Thank you. [LB126]

CORRIE KIELTY: Um-hum. [LB126]

SENATOR MELLO: Senator Nelson. [LB126]

SENATOR NELSON: Thank you for coming here today. The reason I asked the earlier question, you must have additional funding or you must raise private funds in some way in addition to what we do. [LB126]

CORRIE KIELTY: Yes, sir. [LB126]

SENATOR NELSON: And in doing just some rough figuring, if the average cost that you cost per child and the number that you did a couple years, why, we're talking about \$1.5 million altogether that the program costs. Right? [LB126]

CORRIE KIELTY: You are correct. [LB126]

SENATOR NELSON: Okay. So in your bill now if we were to give you \$500,000 a year, you say 80 percent of that would be awarded using to recruit new Court Appointed Special Advocates and also for the training. How do you divide that up? What goes toward recruiting and what goes toward training, if you know? [LB126]

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CORRIE KIELTY: Yeah. They changed the grant formula last year. I didn't work for CASA at that point in time but the formula that was developed was developed by our local directors. And what they decided is they wanted to be able to say to the state office, here's how many volunteers we have and here's how many volunteers we project that we want to recruit over the next year, so this is how much funding we need to be able to do that. And that seems to be a very successful formula for CASA because each program knows how many volunteers they need to be able to serve more children, if they need to. We have two programs that are serving all of the children but the rest are not, so there are costs that we will still need to address outside of this funding. You figured out the amount, the same amount that I came up with. Part of what I looked at with that, though, is that we have to do this incrementally. Obviously, we can't go and start a new program through the entire state of Nebraska next year. It needs to grow smart so that we keep those programs in place. And the other issue is we will raise funds independently, as well, for things like staff people. CASA is amazing in that they have wonderful standards in place to make sure our volunteers are the right match to work with these kids. They're interviewed. They have 30 hours of training. They get every opportunity to step back out of the volunteer position if they're not comfortable with it. But we also need those folks to do that training and to supervise them to make sure that we're providing the service that we have said we would to these children. And so those staff are what we're paying for or what we're raising funds for or what we're writing grants for. [LB126]

SENATOR NELSON: So about how many staff persons do you have then doing the training around the state? [LB126]

CORRIE KIELTY: Every program is different. Some of the rural areas do, do trainings together. They combine trainings if it's geographically possible. Our formulary is that we have one staff, if they do nothing else, they can supervise 30 volunteers. [LB126]

SENATOR NELSON: And how many volunteers altogether? [LB126]

CORRIE KIELTY: Together, last year, we had over 600 volunteers. [LB126]

SENATOR NELSON: All right. Thank you. [LB126]

CORRIE KIELTY: Um-hum. [LB126]

SENATOR MELLO: Senator Conrad. [LB126]

SENATOR CONRAD: Thank you so much for coming in, Corrie. It's always nice to hear an update about the good work that CASA is doing. But I have a technical question more than a substantive question. If there are others that you would like to defer to I

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completely understand because I don't want to catch you off guard. But I'm looking at this and I expressed the same concerns when we looked at this two years ago. It's not a criticism or a negative reaction to the good work that CASA does. But can you provide for me any example of another organization that would qualify for the grants under LB126? [LB126]

CORRIE KIELTY: That is a very good question. [LB126]

SENATOR CONRAD: Because what I'm afraid of is I think it's written narrowly so that it can benefit CASA, which raises concerns for me in terms of a closed class or special legislation. So I put that out there two years ago. For consistency's sake, I wanted to make sure that those issues were addressed on the record, and I'd love to hear feedback from anybody on that topic moving forward. [LB126]

CORRIE KIELTY: Yeah. My initial thought would be if another organization followed the Nebraska CASA statute that's in place, I don't know why they wouldn't qualify for these grants, but... [LB126]

SENATOR CONRAD: Okay. And right, that's the technical issue. And then on the flip side of it, is just that there's so many great organizations in Nebraska that advocate on behalf of children and children in need, and thankfully so, because we need them,... [LB126]

CORRIE KIELTY: Yes. [LB126]

SENATOR CONRAD: ...particularly with the crisis that our child welfare system has been in. And yes, we've made some improvements moving forward, but those kids still need powerful voices and advocates on their behalf. But what do you see as setting apart CASA as deserving of state funds over those other organizations that really operate on that same mind-set? [LB126]

CORRIE KIELTY: First of all, I wouldn't say that they don't deserve state funds that probably many of us should, and if that were the case we wouldn't be in the position that we are right now, having children move from one placement to another and feeling like they've been abandoned by the system. But I think CASA has a specific service that's been proven. You know, the question was asked of Senator McGill about why--you asked that--why would we need CASA; why aren't there all these other people in place right now that can provide these services? Well, we're far from the only state. CASA is in every state in the United States, and it was started in Washington State by a judge who said we're not meeting the needs of these kids; they need a voice and it doesn't have to be a trained social worker or a trained...it could be a volunteer who is trained; they could do this. And that's been proven now throughout the United States because we have it everywhere, and there's a great set of standards put in place by National

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CASA that all of the local CASA and the state has to follow. That includes the training, that includes the supervision, and that includes the way in which our organizations are run so that they meet those high standards that need to be met in order to be a CASA organization. [LB126]

SENATOR CONRAD: Right. And those high standards then are unique to CASA, is that's the response? [LB126]

CORRIE KIELTY: Um-hum. [LB126]

SENATOR CONRAD: The response is those high standards and that set of training and benchmarks is unique to CASA and that's what sets them apart from the other... [LB126]

CORRIE KIELTY: Yes. [LB126]

SENATOR CONRAD: Okay. And then that kind of ties in, back then, well, gosh, isn't that a closed class or special legislation. So it's kind of...I'm trying to work through it, honestly... [LB126]

CORRIE KIELTY: Yeah. [LB126]

SENATOR CONRAD: ...with those technical issues, because I do think that CASA does great work. But I also, from an equity perspective, am trying to figure out how we respond to other great organizations that are our allies in child welfare who don't get a state appropriation. And just...I'm just trying to work through it. So I really appreciate your candor. [LB126]

CORRIE KIELTY: Sure. Um-hum. [LB126]

SENATOR MELLO: Senator Larson. [LB126]

SENATOR LARSON: This is a quick question. I know in...I'm somewhat familiar with CASA, being at...sitting on the Judiciary Committee for two years, and I know you guys testify quite a bit. And it's a question that I raised...always raised concern in that committee is, well, is...you're asking for a half-million dollars and you guys do...I mean, have demonstrated good work. What are you doing to get out into the counties that don't get CASA, into rural Nebraska? You know, I look at my district and there isn't a county on there that... [LB126]

CORRIE KIELTY: Yes, I've looked at your district too. [LB126]

SENATOR LARSON: And so obviously when we're talking about...it raises a concern.

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Like I said, nothing against CASA, as Senator Conrad has, you know, a very valid point as well, and I think you guys have demonstrated you do a lot. But when we're talking about state tax dollars, you know, what are you doing to expand out into rural Nebraska? And I think Senator Harms raised the question as well. Because when you have districts such as mine or Senator Davis' or, you know, Senator Schilz has a few counties, but, you know, we see none of this. What are you guys doing? [LB126]

CORRIE KIELTY: Um-hum. The first step was working with the agencies that were already in place who wanted to expand, because obviously it's easier, it's more cost-effective. And you look at your district and we don't have...we don't have any programs close by; so that would need to be a new program. And one of the steps we've taken so far is we've done a survey of judges and county attorneys in all of the counties that don't have programs, to see are they interested and what is their opinion of CASA programs. Because we feel like if we go into those places where the judge is really interested in us being there, that's going to be a very effective place to move into first. So that will be our next step in that strategy. And one of the other things is that, you know, I was brought on board last fall, and I'm an organizer and part of my previous jobs has been organizing in communities, in small rural communities, including northeast Nebraska. I organized 36 coalitions for prevention of drug abuse in that area, a long time ago when I was young. And so I really hope we get this funding because that will be, you know, just amazing to be able to work with those folks who have never been able to experience CASA. [LB126]

SENATOR LARSON: I'm going to ask you a no-win question for you, because you talk about you have people waiting to get on the list now in the counties that you currently serve. [LB126]

CORRIE KIELTY: Yes. [LB126]

SENATOR LARSON: What's more of a priority, expanding it into counties that don't have it, or (laugh) pushing the people that are waiting in your current counties? Because that...like I said, it's kind of in the same vein and I know it's a no-win question for you. But where are the priorities of CASA right now? [LB126]

CORRIE KIELTY: My board has not said there is a priority of one over another. [LB126]

SENATOR LARSON: All right. Thank you. [LB126]

SENATOR MELLO: Senator Bolz [LB126]

SENATOR BOLZ: Ms. Kielty, the statistic that stood out to me was the statistic that said half of the kids in our foster care system have four or more placement changes in their lifetime. And my background in my nonprofit work says to me that that's expensive and

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time-intensive and difficult work to find four placements for over 2,000 kids in our system. And so I would just appreciate if you would be able to articulate how CASA contributes to finding more permanency for kids, more quickly, and in that way saves our overall system dollars. [LB126]

CORRIE KIELTY: Yeah. And I think that the local directors can specifically speak to this, but in general, I will. And that is that our CASA volunteers spend the time with the children and they spend the time with the people in the children's lives to find out what services are needed so that permanency can happen more quickly. [LB126]

SENATOR BOLZ: Thank you. Appreciate that. [LB126]

SENATOR MELLO: Are there any further questions from the committee? Seeing none, thank you, Corrie. [LB126]

CORRIE KIELTY: Thank you, Senator. [LB126]

SENATOR MELLO: Next proponent for LB126. [LB126]

DAWN ROCKEY: (Exhibit 2) Good afternoon, Senator Mello and members of the committee. My name is Dawn Rockey, D-a-w-n R-o-c-k-e-y, and I'm the executive director of the Court Appointed Special Advocates, or CASA, for Lancaster County. So I'm the local program director here in Lincoln. I appear before you today in support of LB126. As you know, LB126 provides \$500,000 of yearly funding to the Nebraska CASA Association to support training and recruiting grants to local CASA programs across the state and to provide for expansion into counties that do not have CASA. CASA for Lancaster County was started in 1999 and is one of the 22 local programs serving 37 counties in the state. We recruit, train, and support community volunteers who provide advocacy services to abused and neglected children in juvenile court. CASA volunteers do their own investigation. They have a court order that allows them to investigate and talk to anyone that is associated with these children, and they write reports that go directly to the judge so that the judge has more information on which to base their decisions. CASA volunteers get to know the children and work to keep moving so that the children do not languish in the child welfare system. CASA volunteers offer an out-of-the-system viewpoint that lets the judge know what they believe is in the child's best interest. CASA volunteers are generally assigned to one case at a time where other professionals working with the child and family have many cases. CASA volunteers are able to spend the time necessary to get to know the child and all of the circumstances surrounding a family. You've heard that CASA volunteers receive 30 hours of preservice training as well as 12 hours of annual in-service or continuing education. Those trainings are supervised and facilitated by CASA staff persons, and that also helps to ensure quality advocacy. You've also heard about, so I'm not going to repeat it, the legislation that was passed two years ago. I think we made

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excellent use of those funds. In Lancaster County, in 2012, we provided advocacy services for 245 children, including 70 children who were new to our program. One hundred seven children achieved permanency or had their case closed in 2012, and we had 103 active CASA volunteers assigned to a case at any one time during the year. While these may seem like good numbers, you need to keep in mind that we are serving about 30 percent of the children eligible for a CASA volunteer here in Lancaster County. This is up from about 24 percent when I started with CASA in late 2006, early 2007. The grants funded with state dollars ensure that we were able to offer four new volunteer training sessions in 2012, and trained 30 new CASA volunteers, and we've provided in-service training to our active volunteers. Each of our volunteers serves, on average, 2.2 children. Those 30 volunteers enabled us to advocate for 66 additional children. CASA volunteers make a difference, one child at a time. Our volunteers talk to everyone associated with the child--with teachers, therapists, doctors, extended family members, day-care providers--to get a picture of what's going on in the child's whole life, not just the turmoil at home. Most importantly, CASA volunteers recommend services for the children and family so that the issues that brought the case into the system can be corrected and the family successfully reunited. Past studies have shown that cases with a CASA volunteer close, on average, four months sooner than a case without a CASA volunteer, thereby saving state and local governments money that is spent on attorney fees, case management fees, and fees for services. CASA provides a great return on your investment. While saving taxpayer money is a laudable goal, I think the difference a CASA volunteer makes to the children they work with is even more important. I'd like to tell you about two children, Susan and Holly. They were siblings growing up in a very chaotic home. Their mother experienced a myriad of problems, including homelessness, unemployment, drug addiction, and domestic violence. The girls came to the attention of the authorities when an older sibling was physically abused with a belt. The children were removed from their home to keep them safe. As the case unfolded, it became apparent that there were additional problems in the home. A CASA volunteer was appointed to the case. The volunteer spent time with the children, got to know their personalities and their needs. The volunteer recommended a variety of services and advocated for early childhood evaluations for both children, helping to identify a pretty significant learning disability in one child. Initially, the mother worked her case plan and the physical placement of the children returned to the mother. Unfortunately, the mother's drug addiction increased and resulted in the children's safety being at risk and their subsequent removal from their mother's home for a second time. The CASA volunteer was there, did her work, kept in touch with everyone, kept recommending a good outcome for these kids. When it became apparent that the girls couldn't be safely reunited, the CASA volunteer was the first one to recommend that the children be placed for adoption. Luckily, they were in a good foster home and those foster parents ultimately did adopt the kids. And I happened to just, actually this particular case, see the foster mom several weeks ago and the girls are doing wonderfully. They are just blossoming. The CASA volunteer focused on the best interests of the children and their need for permanency and helped achieve the best

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possible solution. I ask for your support of LB126 and the appropriation attached to it so that we can continue to help a lot of Susans and Hollys in the future. Thank you.
[LB126]

SENATOR MELLO: Thank you, Ms. Rockey. Are there any questions from the committee? Senator Nelson. [LB126]

SENATOR NELSON: Thank you. Thank you...let's see, we are...Dawn...Ms. Rockey, right? [LB126]

DAWN ROCKEY: Yes. [LB126]

SENATOR NELSON: Okay, so you're here in Lancaster County. I have a couple statements made here in the earlier presentation. Children in care with CASA volunteers have fewer placement changes. In your experience, what would you attribute that to? [LB126]

DAWN ROCKEY: In a lot of the cases that we deal with, the CASA volunteer is another member of the team who is saying, okay, we don't want the kids to be moved again; what's happening in the foster home; what can we do to put in additional services or what can...what needs to happen so that that placement does not fail. So sometimes we're advocating for more respite services for that foster home. It could be we've had cases where we've advocated for family therapy involving the foster family so that they could work on the issues that could maybe then help to keep that child in the home.
[LB126]

SENATOR NELSON: Okay. So there's a possibility that they might stay in the home a little longer as a result... [LB126]

DAWN ROCKEY: Yes. [LB126]

SENATOR NELSON: ...as things get worked out. When you talked about Susan and Holly, you said there were multiple caseworkers that managed them. What's the function of the caseworkers here? When you say multiple, are they coming and going? I mean, isn't there any... [LB126]

DAWN ROCKEY: Yes. [LB126]

SENATOR NELSON: Isn't there some duplication between the CASA and the caseworkers? [LB126]

DAWN ROCKEY: Not really. I mean, the caseworker is, to not borrow a phrase from George Bush, but I'm going to, the caseworker is the decider in the case. The

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caseworker is the one that says yes or no to a service and is the one that grants permission for, you know, everything to happen. The CASA volunteer is the person that's sitting there saying, yeah, you know, have we thought about this program that's run by this agency or have we thought about that maybe we need to do an early childhood evaluation because maybe Holly is three years old and only is speaking in two-word sentences. That's not what a typical three-year-old does. So the CASA volunteer is kind of that person that is outside the system. The caseworker is hemmed in by a lot of HHS policy, by a lot of here's, you know, how they've been trained to do things. And I will tell you, none of these cases are black and white. There's always a nuance and something different. [LB126]

SENATOR NELSON: So the CASA worker responds directly to questions from the judge. Or does that person... [LB126]

DAWN ROCKEY: Yes. [LB126]

SENATOR NELSON: ...have input to the judge and you go...you don't go through the caseworker, right? [LB126]

DAWN ROCKEY: Well, we work with the caseworker, but the CASA report goes directly to the judge. It is not vetted by the county attorney; it's not vetted by DHHS or anybody like that. It goes straight to the judge. Our reports are factual but they do include recommendations and observations that our volunteers have made. They are not full of, you know, third-party hearsay or anything like that. That's also where staff supervision comes in to keep those reports on point and factual. [LB126]

SENATOR NELSON: All right. Thank you very much. [LB126]

DAWN ROCKEY: Um-hum. [LB126]

SENATOR MELLO: Senator Kintner. [LB126]

SENATOR KINTNER: See, that wasn't so hard, quoting George Bush. You got through that. [LB126]

DAWN ROCKEY: I did get through that. [LB126]

SENATOR KINTNER: Now maybe we can get you quoting Ronald Reagan a few times and we'll have something here, huh? [LB126]

DAWN ROCKEY: All right. I'll give it a whirl. [LB126]

SENATOR KINTNER: How long have you been in your current position? [LB126]

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DAWN ROCKEY: I joined CASA for Lancaster County in 2006--December of 2006. [LB126]

SENATOR KINTNER: How has it changed? How has the whole organization...how have your methods changed? How have you evolved over that time? [LB126]

DAWN ROCKEY: You know, our program has grown substantially. When I came on in 2006, we had about 120 kids in our program. Last year we advocated for 245. Depending on what time point you look at, either Douglas County is the biggest program or we are. What I see is, in the change, is that the need for that collaboration and the need for getting people around the table to brainstorm on these cases. As you know, we've gone through an attempt at privatization. Had we not had CASA volunteers, I shudder to think what would have happened to a lot of these kids with going into privatization, out of privatization, and not knowing who was supposed to be doing what and who had the ultimate decision-making authority at varying times. So I think CASA has provided a crucial role during that, and that is still really unfolding. We're still seeing quite a bit of turnover in caseworkers. And sometimes the only person on the case that has that historical reference, so that we aren't reploting the same old ground, is that CASA volunteer. But I would see...we don't take sides, and I really feel like our approach is very collaborative and I think it's become more collaborative as we have had to go through those into privatization, out of privatization. [LB126]

SENATOR KINTNER: Thank you. [LB126]

DAWN ROCKEY: Um-hum. [LB126]

SENATOR MELLO: Are there any further questions from the committee? Seeing none, thank you, Ms. Rockey. [LB126]

DAWN ROCKEY: Thank you. [LB126]

SENATOR MELLO: Next proponent. [LB126]

GEORGIE SCURFIELD: (Exhibit 3) Good afternoon, Senator Mello and members of the committee. My name is Georgie Scurfield, G-e-o-r-g-i-e S-c-u-r-f-i-e-l-d. I'm a social worker and for the last 16 years I've been the director of the Sarpy County CASA Program. I'm a constituent of yours, Senator Kintner, and I have been proud to be part of the development of the CASA program in both Cass County and Nebraska City and Otoe County. So the whole of the judicial district, Second Judicial District, Sarpy County, Cass County, and Otoe County now has a CASA program covering them. I want to thank you for your consideration of LB126 and let you know how my program specifically has been impacted by this funding. The Sarpy County CASA Program was

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established in 1986 with five volunteers. It was the first CASA program in the state and has been part of the state association from the very beginning. When I took the director's position in 1996, the program had been in existence for ten years and there were 24 active volunteers. By 2003, that number had doubled to 50; but as county funding diminished and the growth of the program slowed, in 2009 there were still just 53 volunteers. In 2007, because we wanted to look at how we could diversify and grow, we created a nonprofit to support several programs in Sarpy County and asked for some private funding. We made a serious and ongoing attempt to diversify funding, but growth and funding remained slow. However, in the last two years the Sarpy County CASA Program has received a total of \$14,000 from the state funding stream that was created two years ago. In the first year, with \$3,000, we did some additional recruiting and added an additional volunteer training class. In the second year, we have added some promotional advertising in local newspapers--on the front page of the Bellevue Times. I hope Senator Kintner noticed that. And we have been able to focus more on focused recruiting so that we have looked at recruiting more men to advocate, particularly for our young men, young teenagers. We have had an additional training class and additional in-service training for our current volunteers. We have now 66 active volunteers--in 2012 we had, and we're focused on recruiting more. So we've begun the growth again once we had the additional funding. I want to talk to you a little bit about the impact of a CASA volunteer on a case, even a case where as we've heard from Senator Conrad, there are a lot of professionals involved and a lot of advocacies going on in different ways, and a lot of expense. A CASA volunteer works with one family at a time. The difference that makes is how well they know that family. So I had a call back in January from one of our CASA volunteers. Her name is Jaci. She lives in Millard. And I'm happy to say she lives just south of Harrison Street, so she is in Sarpy County (inaudible), in Douglas County she works for my program. She is a great volunteer. She's been advocating for four children whose parents have both struggled with addiction and who have been through addiction treatment. Jaci asked me in this telephone call whether it was okay to say what she really felt in her report to the judge. That's always a little nerve-racking, because we want the language she uses to be judge-appropriate and court-appropriate. But she went on to say that the court had ordered several things for this family: child and parent psychotherapy for both parents, domestic violence counseling for Dad, therapy for all four children. And the professionals were saying they needed more evidence that the parents could stay clean and sober. But what she saw was that these children needed to be home. She thought what they needed most of all was to be together as a family. The children needed to be at home and the parents needed to step up to the responsibility; and no one could tell how well it would work out until we took that risk and made it happen. Safety would still need to be monitored and all the services would still need to be offered, but the children needed to be home and the system should work hard to step away and see if this family could survive. At the court hearing, none of the professionals in their reports were suggesting that it was time to do this, but Jaci was adamant and her report said so. The family is never going to be perfect, she admitted, but these parents are doing the best

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they can and are now willing to accept help and the children want to be home. The judge addressed her directly in court, acknowledged her courage in recommending something that no one else was suggesting, spoke to the parents about her faith in them, and agreed to move forward quickly. So currently, two months later, the children are settled at home; and this is particularly important, they're doing really well in school. So it isn't simply that they are settled at home again, but we have outside corroboration that they're doing well. Daddy is finishing up his domestic violence therapy because he continued to cooperate, and both parents are attending support groups. The oldest child is still in therapy. He always took greater responsibility for his little siblings than anyone else, but he is doing well now. There have been no further incidents of violence and the parents' drug tests have all been clean. The case will close months earlier than it was expected to because this CASA volunteer said this is something we should do now. So please, give us the funding that Senator McGill is requesting for us. We, the CASA staff, will recruit and train CASA volunteers who will advocate fiercely and fearlessly for the children, and the children and their parents and Nebraska's child welfare system will see the benefit. Thank you. [LB126]

SENATOR MELLO: Thank you for your testimony. Are there any questions from the committee? Seeing none, thank you. [LB126]

GEORGIE SCURFIELD: Thank you. [LB126]

SENATOR MELLO: Are there any further proponents for LB126? Seeing none, are there any opponents to LB126? Seeing none, is there anyone here to testify in the neutral capacity on LB126? Seeing none, Senator McGill, would you like to close? [LB126]

SENATOR MCGILL: I will waive. I'll save you a few minutes. [LB126]

SENATOR MELLO: All right. Thank you, Senator McGill. Senator McGill waives closing. That ends today's hearing on LB126 and takes us next to our next bill, LB569 by Senator Burke Harr. Good afternoon. [LB126]

ANDY HALE: (Exhibit 4) Good afternoon. Chairman Mello, members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Andy Hale, A-n-d-y, last name H-a-l-e. I am Senator Burke Harr's legislative aide. Senator Harr cannot be here today. He is at home tending to two sick little girls, so he sends his regrets. Senator Harr represents the midtown Omaha area, which is the Dundee-Benson neighborhood, along with the neighborhoods that surround Creighton Prep. LB569 provides an increase in the salaries of Nebraska's county court employees throughout the entire state. The county court system is described as the front line of the court system. County court processes well over one half of one million traffic, criminal, civil, probate, adoption, and juvenile cases each year. County court employees are responsible for monitoring thousands of

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cases and ensuring that cases progress in a timely manner. They are also responsible for collecting millions of dollars in court costs, fines, and inheritance tax. County court employees are the support arm of the county judges, the attorneys, and other governmental agencies. These courts are available to every citizen across the state with a county court in each courthouse. LB569 calls for a 7 percent increase in the salaries of county court employees. We all understand that the budget realities of the state that 7 percent just might be a little too much. So Senator Harr has prepared an amendment which is passed around to you which calls for a 2.75 increase in the salaries over the preliminary recommendation in each year of the biennium. This would call for roughly a 5 percent increase in both fiscal years 2013-2014 and fiscal year 2014-2015. We are really bringing this amendment for two purposes: the economic reality, we just don't have the millions that it would take to fund it at this level for this type of increase. But secondly, and maybe more importantly, this amendment would mirror the increase that the Judiciary Committee is discussing regarding salary increases for judges. I think that it is only fair that county court employees should get the same increase that the judges may be receiving. Following me in testimony will be several folks who are familiar with the court operations and the employees who work there. You will hear about how hard it is for certain courts around the state to recruit and to retain good employees, due in part to the low pay that we as a state provide. I ask that you vote LB569 out of committee, and I am sure the people behind me will be happy to answer any and all questions. [LB569]

SENATOR MELLO: Thank you, Mr. Hale. Are there any questions from the committee? Seeing none, thank you. [LB569]

ANDY HALE: Thank you. [LB569]

SENATOR MELLO: First proponent on LB569. [LB569]

TOM HAWES: (Exhibits 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10) Good afternoon, Senator Mello, members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Tom Hawes, T-o-m H-a-w-e-s. I'm the clerk magistrate of the Adams County Court in Hastings, and I am the president of the Nebraska County Court Association, which represents the clerk magistrates and their staffs throughout the state. I am here to support this bill and the proposed amendment. Over the last six years, the Chief Justice and the State Court Administrator's Office has done everything they could to make sure that the county court offices remained open throughout the state. In spite of the budget restraints, the court has not furloughed anyone, has not had to force anyone to leave because of the shortfall in the state budget, has had surrounding counties help take up the slack either by helping out in their court or by the use of pass-through to the JUSTICE computer system. The court has not been able to rehire some positions in the smaller courts, choosing to use this attrition and its corresponding funds to maintain its budget request, which at times causes great stress for the staffs of those smaller courts, but was necessary

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nonetheless. The State Court Administrator's Office has also been instrumental in the process of scanning our documents statewide, the use of docket and court proceedings for our journal entries, and the use of digital recorders in county court proceedings. The implementation of e-filing has also been a great innovation that the courts have undertaken. This is progress and it has been beneficial throughout the state. However, there are downsides. Because of the downsizing of most of the staffs throughout the state, it has become a difficult task to have the remaining staff members get everything done in a timely manner. We do more with less, less people, less time in some instances, and some would argue for less money. When a staff downsizes, someone else in the office must step up and take up the slack. The work that perhaps one full-time person has handled for years and now becomes extra work for the remaining staff who now have the undertaking of getting that work done. I have heard numerous times throughout the years how magistrates and sometimes staff persons stay late or come in weekends to try to get things done. They are not asking for overtime or compensation for the extra time. They are just doing their job, showing their devotion for getting the job done right for their courts, their judges, and their constituency. Over the last six years with the start of the recession the average pay increase has been 1.96 for the county court employees. Again, we are very appreciative of the efforts of the Court Administrator's Office and their work with the Legislature to ensure that no jobs were lost, except through attrition, through this period. It is our opinion that the time is now to begin to pay these individuals a salary commensurate with their jobs. As Chief Justice Heavican mentioned to the Judiciary Committee a few weeks ago regarding the staying in private practice or being selected to the Judiciary for attorneys and their requested pay increase, the same could be said for the magistrates and their staffs. Many positions pay more money in the private sector than the current salaries of most staff positions. Paraphrasing the Chief Justice, he went on to say that the judges make difficult decisions from deciding guilt or innocence in criminal and juvenile proceedings, from deciding...or signing orders for guardianships and conservatorships, and every other major decision that goes on in the court system they have to make every day. In that same vein, magistrates deal with some of the same issues, determining in some cases the guilt or innocence of individuals in criminal proceedings, decide when to take children out of the home through ex parte orders for removal in juvenile cases, signing letters of temporary guardian and conservatorships, setting bonds for individuals sitting in jail, as well as being the person in charge of all the court staff and records. The courts only thrive with good staff personnel and magistrates. I had some exhibits that have been passed around which are letters of support from several judges throughout the state who would support passage of this bill. I believe their letters speak volumes. I submit to you that the time is now for the state to show these employees that the hard work and dedication they show every day in their court is greatly appreciated and we should compensate them in a like manner. I strongly recommend that the committee move forward with LB569. Thank you for your time. [LB569]

SENATOR MELLO: Thank you for your testimony. Are there any questions from the

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committee? Seeing none, thank you. [LB569]

TOM HAWES: Thank you, sir. [LB569]

SENATOR MELLO: Next proponent. [LB569]

LAURIE YARDLEY: Senator Mello, members of the committee, my name is Laurie Yardley, L-a-u-r-i-e Y-a-r-d-l-e-y. I'm a county judge here in Lancaster County, Nebraska, and have been so for 18 years. I'm also here on behalf of the County Judges Association. They asked me to speak on their behalf here today in support of this bill. I'm going to maybe talk about a few examples that are happening in Lancaster County. But as I talk to the judges across the state, I think it's happening also in their jurisdictions as well. In Lancaster County, we have city and county employees as well as state employees. The state employees are the worst paid employees in the building. The custodians make...I think start out at \$1.50 an hour more than the starting wage is for the county court employees. Obviously, we are losing employees to the other county agencies on a regular basis. I've also found in the last couple of years now we're losing them to private as well. I can tell that the economy is doing better because they're leaving us for private practice. We had a supervisor that left, we'd had her for years, she was a very good employee and she left a couple of weeks ago into private practice for a position that was doubling the salary that she's making. And I understand we can't compete with private practice, but we're not even close. We have a current revolving door in Lancaster County here. We have five current openings for county court. It's just a constant people leaving. We are having to spend hours just interviewing people trying to fill the positions because there's always a constant need for...or people leaving four or five positions, and generally it's for more pay. That's what we hear as to why they're leaving. It's not a very efficient way to run the court when you're spending so much time just trying to keep up and filling the positions. I'm also concerned about the long-range succession planning for the courts. When I first started 18 years ago, we had employees that had been there for years and years and they knew the court system. You could promote within because employees had been there for a long period of time. Now as the supervisors are leaving, there's nobody there that's trained to take their positions because everybody that's, you know, comes and they get trained and then a year later they're gone. And I know this is true also in Douglas County that they have just a continuing revolving door as the employees are leaving. So again, you just get them trained, they're gone. You don't have these employees with the knowledge of how things work. A question comes up and nobody has done it before because they haven't been there for a long period of time. So I just...again, I have concerns about the long range for the courts, too, and how they're going to operate when you lose all this experience and you don't have anyone there to replace it. So I urge you to forward LB569, and I know the judges in the rest of the state are in full agreement with this as well. [LB569]

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SENATOR MELLO: Thank you for your testimony, Judge. Are there any questions from the committee? Senator Kintner. [LB569]

SENATOR KINTNER: I just thought of this and maybe I should have asked it of one of the prior testifiers. Thanks for coming, by the way. How did the state get involved in paying these salaries in the first place? How long ago has that been? [LB569]

LAURIE YARDLEY: It used to be that the county had county employees and then the state took over. They merged the county and the courts. There used to be municipal courts and county courts and they merged them and they took over. And I'm... [LB569]

JANICE WALKER: 1973. [LB569]

LAURIE YARDLEY: 1973. Thank you. [LB569]

SENATOR KINTNER: Okay, when I was about fifth grade. Okay, got it. [LB569]

LAURIE YARDLEY: Now the district court still has even...I think still has...the counties run the district court. But in the county court, it's all state employees. [LB569]

SENATOR KINTNER: Okay. That was my question. Thank you. [LB569]

LAURIE YARDLEY: Okay. Anything else? [LB569]

SENATOR MELLO: Are there any further questions from the committee? Seeing none, thank you, Judge. [LB569]

LAURIE YARDLEY: Thank you. [LB569]

SENATOR MELLO: Are there any further proponents on behalf of LB569? Seeing none, the committee did receive letters of support from Judge J. Patrick McArdle from Jefferson County; Judge Michael Offner from Adams County; Judge Alan Brodbeck from Holt County; Judge James Worden from Scotts Bluff and Banner County; Judge Gerald Jorgensen from Buffalo County; as well as Judges Kent Turnbull and Judge Michael Piccolo. Are there any opponents to LB569? Seeing none, is there anyone here in the neutral capacity? Seeing none, Senator Burke Harr, Andy Hale. [LB569]

ANDY HALE: I know Senator Harr is cringing if he's watching this at home. I would like to say, Chairman Mello, I do appreciate Fiscal's work that they did with us on this bill in particular, as well as the good work they do with all of our bills. So I just would be remiss if I didn't express that. So thank you. [LB569]

SENATOR MELLO: Thank you, Andy. Are there any questions from the committee?

Transcript Prepared By the Clerk of the Legislature
Transcriber's Office

Appropriations Committee
March 12, 2013

Seeing none, thank you. [LB569]

ANDY HALE: Thank you. [LB569]

SENATOR MELLO: That will end today's hearing on LB569 and take us to our first agency hearing of the day, Agency 5, the Nebraska Supreme Court. [LB569]