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Education Committee
March 09, 2015

[LB443 LB489 LB507 LB508]

The Committee on Education met at 1:30 p.m. on Monday, March 9, 2015, in Room 1525 of the State Capitol, Lincoln, Nebraska, for the purpose of conducting a public hearing on LB443, LB507, LB508, and LB489. Senators present: Kate Sullivan, Chairperson; Rick Kolowski, Vice Chairperson; Roy Baker; Tanya Cook; Mike Groene; Adam Morfeld; Patty Pansing Brooks; and David Schnoor. Senators absent: None.

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to the Education Committee public hearing. I'm Kate Sullivan, Chair of the committee and I am from Cedar Rapids, representing District 41. The committee members are coming in. Some may be introducing bills in other committees but I'd like those who are here to introduce themselves and we'll start with the Vice Chair.

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: I'm Rick Kolowski, District 31 in southwest Omaha.

SENATOR SCHNOOR: Dave Schnoor, District 15 which is Dodge County.

SENATOR COOK: I'm Tanya Cook. I'm the senator from District 13 in northeast Omaha and northeast Douglas County.

SENATOR BAKER: Roy Baker, senator from District 30, Gage County, southern Lancaster County.

SENATOR SULLIVAN: As I said, I'm sure the other senators will be joining us shortly. We have several other people who are helping us with the logistics today. To my immediate left is Tammy Barry who is one of the legal counsels for the Education Committee. My far right is Mandy Mizerski, the committee clerk, who makes sure that we have an accurate recording and record of the proceedings. We also have some pages who are helping us, Seth Thompson of Ogallala and Matthew...Roosz? (Phonetic)

MATTHEW RUIZ: Ruiz.

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Ruiz, thank you, from Omaha. So we thank them as well. Today on the agenda we have four bills, LB443, LB507, LB508, and LB489. If you are planning to testify at any...for any of these bills, we ask that you pick up a green sheet which is on the table at either entrance to the room. If you do not wish to testify but would like your name entered into the official record as being present at the hearing, there's a separate form on the table to fill that...to sign as well for that purpose. Regarding the green sheet, we ask before you testify to fill it out completely. Please print. And when you come up to testify, give the sign-in sheet to the committee clerk and this will help make an accurate record. If you have handouts, please make sure you have 12 copies for the pages to hand out to the committee. And when you come up to testify, please

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speak clearly into the microphone. Tell us your name and, please, spell your...both your first and last name to ensure we get an adequate record. Perhaps I don't need to say this, but please be sure you turn off all your cell phones or any beepers or whatever so as to give our full attention to the testifiers and the bill introducers. The...we will be using the light system today, three minutes for your remarks. When the yellow light comes on, you have one minute left. And when the red light is on, you should be concluding. We'll, of course, have the introducer make the opening remarks and then will close if he or she is available. So with that, I think we are probably ready to start with our first one which is LB443. Senator Bolz. And joining us is Senator Morfeld. Welcome.

SENATOR BOLZ: (Exhibit 1) Thank you. Good afternoon. I am Senator Kate Bolz. That's B-o-l-z. And I'm here this afternoon to introduce LB443. I was at a community event in the fall and I was pulled aside by a teacher who teaches at an elementary school in my district. And she said, Kate, I have a student I really want to tell you about. This student has severe behavioral challenges. This student throws objects, calls names, and causes a disruption to her classroom on a regular basis. This teacher expressed not only her concern about her skill set in terms of dealing with this individual child but also concern about the safety of her classroom as a whole and her concern that the other students weren't receiving the academic instruction that they deserved as she was responding to this student's particular needs. This isn't an isolated case. And I know that those of you on the Education Committee have heard related concerns before not only from your own districts but through your visioning process this summer. But I wanted to share with you that the State Education Association conducted six focus groups last year. And the number two concern for teachers behind class size was lack of mental health services for students. Just a few statements from those teachers to share with you are as follow. Mental health: We deal with so many kids who deal with mental health issues and there is no one to turn to for help. Mental health issues: It happens day after day. We are not helping them. The last four years in a row, I've lost a child to suicide. These kids deal with things I could not deal with. So I think there is an evidence base that this is a growing concern within our classrooms. The statistics support it. KIDS COUNT identified over 37,000 kids with mental and behavioral health disorders last year. The U.S. Surgeon General estimates that one in five children will experience a mental health issue during his or her school years that will disrupt his or her academic learning. And the Association of School Psychologists reminds us that these issues not only affect the success and the wellbeing of the individual student but also the school climate and the outcomes for all students. So what we do about it is a large conversation. And it's a conversation that spans different communities and it spans different entities in government. But LB443 is a small step towards adding another tool to the toolbox for school districts who are grappling with students with mental health issues. And what it does is that it adds language to existing statutes related to what's known as the flexible funding program. And if you're not familiar--I wasn't familiar until I started researching these issues--the flexible funding program allows school districts and approved cooperatives to channel a percentage of their

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allowable, reimbursable special education costs to preventative support services for students that are not identified or verified as having a disability but who demonstrate a need for specially designed assistance in order to benefit from the academic curriculum. The bill and the amendment that I have provided adds to the list of approved expenses, support services that may also include access to mental health services offered either at the school or elsewhere including but not limited to assessments and family education services. This would allow local school districts to design local solutions using existing dollars that are geared towards students with special needs. I'm proud to say that the Legislature's preliminary budget adds some additional funds for special education funding. And while the need and the tension there is still great, this is one tool we can add and one door we can open to address mental and behavioral health needs. As I said previously, this is a part of a broader conversation. But I've heard...and I hope that in the future there will be fewer silos and we'll see different government entities working together more strategically. But I've heard some concerns that because there aren't existing programs between the Department of Education and the Division of Behavioral Health that it might be a little too soon to add the original language in the green copy that specifically references the Division of Behavioral Health. So I've brought you an amendment that just strikes that language but retains the core of the idea which is adding to the list of supportive services for flexible funding access to mental support services. So at the end of the day, this is a small, no-cost change that will allow school districts some flexibility in addressing what they're seeing as a growing need. And it's my hope not only that the committee will pass the bill but that school districts will use this new opportunity and that it will lead to some best practices that we can promote and replicate across the state. So with that, I'll ask for your support of LB443 and answer any questions. [LB443]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Senator Bolz. You indicated there is an amendment that you are working on. [LB443]

SENATOR BOLZ: Yes. [LB443]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: So has that...do we have that? [LB443]

SENATOR BOLZ: Oh, I'm sorry. It's paper-clipped to the fact sheet that I sent around. [LB443]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Oh, this one. Oh, okay. Very good. All right. Okay. [LB443]

SENATOR BOLZ: Yeah, I...yeah, I'm sorry. It's a...there it is. [LB443]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: All right. Very good. Okay. Help me understand, you're going after the flex funding that's already available for school districts? [LB443]

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SENATOR BOLZ: Right. [LB443]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: But in terms of identification and assessment, is there a communication that needs to take place between the Department of Education and Health and Human Services? [LB443]

SENATOR BOLZ: That's...I would say yes. I think there's opportunity for greater cooperation and greater strategic planning. But in the short term, the bill as amended would allow local school districts to either, you know, work with the department of behavioral...the Division of Behavioral Health if that's what works for them or to work with local either mental health providers or nonprofits in the community. And there's already one example happening in the Omaha community between an entity called Project Harmony and Omaha Public Schools that's providing some of these kinds of services, not with the flex funding opportunity but from funding with the Sherwood and Scott Foundations. So I think that there are greater opportunities out there for other school districts and this is another way to fund such initiatives. [LB443]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: I guess that's the other question that I had then in terms of how the process unfolds at the local level in terms of, again, identification, accessing the services, and then the larger issue: Are those providers and services out there? [LB443]

SENATOR BOLZ: Those are all good questions. So one piece at a time: I think we've seen evidence that over time the flexible funding opportunity is an opportunity that school districts take advantage of. So we would, of course, have to work with those school districts and the Department of Education to make sure that people who have these challenges are aware of the opportunity. And I, you know, I do think that that would be a cooperative between the Department of Education and school districts and the Nebraska State Education Association, other stakeholders. But your second question, I think, is a fair one which is, are the providers of such services available? And, you know, I think that at the end of the day, there are probably areas in which we are severely lacking behavioral health services. However, this kind of strategy, because it can be districtwide and it can be in a collaborative of entities coming together, they can maximize the resources that are available, because one mental or behavioral health provider trying to get to one school on one day a week is one thing. A more strategic initiative across the school districts is another. And I think it actually leverages existing resources and partnerships if done well. [LB443]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: So I would presume ESUs would play a role in this? [LB443]

SENATOR BOLZ: Absolutely. [LB443]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Okay. All right. Any other questions for Senator Bolz? Yes, excuse me. [LB443]

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SENATOR BOLZ: And sorry, just to finish that thought, the flexible funding would not be duplicative of what the ESUs are doing. The ESUs have their specific role in all of this but where the gap really comes in is providing the actual services to the kids. And that's where this would fill in rather than assessments or identification. [LB443]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Gotcha. Okay. Any other questions? Senator Kolowski. [LB443]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you, Madam Chair. Senator Bolz, thank you for bringing this forward. It's long overdue and we have a great need in districts to have additional services, agencies, anything we can connect with, to meet the needs of what we're finding in our families and our students today. What do you see as the combination of what we could bring forward, because I think of my career in the late '60s, early '70s, we might have had a dozen different agencies we could have gone to in Omaha. Today that's almost down to none. And that's a real handicap. But the districts still have to find people and organize support for students. What additional things can you do with this bill that they can't do for themselves right now? [LB443]

SENATOR BOLZ: At the end of the day, this is another way in which we can spend flex funding money. So if the barrier is that the resources aren't available to achieve those goals or develop those programs with the existing behavioral health providers, this would open up one more door. I don't want to indicate that this is, you know, that this is the be-all, end-all solution. We need more conversations. The real promise that I think is included in this small idea is that we would give the school districts that want to do so and have real pressures opportunity to develop some pilot initiatives and to start experimenting with what works given a little bit more flexibility in their funding. [LB443]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Okay. Thank you. [LB443]

SENATOR BOLZ: Thank you. [LB443]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Any other questions? [LB443]

SENATOR BOLZ: Could I add something? I misspoke when I was referencing the ESUs. The ESUs provide training and curriculum and the bill would provide the assessment. So I'm sorry, I conflated the two. But the difference is, the ESUs provide training, curriculum, technology, and other support whereas the bill itself would allow for a little bit more flexibility in both the assessments and the family education portion. So I just wanted to clarify that I misspoke. [LB443]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Well, okay, but to clarify that even more, both then could conceivably come through the ESU or directly at the school district level, the family education and the assessment? Where does the assessment take place? [LB443]

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SENATOR BOLZ: The assessment would newly be able to take place under the flexible funding option. [LB443]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Okay. Gotcha. Senator Groene, did you have a question? [LB443]

SENATOR GROENE: Yes, but I think Senator Baker had his hand up first. [LB443]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Oh. Okay. I didn't realize that. (Laugh) Okay. [LB443]

SENATOR BAKER: Thank you. Senator Bolz, at present, does health insurance ever pay for mental health services? [LB443]

SENATOR BOLZ: Absolutely. [LB443]

SENATOR BAKER: So how would this work? [LB443]

SENATOR BOLZ: Right. So one real opportunity just to make things a little bit more concrete would be, a school district could use their flexible funds to hire a mental health coordinator. And such a coordinator could make sure that those kids who have been assessed to have a mental health need know how to get the benefits from their private insurance. Or if they don't have private insurance but they haven't yet applied for Medicaid, know how to apply for Medicaid. So part of this is a gap or a lack of being able to connect the dots between what's available in the community and what the child needs and what the family has resources to handle on their own. [LB443]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Senator Groene. [LB443]

SENATOR GROENE: Thank you, Chairman. [LB443]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Oh, I'm sorry. Did...were you done, Senator Baker? [LB443]

SENATOR BAKER: I'll be done. Thank you. [LB443]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Are you sure? Okay. [LB443]

SENATOR GROENE: Thank you, Chairman. Senator Bolz, I don't understand. We have HHS and they handle mental health for poverty you've got and individuals have healthcare because this...you're talking about a health issue here. [LB443]

SENATOR BOLZ: Um-hum. [LB443]

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SENATOR GROENE: So you want to spend money so that the schools now don't have just a school nurse, we have a school psychologist? Are they going to be having sessions with students in the...in a public school or are we going to do this where...I don't understand why the school right now can't call a parent in and say, we have problems and you need to talk to HHS or you need to find some help for this child. I'm... [LB443]

SENATOR BOLZ: And I appreciate the question. It's a good one. I don't think that there's...I do think that there's a role and a responsibility for the family to manage challenges whether it's, you know, dyslexia or mental illness or, you know, whatever challenge a child is facing. And there are already existing school counselors and school psychologists that are helping some of those children deal with a crisis or respond to mental health needs. What this gives school districts an opportunity to do is to address that in a more systemic way. So certain programs or strategic initiatives could be developed in order to maximize the school district's resources to respond to these issues and needs. So if we're seeing, say, a prevalence of anorexia in middle schools all across Lincoln Public Schools, the school district could use their flex funds to develop some educational resources and pull in a trained anorexia educator. [LB443]

SENATOR GROENE: So you're not proposing that school districts become medical facilities where they're treating mental illness. You're sending them out for education or to the...pointing them in the right direction or sending home educational material? [LB443]

SENATOR BOLZ: Right. That's exactly right. I think what I have seen and heard in discussing with the educators in the schools in my district is that teachers aren't trained therapists and they can't always identify what the problem is and that there's a gap between what the teachers can identify as a problem in their school setting and the student and their family actually getting the services and supports that they need from HHS or from their private insurance or from a local nonprofit. And by giving the school districts an opportunity to play a liaison role and to develop strategic initiatives, we can ease some pressure off the school buildings. [LB443]

SENATOR GROENE: Thank you. [LB443]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Will you be here for closing? [LB443]

SENATOR BOLZ: Um-hum. Thank you. [LB443]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: We will now hear proponent testimony on LB443. [LB443]

LARRY SCHERER: (Exhibit 2) Good afternoon, Senator Sullivan. Members of the Education Committee, my name is Larry Scherer, L-a-r-r-y S-c-h-e-r-e-r, and I'm here on

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behalf of the Nebraska State Education Association in support of LB443. And we certainly thank Senator Bolz for introducing this bill. We had a series of meetings across the state and this issue came up primarily...or a lot at all sessions, but in Grand Island and Lincoln it was a special issue for the teachers there. And there was a feeling of a frustration, maybe, that there are services out there but not being able to connect or a feeling that, you know, special education requiring identification assessment is a fairly slow process. And if there's a way to get to services more quickly, that would be a good thing. We also talked to the...who was in the head of the division of mental health services at HHS and, you know, he went down the list of many programs that Senator Groene mentioned that those are out there across the state but it's very uneven as to those programs. One of the goals of this would be as, you know, Senator Sullivan, you mentioned, was to be able to work with the ESUs and the HHS and other providers to coordinate services. And this isn't necessarily to add any staff. This isn't to create a new mandate. I know that school districts and everybody is concerned about adding mandates. This isn't about that. And we certainly support any increase in special education funding to help fund the overall special education budget because it's...I looked at some statistics the other day, and the cost of special education has really pushed down to the property taxpayers over the years in school budgets. And so this is to help the state pay for this. But it's more than that. It's just to call attention to the issue and to make sure that schools have those tools. So the last thing, you know, it's mentioned that we have counselors, we have psychologists, we have principals, and we do. All of those people in large schools are very, very busy. In small schools, there's lack of services. And so, you know, from a statewide issue, there just needs to be some greater recognition of the problem so that we don't have as many tragedies occurring. And this is hopefully one step that could make things better. So I will try to answer questions if I may. [LB443]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Mr. Scherer. What do you hear, aside from teachers saying that this is an increasing problem, mental health concerns? Anything more specific, I mean, or speculations as to why, or just more recognition of it? [LB443]

LARRY SCHERER: Well, especially the teachers are reluctant to, I think, refer students to special education because of, you know, not only the time but the cost. And so they've expressed some concern that, you know, maybe the fact that special education has been capped and the school districts are under a lot of pressure to deal with that issue on their own dollar, that they're feeling a certain pressure not to bring these issues to the fore. Now, if there is a true emergency, I, you know, would hope that they would go beyond that. And the suicide issue is certainly part of it and we recognize the Legislature added a position at the department last year. So hopefully that would coordinate with this effort as well. [LB443]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: You mentioned in your presentation that...something about...that the access to services could be done more quickly. [LB443]

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LARRY SCHERER: Um-hum. [LB443]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Did I understand...is that a...you believe that would happen under this bill and in what way? [LB443]

LARRY SCHERER: If there was a knowledge amongst teachers that there was a person in their community to call or a person at the ESU to call and they have a list of providers whether they're paid for with Medicaid or private insurance, you know, one quick call and this...teachers have to go through administrative channels, obviously, but that would enable them to get services possibly quicker and that's the hope. [LB443]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: And then I also heard you say something to the effect that Health and Human Services says that there are services there that perhaps are not currently being accessed. Is...so is there a lack of communication or coordination? [LB443]

LARRY SCHERER: Well, a lot of the services they have are...you know, their lists of them, I think there were 14 programs that they mentioned that are available in one place or the other in the state. But in terms of access in each district, that was...you know, they recognize that the mental health services...frankly, there's a gap of providers across the state. Telemedicine was even discussed as an option. And, you know, frankly, I don't know how that would work. If you have a seriously emotionally disturbed person, talking to somebody on the telephone is probably not as good an option as a person-to-person counseling session. But in rural areas, if you could use something like that as a beginning step, it might be useful, might be a life saver. [LB443]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Okay. Any other questions for Mr. Scherer? Senator Baker. [LB443]

SENATOR BAKER: Thank you. Mr. Scherer, as people talk about the mental health issues having to deal with, do you think to some extent that's overlapped with behavioral issues in the classroom? You're talking about behavioral problems? [LB443]

LARRY SCHERER: Yes, I do. I do. And I think it relates back to the fact that behavioral problems are more and more common just in classrooms these days. When an issue gets to the point where it looks like there's a...some kind of a mental health issue that doesn't fit that mold, that's kind of a tricky area, you know, when there's serious risk of harm to the student. There are programs there but they're under the same funding crunch that school districts have. [LB443]

SENATOR BAKER: Second question is, you go to various schools, I take it, and that is part of your job? [LB443]

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LARRY SCHERER: Yeah. [LB443]

SENATOR BAKER: Okay. [LB443]

LARRY SCHERER: I do visit some. [LB443]

SENATOR BAKER: I may have the terminology wrong, but... [LB443]

LARRY SCHERER: I don't get out as much as our field staff do, though. [LB443]

SENATOR BAKER: Okay. I may have the terminology wrong but there is something called STAT team, and if that's not the correct term then we'll use it for conversational purposes. It's a team that exists in each building where people get together, counselors, teachers, administrators, and address the needs of people, being aware of community resources, you know, of where, or to direct people when there's a problem. Would that be common? [LB443]

LARRY SCHERER: I'm going to let one of the...if there's a special ed teacher here, I'd think they could give you a much better answer than I could, so. [LB443]

SENATOR BAKER: Thank you. [LB443]

LARRY SCHERER: Thank you. [LB443]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Any other questions for Mr. Scherer? Thank you for your testimony. [LB443]

LARRY SCHERER: Thank you. [LB443]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Welcome. [LB443]

JENNI BENSON: (Exhibit 3) Thank you. Good afternoon. My name is Jenni Benson, J-e-n-n-i B-e-n-s-o-n. I have taught special education for nearly 30 years. I am currently the full-time president of the Lincoln Education Association and the vice president of the Nebraska State Education Association. My professional career has been dedicated to children with behavioral and emotional difficulties. As the leader in the association, the number one concern that I hear from educators in the classroom is the lack of support and services for children with mental health issues. However, today I am here to tell you a personal story about why we need support and resources with children struggling with mental health issues. Unfortunately, I have become an expert on mental health issues on a personal level. I am the daughter of a mother who had bipolar disorder. I am the mother of a daughter who was diagnosed at age 12 with bipolar disorder. I am happy to

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say with love, support, treatment, lots of ups and downs, she is now a productive and successful adult. She teaches Head Start. But today I'm here to tell you about my granddaughter who I want to have a successful future. My daughter and her husband became foster parents two years ago to twins. They are now adoptive parents to those twins who are now 11 years old. We are blessed to have them as a part of our family. The kids were in several foster homes for many years before they came to our family. We could have a lengthy discussion about the foster care system in Nebraska but that's another conversation. Both children have learning disabilities and my granddaughter has a great many behavioral and mental health issues. They attend a school in a small district close to Lincoln. Outside of school, Mia sees a therapist a couple times a month. She has a psychiatrist, and she is on several medications. I won't give you the details about her behavior but she has serious concerns at home and at school. My daughter and her husband are young and inexperienced but they love their daughter and they are trying very...their very best to provide her with the support she needs. Unfortunately, the system is not an easy one to navigate. I have been concerned with services at school for Mia and I recently asked to have a meeting with my granddaughter's team at school. I came away confident the team has her best interests in mind, but they are lacking resources to provide services. While discussing Mia's behavioral concerns, the principal says, Mia sees a therapist outside of school. She should visit with that therapist about her troubles at school. I am sure most of you know that it is not really an effective way to have behavioral change when you wait a week or more to deal with a situation or to help with services especially when that therapist is not in the school at that time. The principal's statement is exactly why I am here today. Mia, like many children with mental health issues, needs wraparound services. Children shouldn't have to wait for help. The school should be able to provide all kids with what they need to be successful. The disconnect between school and mental health services for kids is evident with little progress and success for children leading to a wide variety of issues. This bill would allow schools to access funding needed to better serve children with mental health concerns. My granddaughter is very fortunate to have the family she has. We will continue to make sure that she has the best care and services that she needs. But unfortunately, that is not the case for the majority of children who struggle with mental health issues in school. Please consider this bill as a small step towards making sure all children have the best opportunity to be successful. Thank you. [LB443]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Ms. Benson. If this bill were to become law and in place, how do you think that would change the kinds of experiences and services your granddaughter would be provided in the school setting? [LB443]

JENNI BENSON: I'm not as familiar with smaller school districts. I've worked in Lincoln for the past 22 years. I am familiar, though, with the team that I met with. The team that I met with was the principal, the school counselor...she's in middle school at this school and there's 5th through 8th grade in middle school at this particular school. The school psychologist was at the meeting as was Mia's IEP manager. The school psychologist,

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however, typically does not work with kids regarding behavioral issues or mental health issues. They do a lot of assessment. They do assessment for and reevaluation to make sure that kids qualify for special education services. Mia qualifies for special education services because she has a learning disability. She does not qualify for special education services because she has a mental health issue. That would be under an OHI which is other health impaired. And if she was wasn't learning disabled, we would maybe have to go that route to get her services which is what I had to do with my daughter when she was in school. She didn't qualify. She wasn't learning disabled. But she had severe, severe mental health issues. And the school was not equipped to deal with those health issues. And I will address the fact that we have very good insurance. We had very good insurance when my daughter was in school. There was a time when we were paying over \$400 a month for my daughter's medications as well as paying for therapy and 80/20 for inpatient care. So I think that if you're looking at providing services, you have to look at the services as whole and how we can then help school districts be able to say there are other services out there. Whether they're out there or not doesn't matter. It's how you access them and how then they can work together to provide the support that child needs to be successful in school. Senator Bolz is very correct in saying that the teachers are spending a great deal of time dealing with behavior and mental health issues and the children are suffering in the class because they're not able to have the time they need to work with all the other children. [LB443]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Okay. Thank you, Ms. Benson. Any other questions for her?
Senator Kolowski. [LB443]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you, Madam Chair. Ms. Benson, on the...a size of the school question for you. When you're coming from the Lincoln schools, you've got large high schools, anywhere from 1,500 to 2,000-plus. And compared to a smaller school where the staff would probably have a closer handle on number of students because of the size of the school when it's only a couple hundred--I'm thinking high schools now--what do you use or have in place in the high schools besides counselors? And 300 to 400 kids per counselor is not getting to know anyone very close... [LB443]

JENNI BENSON: Right. [LB443]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: ...and up front and personal in that sense. What else do you do in high schools that breaks down the size of those facilities to have a better, close proximity, kind of, build relationships with the students over time? [LB443]

JENNI BENSON: Counselors...you're right. Most of the counselors in high schools for us are people who do schedules. They're called a counselor but they spend time doing schedules, not to say that they wouldn't work with children on an individual basis with behavioral concerns. Senator Baker is very correct that the term is the STAT process, Student Assistance Team, and that's one of those wraparound services. We also have

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SCIP programs for drug and alcohol concerns that we may have. Lincoln Public Schools has been contracting and making grants. We have a lot of grants that are funded to help kids with behavioral and mental health concerns, meaning we are having outside agencies come in and provide those services. We also work with services that are after school. We have programs like the Lighthouse and different programs for after-school care. It's not care for high school students but it is a place where they can go. And then they also have services there. But within the large high schools, it is still quite a challenge to try to make sure that every child is being seen. My daughter went to Lincoln High. She graduated in 2007 so she's been out of school for a while. But she would call me and be in the bathroom...my daughter was what we would call...she had a cutting disorder, so she would cut herself. And so she would call me. She never would go to the counselor. She would never go because there wasn't...she wasn't comfortable with those things. And I don't know if she would have known if there was any help for her at school. [LB443]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: What are the roles of the advisor/advisee kind of programs...that you have a homeroom and the continuity in the high school? [LB443]

JENNI BENSON: Yes. [LB443]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Do you have that available? [LB443]

JENNI BENSON: We have...I know we at Lincoln High an advisor/advisee. [LB443]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Okay. [LB443]

JENNI BENSON: We have an extra period that is used for advisor/advisee which develops those relationships. And bottom line, we all know that those relationships are the most important thing. Those teachers that are advisor/advisee may have a small group, maybe 20 kids, for their advisor/advisee. And they may meet with them once a week, is what it is. But they also have 160 other kids on their case load. During that advisor/advisee time, I know that teachers then develop those relationships and refer kids to outside agencies as well. [LB443]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Sure. Thank you. Thank you very much. [LB443]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Any other questions for Ms. Benson? Thank you for your testimony. [LB443]

JENNI BENSON: Thank you. [LB443]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Welcome. [LB443]

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JOHN NEAL: Thank you. Senator Sullivan, members of the Education Committee, my name is John Neal, J-o-h-n N-e-a-l, and today I'm testifying for the 24 school districts of the Greater Nebraska Schools Association as well as for Lincoln Public Schools. Flexible funding is a critical component in the continuum of services for...to support students. And access to that funding for mental health issues would be very...would be critical in supporting students that have behavioral issues and struggle in the regular classroom. These are some national statistics but I think they're important to bear in mind: 20 percent of youth between the ages of 13 and 18 live with some mental health condition, 10 percent have a behavior or conduct disorder, and 50 percent of all lifetime cases of mental illness begin by age 14, about the time students are transitioning from middle school to high school. That's why it's such an important school issue, not just a community issue and why you've heard the support for the bill today. For this reason, we support the LB443 because it plays out in outcomes that we see in schools. Approximately 50 percent of students nationwide 14 and older with a mental illness drop out of high school. Ninety percent of youth committing suicide had an underlying mental health condition. That's why, again, the issue is so important. But we support it with this caution: This adds flexibility to spend existing money on a huge issue as you've heard in statistics in other testimony but it doesn't add additional resources. And we hope that the Legislature, as it moves forward in the future, will add those resources so that we not only have the flexibility but we have the ability to continue to support the services we're providing now as well as those growing mental health issues that are in front of us. Thank you for the opportunity to share and I'd be glad to answer any questions if I can. [LB443]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Mr. Neal. Any questions? You mentioned in your testimony that 20 percent of high school students have a mental health condition? [LB443]

JOHN NEAL: This is from the National Institute of Mental Health. And it's a national statistic: 20 percent of youth between the ages of 13 and 18, so this would dip down to about 7th grade through high school, would have some type of mental health condition. [LB443]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: And of that, how many are actually diagnosed and going under treatment of any kind? Do you know...have that figure? [LB443]

JOHN NEAL: That I don't know. It's hard to measure, sometimes, for a public school because families don't...because it hasn't been something that's part of special education funding or flex funding, many times families will go it alone in dealing with a mental health issue without even contacting the school. So any statistics that a public school would have is probably underreported for those families that either want to remain private or don't realize the support services that are available in schools. [LB443]

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SENATOR SULLIVAN: Very good. Any other questions for Mr. Neal? Thank you for your testimony. [LB443]

JOHN NEAL: Thank you. [LB443]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: (Exhibit 4) Any further proponent testimony on LB443? I would like to read into the record a letter of support from Mary Bahney of the National Association of Social Workers here in Nebraska. Anyone wishing to speak in opposition to LB443? Or in a neutral capacity? Senator Bolz. [LB443]

SENATOR BOLZ: I'd like to just briefly address a couple of the things I heard discussed by the committee. First, I recognize that this is an anecdote, but I recently had coffee with a teacher in my district and she shared with me that her student assistance team was only able to meet once or twice a month for about 30 minutes and that they weren't able to work through the list of students for which teachers had concerns. So I think it maybe reflects that teachers are focused on instructional time and the resources of counselors and teachers can be stretched thin. The second piece I just wanted to note is that the Department of Education does have oversight processes available for the flexible funding option and that schools do have to pass that review and put their goals in the context of student...of school improvement. So it has to be a part of a bigger plan towards the goals a school has laid out to achieve their academic goals in any given school year. And the last piece I wanted to share is that, while it will, of course, be local school districts that are coming up with their solutions that are tailored to the needs of that individual area, some examples of ways this flexible funding might be utilized might be to hire a mental health coordinator that helps navigate systems. It might be to create some targeted programs for specific mental health needs, maybe suicide prevention if that's a circumstance that that school has experienced, and then, of course, the family education component which might be targeted at helping families better strengthen their school skills sets and tools and abilities to navigate circumstances for their kids. So I just wanted to illustrate what some of the potential programs might be. I hope that's helpful and I'll answer any final questions. [LB443]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Senator. Any questions? Thank you very much. This closes the hearing on LB443. We will now move on to LB507. Senator Cook. [LB443]

SENATOR COOK: Thank you, Madam Chair, and good afternoon, fellow members of the Education Committee. I am Tanya Cook, T-a-n-y-a C-o-o-k. I am the introducer of LB507, content testing for special education certification. Nebraska currently requires no content-specific testing prior to assisting students with educational needs. A K-12 special education certification without content testing does not ensure that special education students and classroom teachers get the support they need. Here is how the bill, as introduced, would operate. LB507 would require that the issuance of a teaching certificate with an endorsement in special education be certified as either an elementary

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or a secondary school certificate. Passage of LB507 would end the practice of issuing a generalized K-12 special education teaching certificate. LB507 would require candidates for the issuance of an elementary or a secondary teaching certificate with an endorsement in special education to pass a multisubject content examination in the areas of literacy, language arts, mathematics, and arts and science. Finally, LB507 provides the Board of Education rule-making and regulatory authority to carry out the requirements of this legislation. Currently, special education teacher candidates are only tested on special education subjects not the content that they are charged in assisting teachers with instilling in the special education students. Also, Nebraska only gives generalized K-12 special education teacher certifications. This bill proposes there be two special education certifications: elementary and secondary. The purpose for making two special education certifications is to make sure that special education teachers are targeted to the students and professional educators with which they collaborate. I am pleased to testify today to the fact that the Nebraska Department of Education is taking steps to achieve the aim of this legislation. Beginning in September of this year, the NDE will require that candidates for special education's teaching certificate pass a discipline-specific content examination. I applaud these efforts and am encouraged that Nebraska special education certification standards are being strengthened. Although the Department of Education's reforms will keep the generalized K-12 special education certification, there are convincing arguments to keep a generalized certification. The arguments are: first, the difficulty for small and large school districts to staff special education teachers; second, the fact that a special education student, regardless of secondary school age, may be learning at an elementary level; and third, the need to ensure that we are not inadvertently lengthening the time that it takes for a teacher preparation college to graduate a teaching professional. I look forward to hearing testimony today that will outline some of the specifics of the NDE reforms and efforts of the Nebraska State College System to create our work force of professional educators. Thank you for your attention and your continuing interest in supporting a vision for educational excellence for all students in our state. Thank you. [LB507]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Senator Cook. In light of what you indicated that the department is working on, I assume you're still thinking that it's sort of a companion to what you're proposing in this bill? [LB507]

SENATOR COOK: Absolutely. I'm never disappointed when I realize that something I've...that I've had as an idea is already being pursued within the agency. So, yes, is the short answer to your question. [LB507]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: But you would still indicate a need to go forward with this legislation? [LB507]

SENATOR COOK: Absolutely, potentially in an amended form to recognize the efforts that are underway. [LB507]

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SENATOR SULLIVAN: Help me a little bit understand, in terms of special education preparation and certification, you mentioned that there would be a test for...in the area of literacy, mathematics, so in other words... [LB507]

SENATOR COOK: Language arts, arts and sciences, yes. [LB507]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: All right. So we're talking about teaching methods that apply to teachers in all capacities. But is there a special approach if you're going to be a special education teacher? [LB507]

SENATOR COOK: Typically what occurs now is that the certification is focused on special education techniques or the pedagogy that goes along with special education. What I am trying to ensure is that, as the teachers are working in tandem with classroom teachers for a special education student that they are also knowledgeable in content areas that they may be called to assist in. [LB507]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you. Any other questions for Senator Cook? Senator Baker. [LB507]

SENATOR BAKER: Thank you. Senator Cook, do you think it would be possible under your proposal for a person...for a teacher to be both elementary and secondary endorsed? [LB507]

SENATOR COOK: I do think so. [LB507]

SENATOR BAKER: Okay. [LB507]

SENATOR COOK: What I don't want to mandate is that she or he add additional time in order to complete an undergraduate education. And that's something that I've already had conversations with the state colleges and...about. [LB507]

SENATOR BAKER: Second question: How would you treat middle school? Would you allow the elementary certificate to work or secondary certificate to work or both? [LB507]

SENATOR COOK: I would treat them as secondary. And that's probably reflecting on my current...the breadth of my experience or the depth of my experience as how it has been broken out within the Omaha Public School District in that 7th graders are considered more secondary students than they are considered elementary although I know middle school is considering going just to 5th and 6th and some to 5th, 6th, and 7th. Right now, with...the dialog continues, I would consider them secondary. [LB507]

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SENATOR BAKER: Thank you. [LB507]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Any other questions? Thank you. [LB507]

SENATOR COOK: Thank you. [LB507]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Any proponent testimony for LB507? Anyone wishing to speak in opposition? Or in a neutral capacity? Welcome. [LB507]

SHARON KATT: Thank you and good afternoon. And it is a beautiful one. I am Sharon Katt. I am the administrator for adult program services with the Nebraska Department of Education and as such have responsibilities for teacher certification, teacher education program approval, and of course, as everyone else, other duties as assigned. We see the intent of this bill, certainly, to ensure that graduates of Nebraska teacher preparation programs have the skills and the knowledge necessary to positively impact student learning. And we appreciate the concern and the interest from Senator Cook as well as the rest of the committee towards that end. It is important to know, as Senator Cook pointed out, that effective September 1, candidates for an endorsement will be required to pass a content-specific test for special education that will be the knowledge related to being an effective special educator. These tests, along with the passing scores, were reviewed by Nebraska constituencies prior to formal approval by the board. These tests will be in addition to two tests that special educators will also take in order...in the process of becoming certificated to teach. One is the core academic skills test called Core which all candidates must pass prior to admission to teacher preparation. The Core test has recently been significantly revised to be reflective of the current expectations in the areas of math, reading, and writing. And this...it's predecessor was the PPST. So all candidates must pass the Core basic skills test in order to be admitted to a program. And this test became...the new test became effective in August 2014. Elementary education candidates, elementary special education candidates will also take the Elementary Education: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment test to be designated as NCLB qualified. The EECIA includes Core content and pedagogical questions in the area of reading, language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, art, music, and physical education. This test was refreshed by the education testing service a little over a year ago to reflect current standards in those areas. Our endorsements are currently K-6, 7-12, and K-12 for special educators. In many cases, these endorsements are attached to an existing content area. However, that is not a requirement to issue a special education endorsement. Nebraska is a high-inclusion state which means that we expect our teachers to be prepared to work effectively with their content-prepared colleagues in effecting appropriate opportunities for special education. As Senator Cook indicated, one of the fine lines that we must think about here, we try to think about, is to what extent do we want the preparation of a special educator to be about the knowledge and skills and dispositions for special educators fully prepared to work with the people who are in the content areas? The K-12, as she

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also indicates, is...has been on the books for quite some time and it was designed in recognition that many of the smaller schools, and even some of the larger schools, will seek that individual because of the unique needs of the candidates. So there is my red light. I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you. I would ask you to please not hesitate to contact me or my office as...with your thoughts about how we can strengthen the rules that guide teacher preparation. We are never done addressing this. This is a moving target like everything else in education. Are there questions for me? [LB507]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Ms. Katt. Can you tell me again how far along the department is in...Senator Cook referenced the fact that the department is working on including these additional levels of assessment for special education teachers. Where are you in this process? [LB507]

SHARON KATT: September 1, we will officially require an individual seeking a special education endorsement to have passed the ETS special ed test. [LB507]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: How does this impact--or do you know?--the preparation in the higher ed institutions for students planning to be special education teachers? [LB507]

SHARON KATT: We are fortunate in Nebraska in that a lot of the work that we do is constituency based. And we started talking about this about two to three years ago. So institutions have had engagement in the selection of the test along with our colleagues in the Nebraska Council on Teacher Education. They've looked at the test. They've started to ask candidates to take the test so that they begin to understand how candidates do against some national benchmark. And in the event that there needs to be improvement in the preparation of those teachers, they are having time to do that to build the skills for individuals to pass these tests. [LB507]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Okay. Thank you. Senator Kolowski. [LB507]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you, Madam Chair. Ms. Katt, on the smaller schools, describe the relationship as far as getting services to them. Is it primarily the issue delivered in a region or they multicontract with districts? Or what kind of way do they go about doing that as far as small schools? [LB507]

SHARON KATT: In the case of the endorsement that we call special education, and it used to be special ed mild/moderate, I think you would find that most schools do indeed employ at least one special educator. Now, to the extent that there are unique needs, behavioral or visual or a variety of other lower incidence issues, I think they are very much engaged with sharing resources with the Educational Services Units. But even those individuals who are employed as the special education endorsed person would be well connected with the Educational Service Unit. [LB507]

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SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you. [LB507]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Any other questions? Thank you for your testimony. [LB507]

SHARON KATT: Thank you. [LB507]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Welcome. [LB507]

JODI KUPPER: Thank you. Senator Sullivan and members of the Education Committee, good afternoon. My name is Jodi Kupper. I'm the vice chancellor for academic planning and partnerships for the Nebraska State College System. I'm here today to testify in the neutral on LB507 in both my current role and as my most recent previous role as dean of education at Peru State College which I held for the last nine years. The proposed changes in LB507 would require both elementary and secondary candidates pursuing certification in special education to pass a multisubject content exam that includes subsections of literacy and English language arts, mathematics, and arts and sciences. Ensuring that candidates have the requisite knowledge and skills to positively impact student learning is to be commended and the NSCS supports the general intent of this bill. However, beginning September 1, 2015, as Ms. Katt said, the Nebraska Department of Education will require the passing of a discipline-specific content examination as part of certification requirements for all Nebraska teacher education endorsement programs including special education. Nationally established Praxis II content exams developed by the Educational Testing Service have been selected and minimum scores identified through multistate scoring procedures. Each exam is broken down into specific subsections that reflect the critical knowledge and skills for educators in that discipline as defined by content-specific national organizations for teacher education. In order for an individual to receive a Nebraska teaching certificate on or after September 1, he or she will need to pass one or more Praxis II content exams based upon the requested endorsements for certification. The upcoming content exam requirement for certification by NDE sufficiently meets the intent of this bill for those pursuing a special education endorsement and extends beyond this single program to include all endorsement programs in Nebraska. Therefore, we believe that the outcome that this bill sought is already in place to ensure successful evaluation of the knowledge and skills of special educators. Thank you for the opportunity to speak. [LB507]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Ms. Kupper. Just to backtrack a little, could you spell your last name? [LB507]

JODI KUPPER: Sorry, J-o-d-i and then K-u-p-p-e-r. [LB507]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you very much. Are there any questions for her? Thank you for your...oh, Senator Baker. Sorry. [LB507]

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SENATOR BAKER: Ms. Kupper, the exams you're giving, will there be separate exams for elementary and secondary for special education or will it be one? [LB507]

JODI KUPPER: There is one exam for special education. Slight reference was made to the fact that sometimes developmentally, elementary versus secondary doesn't have as clear cut of grade levels and maybe cognitive abilities. And so there is one exam for the K-12 spectrum. [LB507]

SENATOR BAKER: Thank you. [LB507]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you for your testimony. [LB507]

JODI KUPPER: Thank you. [LB507]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: (Exhibit 1) Anyone else in a neutral capacity? We'd like to read into the record another letter in the neutral area, Jay Sears of the Nebraska State Education Association. Senator Cook, for closing. Senator Cook waives. And that closes the hearing on LB507. We will now move on to LB508. Welcome back. [LB507]

SENATOR COOK: Thank you. Thank you, fellow members. I am still Tanya Cook. It's still spelled T-a-n-y-a C-o-o-k. I'm the introducer of LB508 which directs the Nebraska Department of Education to formulate standards of excellence for the next generation of professional educators. High entrance benchmarks, curriculum requirements, and subject area proficiency assessments will ensure that Nebraska teachers colleges meet and exceed national competition. Here is how the bill as introduced would operate: LB508 would require approved teacher education programs to have minimum entry requirement of a grade point average of not less than 3.0 on a 4.0 scale or a grade point average in the top 50th percentile for coursework completed during the most recent two years of the applicant's education. Also, LB508 would require approved teacher education programs to have minimum entry requirement of demonstrated mastery of general knowledge as determined by the State Board of Education on a standardized test. Finally, this legislation provides the Board of Education rule making and regulatory authority to carry out the requirements of the bill. I want to make it clear from the outset, this legislation is not antagonistic to professional educators, to the teacher preparation programs, or to our state's public school systems. Rather, the aim of this bill is to ensure national competitiveness with excellence in education and make it clear that education careers are challenging and require a great deal of specialized, preservice learning to optimally educate the next generation. I understand that grade point average and standardized testing does not make up the whole value of the person and certainly not a person's potential in general or as an educator. This proposal uses grade point average and standardized testing because they are recognized as benchmarks for academic achievement. The teaching profession is just that, a profession. I am the daughter of

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two professional educators and I value the field as critical to stemming the tide of generational poverty and helping each individual meet his or her full potential in life. Just as in the previous legislation, LB507, I am pleased to announce the Nebraska Department of Education in concert with the Council for Accreditation for Educator Preparation are currently collaborating to update standards for admission into Nebraska teacher preparation programs. The Council for the Accreditation for Educator Preparation is a national accreditation agency for teacher preparation programs. Testifiers to follow will be able to outline the efforts of this collaboration as well as national trends that Nebraska might be wise to lead. Needless to say, I am extremely pleased, again, that the Nebraska Department of Education is beginning to implement the core principles of this bill. The State Board of Education is moving forward with plans to implement a cohort GPA minimum, meaning that the average GPA for the entire entering class must meet a minimum. This cohort GPA average ensures strengthening standards without disallowing individuals who may make excellent teachers but fall slightly below a strict GPA cutoff. Like LB507, I'm very pleased that the substance of this legislation is being achieved without the necessity of legislation being passed. After meeting with the Nebraska State College System and others, I am comfortable with the progress being made by executive policymaking bodies to do their part to enhance the culture of excellence in Nebraska's public school system. Thank you again for your attention and consideration of the proposal in its current form. [LB508]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Senator Cook. I...you may have mentioned this but it was an oversight on my part, when do you propose to have this implemented, 2019? Is that what it's...what you were indicating? [LB508]

SENATOR COOK: This doesn't...the introduction doesn't say that. I would have to make...look at my green copy for 2019. [LB508]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Okay. [LB508]

SENATOR COOK: The challenge is, of course, that there are already students in teacher prep programs and we don't want them to have to start all over. Yes, you are correct, Madam Chair. The first...Section 1 of the green copy calls for the State Board, "through the Commissioner of Education, pursuant to Section 79-318 on and after January 1, 2019, a teacher education program shall have the following minimum entry requirements." [LB508]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Okay. Do we have any idea now...anything about the information of teachers going into the profession and their...anything about their... [LB508]

SENATOR COOK: We do, and it's anecdotal. [LB508]

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SENATOR SULLIVAN: Okay. [LB508]

SENATOR COOK: The information that I would share with you... [LB508]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: All right. [LB508]

SENATOR COOK: ...it is gathered...I...not necessarily in a consistent manner, from my understanding, to be able to compare and contrast which is what the movement of the agency, in part, is about, to be able to not only set a standard but--and one that is high enough, recognizing the professionalism--but also to be able to track, if you will, where our students of education are. [LB508]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: And what about the pool of potential educators in the state? What do we know about that? [LB508]

SENATOR COOK: What I have learned, and I am encouraged by, is that particularly when we hear from the state colleges, students enter and have the opportunity, perhaps, to work up from where they left off in high school and with those two years of general education in the state college are able to be at the level that I originally had the bill drafted. (Laugh) In other words, there are students, many students, that are interested in the area of education. They come from different backgrounds. And they might not enter the state college or university with a certain GPA but through their work in general education and through the mentoring into the area, into that career area, are able to work up to that number that we have described in the bill proposal and beyond. [LB508]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: And while this isn't really directly related, do we know primarily where our teachers are being prepared, in which educational institutions, mostly state colleges, or do we know that? [LB508]

SENATOR COOK: I don't know that off the top of my head. [LB508]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Okay. [LB508]

SENATOR COOK: But they...I know there are teacher education programs at the university and at our state colleges. And when we talk about pre-K or early education, there are teacher preparation programs at community colleges. This is not aimed at that. This is aimed at K-12 educators. [LB508]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Okay. Very good. Any other questions for Senator Cook? Okay. Thank you. [LB508]

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SENATOR COOK: Thank you. [LB508]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Anyone wishing to speak in support of LB508? Anyone wishing to speak in opposition? Or in a neutral capacity? [LB508]

JODI KUPPER: Hello again. [LB508]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Welcome back. [LB508]

JODI KUPPER: (Exhibit 1) Thank you. Senator Sullivan and members of the Education Committee, good afternoon. Again, my name is Jodi Kupper, J-o-d-i K-u-p-p-e-r. I'm vice chancellor for academic planning and partnerships with the Nebraska State College System. I'm here today to testify in the neutral on LB508. LB508 would establish specific minimum criteria for all candidates who apply for admission to a teacher education program in Nebraska. These include a GPA of 3.0 that reflects two years of education and a standardized test such as the Praxis Core, SAT, or ACT. I'm very supportive of high expectations for teacher education programs in Nebraska and in my previous role as dean of education worked diligently to ensure that the candidates were well prepared for the classroom and able to positively impact student learning. However, I would like to caution the committee about putting minimum criteria into state law as the field of teacher education is at a critical point of evolution in the assessment of teacher candidates. Both the Nebraska Department of Ed and the Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation, CAEP, from which Standard 3 is the handout, have recently updated their admission criteria for teacher ed programs. However, CAEP has not chosen to identify minimum criteria for the individual but has instead chosen to establish minimum criteria for each group or cohort of candidates who are admitted each semester, as Senator Cook mentioned. This provides more latitude to institutions that prepare educators. This includes a mean cohort GPA of 3.0 for each group of candidates submitted and allows for a percentage of individual candidates to fall below LB508's suggested minimum 3.0 GPA. In addition, one of the quotes I've highlighted for you says, "many measures of both academic and nonacademic factors associated with high-quality teaching and learning need to be studied for reliability, validity, and fairness. It would be shortsighted to specify particular metrics narrowly because of the now fast-evolving interest in, insistence on, and development of new and much stronger preparation assessments, observational measures, student surveys, and descriptive metrics. Instead, CAEP should ask that providers make a case that the data used in decision making are valid, reliable, and fair." The development and implementation of state and national performance assessments for teacher education candidates is occurring across the country and may provide comprehensive and meaningful feedback on candidates' preparation and their ability to impact student learning. As CAEP acknowledges, "As better performance assessments are developed and as various licensure tests are shown to be predictors of teacher performance...CAEP may be able to put more emphasis on exit criteria rather than entrance criteria." (sic) As the evolution of

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teacher candidate assessment continues at the national level, the institutions within the state of Nebraska should have the opportunity to evolve as well. While I'm very supportive of the idea of high expectations for teacher candidates, I believe the GPA requirement introduced in this bill may have an unintended impact on candidates in Nebraska. A minimum 3.0 may limit opportunities for individuals who wish to pursue teacher ed and would otherwise be excellent candidates. Requiring the GPA to be based on two years of college may require candidates in fields such as elementary, early childhood, and elementary education to extend their time at college beyond four years since they would not be eligible for admission until their junior year. Should this bill move forward, I would suggest amending the GPA requirements so that it just states that the State Board of Education would reflect national expectations for teacher education programs. Thank you for the opportunity to speak. [LB508]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Ms. Kupper. Any questions for her? Thank you for your testimony. [LB508]

JODI KUPPER: Thank you. [LB508]

SHARON KATT: Again, good afternoon. [LB508]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Welcome back. [LB508]

SHARON KATT: Sharon Katt, and that's spelled S-h-a-r-o-n, last name is K-a-t-t. [LB508]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: And you have a green sheet? [LB508]

SHARON KATT: I have a green sheet, yes, I have a green sheet. So busy spelling my name... (Laughter) I am here to testify in a neutral position related to LB508. And again, my interest in this is I work with the Nebraska Department of Education as senior administrator for adult program services inclusive of the teacher preparation program approval and teacher certification. LB508 addresses minimum credentials for all...or criteria for all candidates who apply to admission to teacher ed programs in Nebraska. We are...we use two major rules to address admission requirements. One is Rule 23, which is the basic skills testing of administrators and teachers which I mentioned earlier, and Rule 20, which outlines specifics related to colleges of teacher education requirements for admission. There are 16 Nebraska teacher preparation programs. Three are in the university settings. Three are in state colleges. And ten then are in private schools. To the question that was asked earlier, approximately 33 percent of our teachers come from the private sector...from the private institutions, approximately 20 percent from state colleges, and then the balance from the university structure. The recent changes: August of '14 we did increase the GPA requirement to include a 2.75 for admission to teacher...to student teaching. We have a 2.5 for admission and a 2.75

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per individual for admission to student teaching. There's considerable constituency conversation about going higher. We do know anecdotally that most of the institutions, if they look across the cohort, are seeing their candidates at a 3.0 or better. So they already are meeting that standard. We chose not, however, to go to a 3.0 in rule because we do...we were concerned about potential unintended consequences of limiting candidates who, with appropriate supports and/or who will perform well on other indicators, would be excellent candidates and not wanting to keep them away from the teaching profession. Dr. Kupper very well explained the national accreditation standards. I won't rego through that. Contrary to national statistics, I would also mention another piece of information that we do...have determined, and that is that Nebraska candidates for teaching generally do come from the upper 50 percent of their graduating class. And in fact, a significant number come from the upper 25 percent of their graduating class. And we do want the brightest and we do want the best to become our teachers. However, we also are working with things that allow us to attract those individuals on multiple criteria rather than just a GPA or a class rank or a test score. We're working on a much stronger accountability system that relies on fair and appropriate and multiple measures, a first-year teacher/employer survey managed by NDE, a common student teaching evaluation that will be used by all districts...and there is that nasty red light again. (Laughter) So, you know, regardless of all of this, we do so appreciate your interest and your support for helping us to assure that we are preparing the best teachers we can for Nebraska students. It is, after all, as Senator Cook indicates, a profession, and we wish to move forward in that way. So, any questions for me? [LB508]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Ms. Katt. Any questions for her? Senator Pansing Brooks. [LB508]

SENATOR PANSING BROOKS: Thank you, Madam Chair. Ms. Katt, thank you for your testimony. I guess I'm interested, a 2.5 GPA means that that's the average GPA, correct, that's... [LB508]

SHARON KATT: In the case... [LB508]

SENATOR PANSING BROOKS: ...takes all the classes and... [LB508]

SHARON KATT: Yes. It is a cumulative GPA. [LB508]

SENATOR PANSING BROOKS: So that would mean, to get there, we're having as many 2.0 classes grades as 3.0 class grades to get to... [LB508]

SHARON KATT: Potentially. [LB508]

SENATOR PANSING BROOKS: Okay. Thank you. I just...it seems like a really low

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standard. So what are the other factors that you could have to encourage a teacher to teach with a 2.5 GPA? What are the other...you mentioned other factors to use other than the GPA. So I'm just interested in what kinds of other factors. [LB508]

SHARON KATT: An institution already looks at things like actual performance in those courses, interviews with faculty who have worked with those students, interviews with the actual candidates, performance in field...early field experiences and how the student conducted themselves in that experience. The individual will not be admitted into the clinical experience with...the individual must have a 2.75 at the point that they're admitted into clinical experience. So 2.5 only gets them into the preadmission...or gets them admitted to the teacher preparation program. And by the time they are entering their clinical experience, they must have a 2.75 which would be then more inclusive of professional education courses as well as some of the content courses. [LB508]

SENATOR PANSING BROOKS: So when you...okay, they have to have a 2.75 to get to take other courses, you're telling me? And what kind of grade point do they have to have to graduate then? I think I don't understand it quite, maybe. [LB508]

SHARON KATT: That would be an institutional decision on what...a grade point average to graduate. That would not be controlled by our Rule 20. We do not say, for example, in order for you to get your teaching license, you have to have a grade point average of X. [LB508]

SENATOR PANSING BROOKS: So people could have a 2.75 basically and teach any course in the school district that they're hired to teach? Is that correct? [LB508]

SHARON KATT: No. They must have a 2.75... [LB508]

SENATOR PANSING BROOKS: How much to they have...they're endorsed and then... [LB508]

SHARON KATT: ...to be allowed to go out to student teach. [LB508]

SENATOR PANSING BROOKS: Okay. [LB508]

SHARON KATT: And then student teaching, typically the last semester... [LB508]

SENATOR PANSING BROOKS: Right. [LB508]

SHARON KATT: ...of their teacher preparation program is graded by or evaluated by the school...by the institution. And the institution, at least in Nebraska, is very concerned about the individuals that they're sending out. And so through the process of evaluating that individual, it is possible that an individual will not do well in a student teaching or a

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clinical experience, and that person would, therefore, not be recommended for certification. But the responsibility for recommending an individual for certification based on student teaching as well the rest of the development rests with the institution. [LB508]

SENATOR PANSING BROOKS: Well, I would totally agree that there are other factors that can make somebody a great teacher other than their ability, necessarily, to get a good grade. But that's certainly one factor that... [LB508]

SHARON KATT: Absolutely. [LB508]

SENATOR PANSING BROOKS: ...you've certainly set up in the school system to be able to determine whether or not somebody is meeting the minimum standards, and I think that's an amazingly low level. Thank you. [LB508]

SHARON KATT: Um-hum. [LB508]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Any other questions? Thank you for your testimony. [LB508]

SHARON KATT: Thank you. [LB508]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: (Exhibit 2) Anyone else in a neutral capacity? I would like to read into the record another letter in a neutral capacity from Jay Sears of the Nebraska State Education Association. Senator Cook, to close. [LB508]

SENATOR COOK: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, committee, for your consideration. Very briefly, the intent with the introduction of LB508 and LB507 is to be...provide an opportunity for our state to be leaders in terms of teacher quality. We hear too often in our floor debates about, Nebraska is 49th in this, or we're in the middle of the pack there. I think that everyone on this committee, while we don't agree philosophically on everything, we do agree that teaching is a profession and that our students deserve to have classroom teachers who know their content area and who are well versed in the instructional skills necessary to impart that knowledge. So thank you again for your consideration. [LB508]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you. Any other questions for Senator Cook? [LB508]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Can I ask one? [LB508]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Senator Kolowski. [LB508]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you, Madam. Senator Cook, thank you for your bills today. And can I ask you your personal feelings...as you stated, where you come from

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with the standards you're talking about here. But as you hear about Teach America...
[LB508]

SENATOR COOK: Oh, boy. [LB508]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: ...and some of the other programs we've been exposed to in
the last day or two, the... [LB508]

SENATOR COOK: Yes. [LB508]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: ...where do you stand on a person volunteering for two years
and doing...with very minimal training put into a classroom and all the rest? [LB508]

SENATOR COOK: Right. I'm hearing my mother's voice from heaven calling, and I
won't say exactly what she's saying but my mother was a proud public school educator
her entire...for most of her career as was my father after he retired from the Air Force.
And we would, you know, see those movies about police officers and army generals
who go in to take over a school building. And they would kind of chuckle to themselves
about what it takes to manage a classroom, what it takes to, once again, to impart the
knowledge, one's instructional skills. I have no doubt...and I've known young people
who have gone to Teach for America for a couple of years. One young man I'm thinking
of in particular is...had planned to go to medical school after that. But it...being a
classroom teacher and being successful at it involves more than being a smart person
yourself. And certainly I wouldn't wish anyone taking that on as a challenge anything but
the best of luck. But to merely say that, I can come out of XYZ competitive university
and take on a classroom of children in poverty in a city like New York City or Chicago or
Omaha, I don't know that A plus B equals C. I think that teacher education is very, very
important. [LB508]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you. I knew your mother and I think she would agree
with you. [LB508]

SENATOR COOK: Thank you. [LB508]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Any other questions for Senator Cook? [LB508]

SENATOR PANSING BROOKS: I guess, could you just speak, Senator Cook, to the
discussion before that was...I think it was with Ms. Kupper that said that the...that there
are already regulations which require some of these standards? Now we've just heard
two different things where there's a much lower standard in...with one group. But
certainly here we're seeing 3.0 and 50 percent...or 40 percent, I guess. [LB508]

SENATOR COOK: In my conversations, I certainly did not want to be a barrier to a

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student that might enter a state college, let's say Peru State College, with a 2.5. So I'm open that she or he could get to a 3.0 by the time it's for the down and dirty teacher education. But I agree with you, I think there is sometimes an attitude, whether it's at university or at colleges, that people "end up" in the teacher education program or in the teacher college because, for whatever reason, they can't handle engineering or another program. So while I'm encouraged that there is a national dialog, I would tend to agree with you that, you're right. A 2.5 means you could have a 2.0 plus a 3.0. What I'm encouraged by is that when we did our research, the University of Nebraska at Omaha, most of the students are at a 3.0 or better in that program of study. [LB508]

SENATOR PANSING BROOKS: Well, I can't even stand the thought of somebody thinks that people end up in education because... [LB508]

SENATOR COOK: Nor... [LB508]

SENATOR PANSING BROOKS: ...of course, they're our hope for the future, the teachers. They're...and the teachers that I know, maybe I would be surprised that somebody did receive a much lower grade whom I think is an excellent teacher because there are so many other factors. But I just think, again, we have to support great leadership within education. And that's how education will thrive. [LB508]

SENATOR COOK: I agree. Thank you. [LB508]

SENATOR PANSING BROOKS: Thank you. [LB508]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Any other questions? Thank you. [LB508]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: We'll now move on to LB489. Senator Sullivan, please. [LB489]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Senator Kolowski and fellow members of the Education Committee. For the record, my name is Kate Sullivan, K-a-t-e S-u-l-l-i-v-a-n, representing the 41st Legislative District, here today to introduce to you LB489. LB489 is a bill that I'm introducing on behalf of First Five Nebraska which expands the eligibility for grants from the Early Childhood Education Endowment Cash Fund. LB489 would allow grants to be issued to childcare centers in school districts that partner to provide educational services and experiences for young children through the Sixpence Early Learning Fund. LB489 assures communities that childcare providers voluntarily partnering with a school district to receive a Sixpence Early Learning grant will provide high-quality early learning experiences. LB489 accomplishes this by requiring the childcare provider to collaborate with the school district on the provision of educational programming and experiences provided to children and also requires the childcare providers to enroll in the...Nebraska's childcare transparency and accountability system known as Step Up to Quality. The Sixpence Early Learning Fund was established

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through legislation in 2006 and the first partnerships were funded in 2008. Sixpence provides high-quality early childhood experiences for at-risk children from birth to age three and their families in their homes or in education centers or both as decided by that local community. Children served in education centers receive full day, year round, early childhood education while children and families served at home are provided support through a parenting engagement specialist that empowers parents to create strong early learning environments in their home. LB489 gives communities another option for closing the achievement gap for Nebraska's youngest and most at-risk children. Closing the gap early is critical because a significant number of Nebraska's children arrive at kindergarten unprepared to learn due to a lack of high-quality developmental experiences during the infant and toddler years. Moreover, many school districts currently lack the space, staff, and resources necessary to provide full day, year round services for infants and toddlers. LB489 overcomes these factors by making private childcare providers a part of the solution. LB489 does not seek any additional state funds, just the ability to issue grants to schools and childcare providers that partner in order to provide enriching early childhood education experiences to our children that need them most. I ask for your support in advancing LB489 to General File. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you very much. And from our travels in the last year, as we went around the state, we witnessed a city where these...this program was in effect. And would you describe the home aspect, training with the parents, that went on as we heard about that Sixpence program in that location? [LB489]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Well, I mentioned that some of these actually take place in the home. I think what we saw also in Broken Bow was a wonderful example of the parents coming in and receiving some education by the facilitator and really learning how to more effectively interact with their child. Now, what happens with this proposal is unique in that the school district will form a partnership with a local childcare provider to make sure that that local childcare provider is getting more education so that they can become more effective in their role as not only a childcare provider but really an educator for that young child in the childcare setting. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Would you tell us about the grants as far as the fiscal note, as far as... [LB489]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: It's a little misleading because, if you recall, I indicated that I'm not requesting any state funds. The fiscal note and the interaction with the Department of Health and Human Services, if you...well, let me back up and say, as part of this grant project, the childcare provider would have to agree to become part of that assessment system that we're calling Step Up to Quality. And that is an assessment system that assures the local childcare provider is getting the education to become more effective in his or her role. And there is an assessment system in the Department of Health and Human Services to gauge that. They were assuming that there would be

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more childcare providers requesting involvement in the Step Up to Quality program. I don't deny that except, there are limited funds that will be available through First Five and the Sixpence program and you're going to hear more about that in a little bit. So there simply wouldn't be grant dollars for this partnership to be forged between the childcare provider and the...and First Five. So again, we don't expect that there would be any more dollars. We're going to be leveraging...this first go around with these, we're going to be leveraging federal dollars, part of which would be...a small portion that would be used for these projects. The remainder would be used for the Step Up to Quality. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: And we heard throughout the state people speaking up about the desire to have additional early childhood opportunities for their communities. And this was one of them that was very impressive and we saw a great deal going on with those. Any questions from the committee, please? Seeing none, thank you. Do we have proponents for this particular bill, please? Good afternoon. [LB489]

K.C. BELITZ: (Exhibit 1) Good afternoon, sir. Good afternoon, Chair and members of the Education Committee. My name is K.C. Belitz, K, period, C, period, last name is B-e-l-i-t-z. I'm the president of the Columbus Area Chamber of Commerce and I'm also a member of Nebraska's Early Childhood Business Roundtable and I'm happy to testify on behalf of both of those entities today in favor of LB489. First, the Early Childhood Business Roundtable, which I'm sure many of you know, is a statewide network of business leaders who believe that early childhood needs should be a top priority in our state. As a roundtable, We've been traveling the state for around four years now meeting in local chambers of commerce with business leaders in places that have included Omaha, Lincoln, Bellevue, Norfolk, Kearney, York, North Platte, Columbus, Scottsbluff, and South Sioux City. There are certainly lots of reasons why early childhood should be a top priority for our state. But our main interests, as a business roundtable, include economic development, of course work force development, and the return on investment that quality early childhood education generates for our state. I know some of our members have testified in front of you during your interim hearings last fall that were referenced a minute ago. So rather than expand upon those points today, we'll just proceed right to the legislation in front of the committee that we are pleased to support and that we think will help Nebraska make progress. Two weeks ago, the roundtable testified in support of LB547 in the Health and Human Services Committee that would use existing Child Care, Community Development Block Grant funds to increase quality early childhood grants throughout the state. And we're testifying in favor of LB489 today because, for the first time, it would allow private childcare providers to participate in those local public/private partnerships and by doing so, we believe LB489 further encourages and engages the private sector to help bring quality early childhood to communities across the state. And certainly that is something that we appreciate. While Sixpence itself is a great example of public and private resources coming together to fund quality early childhood, I think it's the local

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partnerships it promotes that are truly powerful. And that's because these local partnerships can leverage additional private resources and provide a platform by which to scale up the Legislature's early childhood efforts over time. In Columbus, for instance, we were one of the first communities to apply for and receive a Sixpence grant and we were one of the first chambers to host a dialog for local business leaders on this issue a few years ago and have been pleased to support the Sixpence partnership in our community. We continue our work specifically with Columbus Community Hospital and other entities to take things to the next level in Columbus. Certainly there is no issue more challenging today than providing quality care for our youngest citizens and our chamber has been working on this issue in Columbus for several years. And we know firsthand there are significant barriers to providing the care and development that all of us around this table want for our children. As such, any tool that is provided by the Legislature, such as LB489, is welcome. And certainly this bill will assist many communities including ours in such efforts by allowing those private childcare providers to become part of the solution. Between the efforts of state government, the Legislature, the business community around the state, the Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the university, and various other entities and providers, great potential does exist to make our state a model for early childhood. And that's an exciting prospect, I think, for all of us. I appreciate your time today and certainly urge your support for LB489. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Belitz. And thank you for your leadership in this capacity across the state and for your outstanding statements today. Any questions, please, for Mr. Belitz? Seeing none, thank you very much. [LB489]

K.C. BELITZ: Thank you. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Welcome. [LB489]

JEN GOETTEMOELLER: (Exhibit 2) Good afternoon. Senator Kolowski, members of the Education Committee, for the record, my name is Jen Goettemoeller. That's J-e-n, the last name is G-o-e-t-t-e-m-o-e-l-l-e-r. I'm here on behalf of First Five Nebraska to thank Senator Sullivan for introducing this legislation and also for your time this afternoon. LB489 outlines a meaningful path for Nebraska communities to design local efforts that will close the achievement gap for children who are very much at risk of failing in school. The achievement gap is not just about failing test scores or dropping out of high school. To be successful, children need the skills to control their emotions, to plan, to focus their attention, make good choices, follow through, and develop good judgement. Those types of skills do not suddenly appear in adolescence. They must be built. And the research is clear that if they're going to be strong, the foundation must be built in the first three years. The development of the brain in those early years literally shapes the learning capacity for the rest of a child's life. There is a growing number of young children who face serious threats to their development. We can point the finger at their parents, at the economy, at a host of things. But the reality is, 42 percent of young

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children in Nebraska ages zero to five face significant obstacles during their formative years that will disrupt brain architecture and future learning. If we don't intervene strategically when it makes the most financial sense to do so, we'll continue to have increased demands not only on our education system but also on behavioral health, corrections, public assistance. Senator Sullivan's legislation builds on what is already working in 25 communities across the state. These communities are seeing the achievement gap close early when the brain has the most plasticity which is the capacity for change. Now, they are not sitting babies and toddlers at desks and teaching them how to write their name or learn how to read. Instead, they are surrounding children at risk with responsive relationships from their parents and other caregivers. That's what is building brain architecture. That effort is called Sixpence. Sixpence is a public/private early childhood endowment led by a six-member, Governor-appointed board. Their investments into Nebraska communities are both financial and nonfinancial but currently limited to partnerships led by this public school system. Senator Sullivan already mentioned to you that this bill allows childcare providers, and I want to make sure that you understand it's both center and home...childcare home providers who are doing childcare in their home, to receive Sixpence grants partnering with the schools. Right now, that's not allowed because they would have to be certified teachers. I see a yellow light so I want to make two final points on the fiscal side of things. One, Sixpence provides early childhood resources outside of TEEOSA which we think is very important. Second, it works in tandem with LB547 which you have just heard a little bit about. That bill allocates federal funds to Sixpence to fund the partnerships that this bill makes allowable. So it's important to know that only federal funds will be used and no state funds are needed for either LB489 or LB547. I've got a red light so I'm going to stop there. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Jen, thank you very much. Thank you for your testimony and for the work that you do in this capacity. We're glad to have your testimony today. [LB489]

JEN GOETTEMOELLER: You bet. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Any questions from the committee, please? Mr. Groene. [LB489]

SENATOR GROENE: Is this all based off of what passed in 2006 where they...private fund for early childhood in our constitution? [LB489]

JEN GOETTEMOELLER: Right, so there were investors that put up \$20 million of their own money. And those dollars are invested and then there are \$40 million from the Education Lands and trust Fund (sic). The other... [LB489]

SENATOR GROENE: But then you just said there's only federal money. There would be

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no state money. [LB489]

JEN GOETTEMOELLER: So what is currently proposed in legislation will only use federal dollars. So we do currently have earnings off of the \$40 million in the Education Lands and Funds and that is currently going out in grants across the state combined with the earnings from the \$20 million in private. [LB489]

SENATOR GROENE: Because if I...I remember that back in '06, it was pretty clear that it had to be public schools. [LB489]

JEN GOETTEMOELLER: Right. And so what this legislation is doing is really broadening that and allowing for private childcare providers or even private schools could also partner with the public schools, because there are some communities I know that the public and the private schools actually do a lot together and so this legislation would allow for that. [LB489]

SENATOR GROENE: I guess I'm not getting it, but how can it only be private federal money then if it's tied to this? [LB489]

JEN GOETTEMOELLER: So the companion bill or the bill that works in tandem with LB489 is LB547 and so I can get you some more information on that bill, too. That bill was actually heard in the Health and Human Services Committee. There were some new federal funds in the Child Care and Development Block Grant that we have to spend on improving the quality of early childhood efforts. And so it's those funds that LB547 is allocating. [LB489]

SENATOR GROENE: And they can be used for private is what you're...mixing them but not mixing them and then tying in private? [LB489]

JEN GOETTEMOELLER: So private providers could certainly be a part of the effort if this legislation were passed. And that is what we're attempting to accomplish here today. Does that make sense? [LB489]

SENATOR GROENE: But wasn't what passed in... [LB489]

JEN GOETTEMOELLER: I'll get you some more information on LB547. [LB489]

SENATOR GROENE: But wasn't what passed in '06 a constitutional amendment not a law? [LB489]

JEN GOETTEMOELLER: There was a constitutional amendment and then also a legislative bill. LB1256, I believe, was the number, um-hum. [LB489]

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SENATOR GROENE: Thank you. [LB489]

JEN GOETTEMOELLER: You bet. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Any other questions, please, committee? Thank you very... [LB489]

JEN GOETTEMOELLER: If I... [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Yes, go ahead. Sure. [LB489]

JEN GOETTEMOELLER: If I...I'm sorry, if I could also just clarify that none of the grants that go out actually go through First Five Nebraska, just in case there was a question about that. That will be...that should be cleared up later but just for the record. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you very much. [LB489]

JEN GOETTEMOELLER: Thank you so much. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you. Good afternoon, Dr. Breed. Welcome. [LB489]

ROGER BREED: (Exhibit 3) Thank you. Senator Kolowski, Senator Sullivan, members of the Education Committee, the Greater Nebraska Schools Association, representing 24 school districts enrolling two-thirds of Nebraska's 300,000 public school students offers the following testimony in support--and I'd like to note that this is in support of something--of LB489. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: And would you state your name for the record, please? [LB489]

ROGER BREED: I'm sorry. I'm Roger Breed. I'm the executive director of the Greater Nebraska Schools Association, R-o-g-e-r B-r-e-e-d. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you. [LB489]

ROGER BREED: LB489 continues and improves the Early Childhood Education Endowment, or Sixpence, public/private partnership initiative that respects local solutions for early childhood education needs. Allowing school districts across Nebraska to partner with community childcare providers to serve infants and toddlers if the childcare providers enroll in the Step Up to Quality program expands the reach and quality of early childhood education efforts. Enrollment in the Step Up to Quality program benefits providers by introducing high-quality standards and best practices for working with infants and toddlers. By broadening the numbers of community early

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childhood programs, the school districts with Sixpence grants can partner. LB489 provides targeted community programs providing care to infants and toddlers with resources and technical assistance to improve quality in a measurable and accountable way. In return, the community programs help build a success-based bridge from early education into K-12 schooling for our at-risk children. In summary, LB489 improves an already quality effort by expanding options available to local school districts and providers seeking to build a coordinated, high-quality early childhood education opportunity for all. I'd be happy to respond to any questions and I thank you for your consideration and commitment in support of LB489. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Dr. Breed, thank you. And thank you to GNSA as well for that support. Any questions from committee members? Seeing none, thank you very much. [LB489]

ROGER BREED: You're going to let me off easy today? [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Positive letter, easy. [LB489]

SENATOR GROENE: I got a question but I better not ask it. (Laughter) I've been nice all day. [LB489]

ROGER BREED: Oh. Are you okay? (Laughter) Okay. You get me later. [LB489]

SENATOR GROENE: Thank you. I'll corner you. [LB489]

ROGER BREED: Okay. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you, Dr. Breed. Any other proponents, please? Good afternoon. [LB489]

AMY BORNEMEIER: (Exhibit 4) Good afternoon. Senator Kolowski and members of the Education Committee, my name is Amy Bornemeier, A-m-y B-o-r-n-e-m-e-i-e-r. I work at the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation. I am a Sixpence administrator. Sixpence, as you've already heard, is an innovative and...or is an innovative early childhood public/private partnership that is closing the achievement gap for children who are most at risk of failing at school. At the core of Sixpence is the public/private partnership that is seen at many levels. The funding is a mixture of public and private dollars. The oversight occurs by a six-member, Governor-appointed, public/private board of trustees. And the grants require a local match to equal the board's investment. The private sector's involvement has been critical to the success of Sixpence. They demand accountability for their dollars, and the way Sixpence maintains accountability is by embedding technical assistance and evaluation into the model. My job is to work with the 25 grantees across the state that have a Sixpence grant including rural, urban

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areas, and Native American reservations. With dedicated technical assistance offered to all Sixpence partnerships, we can ensure the highest quality, accountability for the dollars, and the greatest impact for the children and families served. Whenever Sixpence programs face local challenges, the one-on-one technical assistance is there to help. A robust, independent evaluation of the children and the program is also embedded as a fundamental feature of which you'll hear more about later. These independent evaluations prove that Sixpence is narrowing the achievement gap prior to school entry as evidenced in the biennial report to the Legislature which you're looking at now. And I hope that that does give you a little bit more insight, helps to answer some of the questions you have about the historical perspective of Sixpence as well as the current status. In fact, you'll see a success story highlight of the Broken Bow program that some of you were able to visit prior. For some communities, Sixpence provides high-quality early care in education for infants and toddlers with an emphasis on parent engagement so they can attend work or school. This is an especially important option for teen parents who receive parent education and individualized coaching regarding their infant's developmental needs while they finish high school themselves, even gaining the skills and confidence to enter into higher education. In many communities, Sixpence programs works individually within their homes so parents can learn more about their child's development and how their interactions with their child can actually grow healthy brain architecture. Regardless of the model, Sixpence programs provide parents with the knowledge and tools to support their child's learning and development well beyond their child's third birthday. I want to share a quick success story from one of our newest grantees where a toddler who was identified early, and through that intervention, the services that family received allowed his development to get back on track. I am happy to report that the primary provider believes this child will not need special education services when he goes to school. This early intervention will save the school unknown amounts of dollars. You also have a map in front of you that shows communities who currently have Sixpence programs, communities that have applied for a Sixpence grant and were unable to be served due to the lack of funding, and communities who have declared an interest in applying when more funding is available. Clearly there is still a large unmet need in Nebraska. These communities are desperate for resources to support the educational success of their at-risk children who would otherwise arrive at school developmentally behind, requiring extra resources and remediation in special education. As you've already heard, utilizing the childcare partners as providers in that, as LB489 proposes, would allow for an extension on the reach to reach more at-risk families and children. And I would urge you to consider advancing LB489 from committee. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you, Ms. Bornemeier. How many students in the state would be involved in the Sixpence program as you look at it right now? Do you have a number... [LB489]

AMY BORNEMEIER: Currently enrolled? [LB489]

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SENATOR KOLOWSKI: without reading this...(Inaudible). [LB489]

AMY BORNEMEIER: Currently enrolled we have around 700--gosh, I just did the report--around 740 infants and toddlers that are being served by the 25 current grantees. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Seven hundred forty at this time? Okay. And that means there's a lot more out there that we certainly could... [LB489]

AMY BORNEMEIER: Correct. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: ...work with as the program expands, hopefully, over time. But thank you for your work, appreciate that. [LB489]

AMY BORNEMEIER: Thank you. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Questions? Yes, Mr. Groene. [LB489]

SENATOR GROENE: Thank you, Chairman. How much money did you dispense last year? [LB489]

AMY BORNEMEIER: I am not prepared to answer that question. I would be happy to get you a report of that. [LB489]

SENATOR GROENE: So you don't know what the average grant was either, or... [LB489]

AMY BORNEMEIER: The average...there wasn't an average grant because there are different costs for the different levels or the different types of programming options. It also depends on how many children they are seeking to serve. [LB489]

SENATOR GROENE: You said children at risk. How do you quantify or qualify which child is at risk in a town when you start one in a public school and people want to bring their kids there? How do you disqualify one and qualify another one? [LB489]

AMY BORNEMEIER: Children? Sure. Children qualify for Sixpence by meeting one of the risk factors established in the legislation that allowed for Sixpence. Being a child of a parent that has not graduated from high school, being a child of a parent that is a teen, being a child in a home that is of a language spoken other than English, qualifying for free or reduced lunch, and being born prematurely and/or low birth weight would qualify a child for a Sixpence program. [LB489]

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SENATOR GROENE: So a little school district like Garden County has maybe only, if you're lucky, 30 children infant to three years old in the whole school district. How do you qualify which of those 30 children are accepted into the program and which ones aren't? You've turned some away? [LB489]

AMY BORNEMEIER: Sure. The school district and the program actually establishes their qualification procedure. But Sixpence is required...Sixpence requires the school district to serve the most at risk. So they would have a weighted enrollment system that would allow for the most at-risk children to be served first. [LB489]

SENATOR GROENE: And if the other children, middle-class child with two parents, they pay a tuition, or...if they want into that program? [LB489]

AMY BORNEMEIER: Are you referring to center-based services? [LB489]

SENATOR GROENE: Well, this...there's one program, I think. [LB489]

AMY BORNEMEIER: There's two different program models. One is center based where early care and education programming is offered while parents work or go to school. And the other one is home based where they provide parent coaching for their child's development and helps to improve parent/child interactions in their home. [LB489]

SENATOR GROENE: So, like, a small school district like Garden County probably doesn't have a day care, basically, inside the school. They're doing it in the home. [LB489]

AMY BORNEMEIER: This legislative bill would allow that partnership to occur, correct. [LB489]

SENATOR GROENE: What are they doing right now? How is the program set up in a small community like Garden County or Chadron or Broken Bow? [LB489]

AMY BORNEMEIER: Sure, in a small community that does not have a need or have the capacity for a center-based program could choose home based as an option. And they would partner with another community agency in some manner to allow for the home visiting model to occur. [LB489]

SENATOR GROENE: I guess, Broken Bow, what are they doing right now? Is it home based... [LB489]

AMY BORNEMEIER: Yep. [LB489]

SENATOR GROENE: ...or is there a room in the school where a day care basically is?

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[LB489]

AMY BORNEMEIER: It is not an early care in education center-based program. It is a home visitation, family engagement program. [LB489]

SENATOR GROENE: So it's a home-based, all right. All right. Thank you. [LB489]

AMY BORNEMEIER: Yep, you bet. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: How is technology used to assist the parents when there might be a little more distance or inclement whether that they couldn't get together when they want to gather like we saw them in Broken Bow? Do you use technology to... [LB489]

AMY BORNEMEIER: A lot of the programs utilize iPads and they utilize the...even administratively we utilize technology to reduce costs to connect. And we'll use Skype and things of those nature, um-hum. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Okay. Do you have a...sort of a certified list of manipulatives, items you'd like to recommend or do you box up and move around to different locations that parents could check out like a library and use at home with their kids? [LB489]

AMY BORNEMEIER: That is definitely an option that some of the programs do offer. But certainly the beauty of Sixpence is that programs and communities get to develop how they want their program to fit best with the existing services that are already available. So if there's already a nice lending library in their community, they wouldn't replicate that. But if that was identified as a need, that would absolutely be an appropriate program option. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Okay. What do you do when there's a, you know, a couple of different day care centers or preschools that are in existence in a community? How do you work with them or...because you have a certain slice of candidates, parents and kids, that you're working with. But do you bring a larger picture together with these other facilities that are...might be in some towns? [LB489]

AMY BORNEMEIER: Sure, that is a great example of partnerships that occur. And this bill would actually allow for more intentional, purposeful relationships between the school district and the private childcare provider. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Excellent. Good, because the kids all come to...eventually to the same schools. [LB489]

AMY BORNEMEIER: Exactly. [LB489]

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SENATOR KOLOWSKI: And so the more cooperation you have on some of that helps a great deal. [LB489]

AMY BORNEMEIER: Right. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you. Any other questions, please? Thank you. [LB489]

AMY BORNEMEIER: Thank you. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Other proponents, please? Good afternoon, Joe. Welcome. [LB489]

JOE KOHOUT: (Exhibit 5) Good afternoon, Vice Chairman Kolowski. Members of the Education Committee, Joe Kohout, K-o-h-o-u-t, registered lobbyist appearing today on behalf of Ralston Public Schools. I'm passing out a letter from Dr. Mark Adler, the superintendent of Ralston Public Schools, in support of LB489. And Dr. Adler had wished to be able to join you today but had commitments back in the district and was unable to join you so asked that this letter be made part of the record. And I'll try to answer any questions that you might have. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you very much. And in your high school, you have an early childhood center... [LB489]

JOE KOHOUT: We do. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: ...which is very unique and I wish we had more of those around a lot of different schools because it's really...does a great job working with the kids in the community and gives your high school students very much of a hands-on exposure to the early childhood education field. [LB489]

JOE KOHOUT: That it does, and in particular, Senator, that was the one topic that was discussed by our legislative committee when they looked at LB489. They said, boy, this would be very helpful for that specific program, so. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Excellent. Excellent, Joe. Any other questions from anyone on the committee? [LB489]

JOE KOHOUT: Thank you very much. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Joe, thank you very much. Good afternoon. [LB489]

SANDRA ROSENBOOM: (Exhibit 6) Good afternoon. I am Sandy...or Sandra Rosenboom, S-a-n-d-r-a R-o-s-e-n-b-o-o-m. But I'm actually testifying in place of Kyle

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McGowan who had to stay in the district today. So I'm testifying for STANCE. And members of the committee, Senator Sullivan, Senator Kolowski, appreciate the time to speak to this important bill. STANCE would like to support Senator Sullivan's proposal to enhance early childhood programs within Nebraska communities. LB489 encourages partnerships between schools and childcare providers which will ultimately enhance the quality of service to young children. Qualifying school districts are already providing professional development trainings for the teachers of young children. Sixpence grantees are required to meet high quality standards and incorporate best practices while working with infants and toddlers. Encouraging local caregivers to participate within these professional development activities will promote the developing cognitive and social skills of children. Childcare providers and early childhood educators are spending quality time with young children. These many hours may maintain a child upon an appropriate developmental path and readiness for both physical and cognitive milestones. Partnering with childcare providers would be a helpful option for school districts who want to offer more early childhood services, however, don't have the space in their own building. Under LB489, these schools would now have more options to work with providers who are willing to meet the quality standards. Achievement gaps don't begin in kindergarten. Partnerships with parents, schools, and providers are a commonsense approach to helping children be safe and successful. I'd like to offer an open invitation to the Education Committee to visit Crete Public Schools and observe some of our early childhood programs. Crete has been a Sixpence program since 2008 and we are seeing the results of children at risk coming prepared for school. The memberships of STANCE would fully support LB489 and the intent to expand high-quality services to young children. I might share one of our success stories. In 2008, we had a teen parent who had her child when she was a senior in high school. She...through the STANCE program, she received support and graduated from school and then, since children stay in STANCE for three years, she went on to college. She graduated with a degree in education. She now works for Crete Public Schools and is in her second year as an ELL teacher. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you very much. Any questions, please? Thank you for your assistance from STANCE today, appreciate that. Additional proponents, please. Good afternoon. [LB489]

REBECCA BIMLER: (Exhibit 7) Good afternoon, Senator. Good afternoon to the members here of the Education Committee. My name is Rebecca Bimler--for the record, R-e-b-e-c-c-a B-i-m-l-e-r--and I'm the director of St. John Child Development Center in Seward, Nebraska. And I'm here to fully support LB489. St. John's Child Development Center is also a member of the Nebraska Child Care Directors Association, which I'm also here to represent the association's support on this bill. We would like to thank Senator Sullivan for bringing this bill forward. As childcare professionals, we know that good, quality environments matter. And the providers in our association are intentional about their quality. Many of us are already voluntarily participating in Step Up to Quality.

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And furthermore, we see ourselves as a crucial part of the solution to closing the achievement gap because the environments we offer to children in our childcare are healthy, stable, stimulating. The families we serve choose us because of the nurturing environments we offer. We understand that LB489, working together with Senator Campbell's bill, LB547, it encourages high-quality early childcare in partnership between childcare providers and school districts. And many childcare providers want that opportunity to partner with schools. We support LB489 because we believe we are part of the solution in providing good learning environments for children at risk. I strongly encourage you today: Advance the bill out of committee for consideration by the full Legislature. I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on behalf of this bill. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you, Ms. Bimler, and thank you for your good work in the community...in your community as well. [LB489]

REBECCA BIMLER: Thank you. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Any questions, please, for Ms. Bimler? Seeing none, thank you. [LB489]

REBECCA BIMLER: Okay. Thank you. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Additional proponents, please? Welcome. [LB489]

MELODY HOBSON: (Exhibit 8) Thank you. Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Melody Hobson, M-e-l-o-d-y H-o-b-s-o-n, and I'm the administrator for the Office of Early Childhood at the Nebraska Department of Education. The Nebraska State Board of Education and the Department of Education both support LB489. LB489 would allow Sixpence grants to school districts partnering with childcare to provide high-quality services for children of families with low incomes and other significant risk factors. As you know that research indicates that intervening early to provide high-quality experiences for infants and toddlers and their families improves the growth trajectories of young children and it is cost effective. Community-based, private childcare programs often lack resources to improve the quality of their programs. LB489 provides an opportunity to target technical assistance, coaching, and other needed resources to childcare programs serving concentrations of infants and toddlers in need. An expansion of the Sixpence program with a focus on partnerships between schools and childcare providers will reap benefits for additional numbers of children and families in Nebraska. Families choose childcare because it fits their needs. Now, Sixpence has a track record of providing high-quality outcomes that produce positive child outcomes. LB489 allows schools to partner with community programs to provide the high-quality services that are truly family centered. Additionally, the inclusion of the requirement for the childcare program to participate in and maintain

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a level of quality in Step Up to Quality allows for coordination of funds and technical assistance that is fiscally responsible, comprehensive, and transparent. As you can tell by the attached map of Step Up to Quality programs, there is interest across the state in providing high-quality childcare. We believe that Sixpence childcare partnerships will assist additional programs reach higher levels of quality and improve the outcomes of children enrolled. Thank you for your time today and your consideration of LB489. On behalf of the Department of Education and the State Board of Education, I ask you to advance the bill. Thank you. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you, Ms. Hobson. Any questions, please, from the committee? Senator Groene. [LB489]

SENATOR GROENE: Thank you, Chairman. In section (9)...I'm trying to see how this fits in. "Any school district entering into agreements pursuant to subsection (2) of this section with childcare providers must employ or contract with, either directly or indirectly, a program coordinator holding a certificate as defined in 79-807." I was looking up 79-807 but I didn't get there. The independent childcare doesn't have to have a certified teacher. A small school district has to hire an employee or can an existing preschool teacher or kindergarten teacher fill that position? [LB489]

MELODY HOBSON: The way...it could be a couple of different ways. If there is somebody that could provide those services that's already employed, you know, they may have to do some juggling around of duties. The...I'm sure the board of trustees would...I think would have to have some input on, exactly how does this roll out and what does this look like in the local community? But the idea is that childcare providers right now, for many of them it is not possible for them to get a degree right now. But this allows somebody from the school to be able to work with different childcare providers. So it kind of helps to alleviate some of the concern about not having as many early childhood endorsed people as we would like. So in some small school districts, that would be an issue. Our experience has been that, for small districts to hire someone with an early childhood endorsement, it's mixed across the state. Some places have had, you know, a dozen applicants. Other places do struggle to find one or two. But we know that that is a high priority for our colleges and universities. [LB489]

SENATOR GROENE: So an ESU might be the contractor? [LB489]

MELODY HOBSON: That's a possibility. [LB489]

SENATOR GROENE: It would have to be somebody with an early childhood development endorsement? Isn't that...I didn't get a chance but that would...that's what section 79-807... [LB489]

MELODY HOBSON: That's certainly the idea, yes. [LB489]

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SENATOR GROENE: All right. Thank you. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: How many of our institutions of the state are...offer early childhood education programs? I haven't asked that in a long time. [LB489]

MELODY HOBSON: I knew you'd ask me that. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: My wife is certified in that area, so. [LB489]

MELODY HOBSON: Honestly, it's like...I can get that for you. It's...I should have known it. We've just been through the whole early childhood endorsement revision process. And I can get that for you. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Has it gone up considerably over the last couple of years, decades? [LB489]

MELODY HOBSON: Actually, I think the number of people we are certifying has. And about ten years ago, you probably know that we went to what we called an inclusive endorsement so that providers can...so that teachers can teach both children with disabilities and children without because, as you know, the younger they are, the less...you know, they don't come to you already identified. And so people need to have that background. And we've now revised that to be inclusive to really...to beef it up a little bit. And we're getting more and more higher institutions that are offering that inclusive endorsement. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Are there...would you say most of the early childhood education candidates getting a certification endorsement in that area, are they also doubling up as far as elementary to... [LB489]

MELODY HOBSON: Depends on where they go. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: ...options for their job? [LB489]

MELODY HOBSON: If they're...if it's an inclusive endorsement, they generally don't because the inclusive endorsements are for birth through grade 3. If it's, like, a supplemental and they're just adding it on, they may add it on to an elementary endorsement. Or if somebody is coming back to get, like, an early childhood special education, it may be added on to something like a K-12 SPED or an elementary endorsement. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Okay. And at the high school level, the family consumer science endorsement, would they also have early childhood as far as a teaching area

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because they may be teaching that at the high school level? [LB489]

MELODY HOBSON: That's...generally there...now, there are some people who do have that. But that is not what is the preferred endorsement, certainly, for birth to five. One of the things that that...you know, you can have...for Rule 11, you can have an endorsement. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Okay. [LB489]

MELODY HOBSON: You can have a certificate but be working towards an early childhood endorsement. With the family consumer education endorsements, they still are...they have some growth and development in them, but they're really still geared more toward high schools students. So, I mean, it's a good place to start. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Okay. Thank you. Other questions, anyone? Thank you very much. [LB489]

MELODY HOBSON: Thank you. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Any other proponents, please? Welcome. [LB489]

SARAH ANN KOTCHIAN: (Exhibit 9) Good afternoon. Vice Chairman Kolowski and members of the Education Committee, my name is Sarah Ann Kotchian, S-a-r-a-h A-n-n K-o-t-c-h-i-a-n, and I appear in support of LB489 on behalf of the Holland Children's Movement, a nonpartisan, not-for-profit organization founded by Richard Holland, committed to improving public policies essential to providing opportunities for success for children and families living in poverty. We, too, would like to thank Senator Sullivan and the cosponsors for the introduction of this legislation and the continued attention and commitment to increasing access to effective early childhood care and education services. I'd like to thank you for your time today. There's been some great testimony this afternoon. I will be brief. We just want to go on record in strong support of the integration of the Sixpence and Step Up to Quality programs as provided for in LB489. This proposal moves Nebraska in the right direction toward a more coordinated and comprehensive partnership between parents, childcare providers, and schools. Furthermore, we believe all efforts to strengthen and link the childcare subsidy program to quality early childhood initiatives like Sixpence and Step Up to Quality are a wise state investment. And with that, I would like to thank you again for your time and consideration of this bill and respectfully ask that you advance it to General File. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you very much for your work as well. And we thank Mr. Holland as well. Thank you. [LB489]

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SARAH ANN KOTCHIAN: It would be my pleasure. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Other questions from the committee, please? Senator Groene, please. [LB489]

SENATOR GROENE: This...I didn't have a chance to read up...the board shall require childcare providers...programs receiving grants under this section to obtain a step three rating or higher. Describe a step three rating to me. Do you know? [LB489]

SARAH ANN KOTCHIAN: Sure. So the Step Up to Quality is broken down into five different steps of ratings, five being the highest, one being licensed childcare. And step three means that you...the providers have taken the initiative to move through a step two, which is a considerable amount of professional development and training and preparation for environmental and other assessments to be rated. Step three is when programs would enter a period where they can choose from a number of quality standards a specific amount of points to earn to achieve a step three. The different quality standards, because it's kind of complex and I'd be happy to bring you Step Up to Quality detailed information, but some of the quality standards include program curriculum, learning environments, interactions, child outcomes, professional development and ongoing training, family engagement and partnerships, and program administration. So there are a whole number of quality indicators that a program would have to address to achieve a step three. [LB489]

SENATOR GROENE: Nowhere in there does it all of a sudden force private providers that they have to have certified teachers under the Section 79-807, do they? [LB489]

SARAH ANN KOTCHIAN: The childcare provider themselves do not have to have a certified teacher. That would be the role of the program coordinator under this legislation. [LB489]

SENATOR GROENE: But under this step five, step four or five, does it ever reach that? [LB489]

SARAH ANN KOTCHIAN: They can...so a part of the quality standards as far as professional development, if they have a certified teacher, that could mean more points within the point system to achieve the higher rating. So it provides an incentive to have a certified teacher. And that's certainly the direction we would like to help move programs, yes. [LB489]

SENATOR GROENE: That's what I was afraid of. Thank you. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: How many children are you involved with in your program total? [LB489]

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SARAH ANN KOTCHIAN: Oh, I do...I am the vice president of education and early childhood policy. So we do not do any direct services work. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: But how many are you serving under the... [LB489]

SARAH ANN KOTCHIAN: Oh, in Step Up to Quality? [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Yes, yes. I'm sorry. [LB489]

SARAH ANN KOTCHIAN: Excuse me, no problem. As of the middle of...let's see, I think it was about two weeks ago...well, first of all, let me tell you that the Step Up to Quality program went live July 1, 2014. And as of about two weeks ago, we had over 100 programs participating, I think 115 programs participating, and over 700 staff associated with those programs entered into our new professional development records system to collect data that we have never had on the work force before. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: And the number of students under that umbrella? [LB489]

SARAH ANN KOTCHIAN: That we don't know. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: It's quite a few. [LB489]

SARAH ANN KOTCHIAN: When we...when this legislation was passed in 2013, it was estimated that more than 12,000 children would be impacted in the first two years alone and 5,000 of those would be infants and toddlers served through the subsidy. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you very much. Any other questions? Senator Groene. [LB489]

SENATOR GROENE: And do you know how much money has been spent so far out of the fund? [LB489]

SARAH ANN KOTCHIAN: On Step Up to Quality? [LB489]

SENATOR GROENE: No, on... [LB489]

SARAH ANN KOTCHIAN: On Sixpence? [LB489]

SENATOR GROENE: Yeah. [LB489]

SARAH ANN KOTCHIAN: I do not, but I'm sure we could work to find those numbers. [LB489]

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SENATOR GROENE: Thank you. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you very much, appreciate it. [LB489]

SARAH ANN KOTCHIAN: Thank you. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Any other proponents, please? Good afternoon. [LB489]

KAREN HEMSATH: Good afternoon. Thank you for having us. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Yes. [LB489]

KAREN HEMSATH: For the record, my name is Karen Hemsath, K-a-r-e-n H-e-m-s-a-t-h. I'll try to keep my remarks brief here. I am currently a center director for KinderCare Learning Centers here in Lincoln, Nebraska. And on behalf of Knowledge Universe, I would like to offer our strong support for LB489 which strengthens Sixpence public/private partnership by integrating quality standards through Nebraska's Step Up to Quality program. As the largest private provider for early childhood and education in Nebraska and the nation, Knowledge Universe is honored to provide high-quality education and to care for more than 1,200 children at our ten KinderCare Learning Centers in the state of Nebraska. More than half of the children we serve receive tuition assistance through the state to be able to attend our programs. At our early learning centers, quality is of the utmost importance. All of our centers in Nebraska are either accredited or actively pursuing national accreditation and strive to maintain a quality of service and education excellence each day. Many of our centers are also excited to be participating in the Step Up to Quality during the program's initial phases. We look forward to seeing it grow, strengthen, and attract more provider participation. One of the keys to the growth is ensuring that new opportunities are available to providers who achieve higher ratings in the program and we feel that this bill will do just that. LB489 is a positive step for Nebraska's youngest and most vulnerable children and we encourage its passage. Thank you for your time. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: (Exhibits 10, 11, 12, 13) Thank you very much. Thanks for being here today. Questions from the committee? Seeing none, thank you. Any additional proponents, please? And opponents now? Any opponents for the bill, to LB489? On LB489 we had, just to go back, a couple of additional proponents: Sam Meisels, Buffett Early Childhood Institute; Jane Carnazzo, American Academy of Pediatrics, Nebraska Chapter; and Jennie Cole-Mossman, Nebraska Resource Project for Vulnerable Young Children. And on the opponent category we have Kathy Wilmot of Beaver City. Any other opponents in the audience? And anyone of a neutral nature, please? Good afternoon. Welcome. [LB489]

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BARB JACKSON: (Exhibit 14) Hello, Senator Kolowski and members of the committee. I'm Barb Jackson, B-a-r-b J-a-c-k-s-o-n, and I direct the Interdisciplinary Center of Program Evaluation which is at Munroe-Meyer Institute which is part of the University of Nebraska Medical Center. I'm here to offer expert testimony regarding the outcomes of Sixpence program which I evaluated since its inception in 2008. I'm not here representing the University of Nebraska Medical Center. Today, I'd like to share with you the findings of the 2013-14 Sixpence evaluation to demonstrate your results of your investment in that program. In the past year, Sixpence served 25 programs across 22 different counties, 531 families last year were served and enrolled, and this was a 73 percent increase over the previous year. As Amy had indicated earlier, we're really trying in that program to serve the children most at risk and so you'll see a number of risk factors stated there: 86 percent of the families were of low income; 56 percent of the families were single-parent households; 65 percent of the families had three or more risk factors, several of the risk factors that Amy had described earlier; and trauma played the role in over 43 percent of the families. Each year, we do a comprehensive evaluation which is...has really several purposes. One is for program improvement; secondly is to really help determine how the program is being implemented; and third is to see, what kind of difference does it make in the lives of children and families? So I'd like to share with you those results by answering four different questions. First of all, what is the quality of Sixpence programs? Sixpence programs are of high quality and they embrace best practices. In-person or videotaped observations found that the majority of centers exceeded our state benchmarks that were set. Their strengths were in the area of supportive caregiving and positive adult/child interactions. Our center does a large number of observations of classrooms across the state and I can say by far that Sixpence exceeds many of those in terms of their quality. Family engagement programs also were of high quality. Parents and children were highly engaged in the process of those family engagement sessions and the instruction that were provided by that family engagement visitor were very effective in terms of supporting the parent/child interaction. The second question looks at, really, the child outcomes. And what are the child outcomes? The results show that 90 percent were gaining developmental skills at the expected rate, 96 percent of the families...or children showed meeting the widely held expectations both with respect to their social/emotional outcomes as well as their cognitive skills. The story of language development is a little more complicated. Young children's expressive skills over time stayed stable but were in the mid/average range. This suggests that participation in Sixpence really prevented the decline in expressive skills that we frequently see of children in poverty. But there were also significant increases in toddlers' expressive vocabulary over the course of time, suggesting a closing of the gap in that particular area. As we look at Sixpence in terms of their health outcomes, the health outcomes, almost all of the children met the indicators that are set by the state. And finally, what are the parent outcomes? And these are the most important because a parent stays with that child over the course of their lifetime and we know that they are key to their success of children in school. Parents showed a significant increase in their ability to support their children and their interactions,

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particularly in supporting their learning and their confidence which is very important. And 68 percent of the parents met the program goal for their relationships with their children. So as the red light is on, in summary--those...time really flies--in summary, Sixpence is a high-quality program that really is making a difference across multiple areas in terms of the child, the family, and the health outcomes. Can I answer any questions? [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Dr. Jackson, thank you very much for your statement and for the work that you do on the evaluation of this...these programs. Very good. Questions from the committee? Yes, ma'am. [LB489]

SENATOR PANSING BROOKS: Thank you. Thank you, Dr. Jackson, for your testimony. I guess I'm interested in why you're coming in neutral? [LB489]

BARB JACKSON: I'm coming in neutral because I wanted to share these...the objective findings of the report rather than coming as a proponent because I thought that might compromise my objectivity, that you'd be compromised by my objectivity. So I was trying to be objective in providing that information. [LB489]

SENATOR PANSING BROOKS: I see. So the outcomes seem pretty positive. [LB489]

BARB JACKSON: They are very positive. [LB489]

SENATOR PANSING BROOKS: Okay. And...good. That's just what I wanted to hear. Thank you. [LB489]

BARB JACKSON: Thank you. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you. Any other questions, please? Thank you very much. Thanks for being here. [LB489]

BARB JACKSON: Thank you. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Any other neutral statements from anyone? Senator Sullivan, back to you. [LB489]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Senator, and sort of piggybacking on Dr. Jackson's evaluative report of the Sixpence program, I know Senator Groene isn't here right now, but I will get this information to him as well. But just by way of background as to how many Sixpence grants we have going, we currently have 25 of them across the state. They are granted up to a maximum of \$150,000 per grant, and it has to be matching at the local level. Some of that match can be in-kind. The total amount granted out in 2014-15 year was about \$4.1 million. The number of children served--I think you heard that in a previous testimony--was about 713. And the average Sixpence funding per

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child was about \$5,800. So that kind of gives you an idea. Now, under LB489, we have the opportunity to expand how we...those grants are used and that, in essence, is a partnership between the public school district and the local private childcare provider. That can be center based or in the home. No state dollars are being used. We are simply leveraging the federal Early Childhood Block Grant dollars that are coming and we're sort of piggybacking or going in tandem with Senator Campbell's bill. They will use part of those, but it's...those dollars will be also...or, at least, I should say, part of this grant is that the local childcare provider would have to participate in the Step Up to Quality. And one thing, again, to kind of clarify, I think, something that Senator Groene was asking, in the bill it says that they have to reach...the provider has to reach at least a minimum of stage three in the Step Up to Quality. But at no time, either Step Up to...three, stage three, or four or five, would they have to be a certified provider under, I think, 75-807. So I hope that gives you a little background on what we're trying to achieve with LB489 and hope you'll consider it. Thank you. [LB489]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you, Senator Sullivan. Any questions, please, for the senator? Seeing none, thank you. And that brings us to the end of our hearing today. Thank you very much for all those who have attended and contributed to our hearing. Thank you. [LB489]