

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Appropriations Committee February 14, 2022

STINNER: Welcome to the Appropriations Committee hearing. My name is John Stinner. I'm Chairman of this committee and I'm from Gering and represent the 48th District. I'd like to start off by having members do self-introductions, starting with Senator Erdman.

ERDMAN: Steve Erdman. I represent District 47, nine counties in the Panhandle.

CLEMENTS: Rob Clements, District 2, Cass County and eastern Lancaster.

STINNER: John Stinner, District 48, all of Scotts Bluff, Banner, and Kimball Counties.

WISHART: Anna Wishart, District 27, Lincoln and Lancaster County.

KOLTERMAN: Mark Kolterman, District 24.

HILKEMANN: Robert Hilkemann, District 4, west Omaha.

VARGAS: Tony Vargas, District 7, downtown and south Omaha.

DORN: Myron Dorn, District 30, Gage County and part of Lancaster.

STINNER: Assisting the committee today is Tamara Hunt, and to my left is Clint Verner, our fiscal analyst. Our page today is Jason Wendling. After each-- at each entrance, you will find green testifier sheets. If you are planning to testify today, please fill out a sign-in sheet and hand it to the committee clerk when you come up to testify. If you will not be testifying at the microphone but would want to go on record as having a position on a bill being heard today, there are white sign-in sheets at each entrance where you may leave your name and other pertinent information. These sign-in sheets will become exhibits in the permanent record at the end of the day's hearings. To better facilitate today's proceedings, I ask that you abide by the following procedures. Please silence or turn off your cell phone. Order of testimony will be introducer, proponents, opponents, neutral, and closing. When you-- we ask that when you come up to testify that you spell your first and last name for the record before you testify. Be concise. It's my request that you limit your testimony to five minutes. That may change depending on volume. We're trying to get through a lot of hearings, so I will stick with five for a period of time. Written materials may be distributed to committee members as exhibits only while testimony is being offered. Hand them to the page for distribution to the committee and staff when you come to-- up to testify. We need 12 copies. If you have written testimony but do not

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have 12 copies, please raise your hand now so the page can make copies for you. With that, we'll begin today's testimony with LB1238. Senator Vargas.

VARGAS: Senator Stinner, members of the esteemed Appropriations Committee, my name is Tony Vargas, T-o-n-y V-a-r-g-a-s. I'll take this off to make sure you can hear me a little bit better. Today I'm here to open on LB1238. LB1238 would allocate \$50,000 to the south Omaha recovery act funds. You're getting a one-pager that just gives brief details on LB1238, more information about south, south Omaha and why this need exists. The south Omaha recovery act fund is created to provide grant funding to public and private entities utilizing funds from the federal American Rescue Plan Act or ARPA of 2021 to respond to the COVID-19 public health emergency and its negative impact within qualified census tracts located within the boundaries of a city of a metropolitan class. Now, the Nebraska Department of Economic Development would create the grant fund application process and would distribute funds based on applicant eligibility. These funds are not earmarked for any specific individual or company. They're simply being set aside to address the needs of south Omaha community. Quick note about the district, and not just my district, also Senator McDonnell's district. South Omaha contains the largest underrepresented minority group, ethnic group in the Omaha metro area. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Latinos in Douglas County represented more than one of every five cases of COVID-19, making it the hardest-hit ethnic racial group in the Omaha metro area. It has been devastating to see the unprecedented economic hardship that COVID-19 pandemic caused our communities: high unemployment, wage decreases, increased homelessness, food insecurity. It only scratches the surface. The utilization of ARPA funding for south Omaha presents an unprecedented opportunity to enhance the ability of public and private entities to respond to these disparities. These funds can be utilized to rebuild infrastructure, enhance workforce, and to promote economic development in south Omaha, all of which are desperately needed. As our committee works together to follow the guidance given to us by the U.S. Treasury Department for distributing ARPA dollars, we should be investing in the parts of our state that have been hit and greatly affected by this public health crisis. All of the metrics and data points show south Omaha is one of those communities. On a more personal level, and I haven't talked about this too much with the committee, this is obviously my home and my district, but every day I'm honored to represent south Omaha in the Legislature. I'm thrilled to come home to my community, every single night to my family. My wife, Lauren, and I cannot be more excited to raise our two kids in District 7. This is a

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community that values inclusivity, love, diversity. LB1238 provides an economic lifeline to ensure that this community can continue to flourish for generations to come. Now, I'd also like to mention that my office has been working with Senator Wayne and members of his staff on how we can work to ensure that the eastern half of Omaha is not forgotten when we're distributing these funds. And as you might notice in the language, this language and that language, that we're really prioritizing qualified census tracts, which is defined in statute as higher underemployment and unemployment, higher poverty. So it's really getting to the places that we need the most. This is not superfluous. This is targeted economic development recovery. It's my hope that we can continue to work together to do what's right for both south Omaha and north Omaha communities in a collaborative and productive manner. I know we hear this every day, but this is really one of those times where it matters more than ever and is truly a life-- once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. On that note, there are several testifiers behind me that I really want to make sure that they, they can speak further about the need for these funds in the south Omaha community. You're going to hear from nonprofit leaders, business leaders, housing developers, people that have been-- foundations working in every single sector that you can possibly think of that have been investing the time and efforts that can speak to exactly what's happened amidst this pandemic and why recovery is both necessary and needed, and that this is an economic driver for building development in Omaha, where we have opportunities to really invest dollars and create more job opportunities and meet the workforce demands that we talk about every single day. This is the opportunity for us to make sure we're retraining individuals. This is an opportunity for us to make sure that the jobs are higher paying. We're investing in companies to build and develop and also making sure small businesses can actually get through this pandemic in the long term and bring people back to south Omaha. I want to thank you because they're going to do more justice to this than I can ever do. But I just appreciate that people taking time out of their day. [SPEAKING SPANISH] Thank you so much for coming today to speak. And with that, I'm happy to answer any questions.

STINNER: Just to correct the record, you're asking for \$50 million, not \$50,000.

VARGAS: \$50 million, yes.

STINNER: Additional questions? Senator Erdman.

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ERDMAN: Thank you, Senator Stinner. Senator Vargas, you made a statement. You said this district is under-- this is the most underrepresented group. Are you saying that people that represent them in the Legislature? What do you mean by that?

VARGAS: I'm saying in terms of underrepresented ethnic group, the Latino community. This is one of the largest contingencies of Latino community across the state of Nebraska is in south Omaha. And this is also one of the most underrepresented, underrepresented groups when we're talking about economic investments that we have made in this community, and many people will talk about these data points over the next many testifiers.

ERDMAN: So you're saying they haven't gotten enough resources, that's how they're underrepresented, is that what you mean?

VARGAS: Underrepresented both in terms of the ethnicity and that group and also in terms of resources, yes.

ERDMAN: Thank you.

STINNER: Additional questions? Seeing none, thank you.

VARGAS: Thank you.

STINNER: First testifier, please. Afternoon.

ITZEL LOPEZ: Good afternoon. I shall say buenas tardes. My name is Itzel Lopez, I-t-z-e-l L-o-p-e-z. I am the vice president of advancement at the AIM Institute, an innovative not-for-profit community in downtown Omaha with a mission to grow a strong and diverse tech community. I am also the president of the Latino Economic Development Council, a 501(c)(3) empower network that's focused to create outreach, development and funding opportunities for south Omaha, as well as a member of the Greater Omaha Young Professionals Council and a small business owner. I stand here-- well, I'm sitting down. I stand here today in support of LB1238 that aims to bring \$50 million in American Rescue Plan Act funds to aid south Omaha. South Omaha is a vibrant and diverse community and is also one of the most impacted by this pandemic. The Latino community in south Omaha is the largest ethnic minority in Omaha, Nebraska. And in Douglas County, Latinos represent 13.4 percent of the total population, but are 21.7 percent of the COVID cases, making it the hardest-hit ethnic and/or racial group. Businesses and families in this district have been devastated. As a result, the community has endured physical sickness and distress while also suffering economic hardship. As someone who

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was somewhat-- no-- as someone who was once undocumented, I know what it's like to live in poverty. I grew up in south Omaha. I went to South High. I still live on South 24th Street in south Omaha. I love my south Omaha community and I want to see it prosper for businesses, organizations, and families. As a child of immigrants, I devoted my career to helping children and teens become the first members of their families to attend college. I also have a passion for volunteer work, whether that's serving as a school translator for parents who don't speak English, picking up trash in my neighborhood parks, or helping other Latinos serve in nonprofit organizations. Every single part of my community involvement have played a role in my personal development, which is where my daughter was born, and that's the community I want to create for her to have a better place. It is time, though, to address the structural barriers and oppression laid bare by the pandemic. This is the time to right some wrongs by investing in our BIPOC communities who live in east Omaha, as they have been hit the hardest by the pandemic and who have not historically received equitable funding. According to the Economic and Fiscal Impacts of Immigrant Populations on Nebraska and Omaha: Evidence from the 20--2015-2019 American Community Survey conducted by OLLAS, Latin American and Caribbean immigrants accounted for 2.6 percent of the state contributions from income, sales, and gasoline taxes. This population accounted for 2.5 percent of the total state expenditures on public assistance. That means Medicaid and education. This suggests, though, that this group has also paid into government accounts substantially more than they took out in the form of public benefits in 2019. The impact of COVID in south Omaha requires an equitable distribution of federal funds, and we hope that this committee come to a just and inclusive decision. Not only south Omaha will be better for it, but will also build future generations of Omaha in the greater state of Nebraska. Muchas gracias.

STINNER: Thank you. Questions?

ITZEL LOPEZ: OK.

STINNER: Seeing none, thank you very much.

ITZEL LOPEZ: Thank you.

STINNER: Afternoon.

ANDREA SKOLKIN: Good afternoon, Chairman Stinner and members of the Appropriations Committee. I am Andrea Skolkin, A-n-d-r-e-a S-k-o-l-k-i-n, and I am the chief executive officer of OneWorld

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Community Health Centers in south Omaha, representing the health center today, as well as the seven health centers across Nebraska, serving 107,000 patients each year. OneWorld Community Health Center, our main clinical location, is in the historic Livestock Exchange Building and in the heart of south Omaha. We have and continue our public health role, having tested more than 40,000 people, with just over 10,000 of those testing positive for COVID from 40 zip codes in Omaha and especially in south Omaha. We see the immense impact that COVID has had on the community every day in every health center, but especially south Omaha. Our COVID patients are primarily underinsured, uninsured, live on lesser income, and 80 percent are racial and ethnic minorities. We also have provided 70,000 vaccinations to protect the community, whether they are our patients or not. As you heard, the COVID pandemic has exacerbated underlying health and economic disparities. Low-income families are much more likely to work in essential or public facing jobs and have fewer resources to be able to quarantine when they test positive for COVID. They have larger transportation hurdles and access to health-- the healthcare system is much more difficult. This is especially true even in the meatpacking plants, which is one of the biggest industries in Nebraska and in south Omaha, where we have experienced large outbreaks among workers. LB1238 appropriates \$50 million from the American Rescue Plan Act to provide grant funding directed toward the south Omaha area. I stand in strong support of this legislation. It is essential to use this ARPA funding to support the communities that suffered the greatest impact from the COVID-19 pandemic. OneWorld was and is on the frontlines of the pandemic as one of very few in south Omaha who care for those that are left behind. However, healthcare alone does not stand by itself to assure the vitality of the community. Affordable housing and the livable incomes that come from economic and cultural development, along with the educational opportunities impact the ability of the community to recover and to grow. COVID has had a devastating impact, which we see on families and businesses in the area, forcing some businesses to shut down and many business owners to be exhausted with their mental health and well-being in jeopardy. Additionally, many residents work in seasonal jobs, which were once more plentiful prior to the pandemic, and also in the hospitality industry, which has also been impacted. South Omaha has not been a recipient of redevelopment funds like other communities and has been left out due to the sense, I believe, that the community takes care of itself. The good news is that the entrepreneurial spirit is alive in south Omaha. The bad news is the economic impact from the pandemic has taken its toll, and the community needs your help. South Omaha businesses and residents do not ask for a handout, but a hand-up through your support of LB1238. It is

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the right thing to do to set aside a significant portion of the funding to address specific needs of the south Omaha community that has been so hard hit. It is in line with the intention of ARPA funding to ensure community and economic development and to invest in critical businesses and services in the communities that need it the most. I would like to thank Senator Vargas for introducing this bill and encourage the committee to advance this funding to General File. Thank you and I'm happy to answer any questions.

STINNER: Any questions? Seeing none, thank you.

CESAR GARCIA: Hello, my name is Cesar Garcia, C-e-s-a-r, Garcia, G-a-r-c-i-a. I'm here today in front of the Appropriations Committee-- thank you for your time, by the way-- representing Southside Redevelopment Corporation, a 501(c)(3) organization working with the revitalization of areas in south Omaha, as well as the Greater Omaha Chamber as a board member and part of the Public Policy Council. So, you know, a lot of things has been told, been said about south Omaha and majority of those are in favor of a very vibrant community, which has been the gateway for many of the immigrants that have come to the city of Omaha. Over the years, over the decades, this community has been discriminated legally, and we can prove that by all the redlining records that happen, have been given-- taking opportunities away from them and have been passed in opportunities. I say that with a conviction that I can see it every single day when we're working on the revitalization of Southside Terrace in the Indian Hills Neighborhood, which host right now the largest public housing complex in the city of Omaha. And it's also house to one of the largest refugee communities in the Douglas County. We have an opportunity today to start making things right. Fifty million dollars that will come to this community, a community that besides and before the pandemic was already being in a crisis. Let's talk about some of the numbers: 68105, 68107, and 68108, which are typically what's considered south Omaha. There's about 70,000 residents there. Of those 70,000, close to 60,000 people have been positive in the COVID. That means all the families that affect, I could say that's almost everyone. If 25 percent of the population has been affect-- of this population have been affected, imagine the repercussions in families from their jobs, from their daily life, from their health, from their already very stressful life mentally and physically; 68107 is the seventh-largest zip code in population in the state of Nebraska out of the 580 zip codes. We're not talking here about small piece in Douglas County, we're talking about here with real lives, very highly dense areas in the population. The businesses around south Omaha are vibrant. It is not because of all the help they get, it's just because

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of their people, some of the most resilient people you'll ever meet in the state of Nebraska. We're very proud of everything that happens in, in Nebraska. You know, the farmers, we, we see it everywhere every day. Go to south Omaha and you'll see these people not complaining about anything, just waking up every single day trying to make a living, making, making it happen. This is the house, the home for many of the diverse groups of immigrants, not only Latinos, but, as I mentioned, also big group of African refugees. They already had a hard life. By the time they get here, they see in their lives that they have the American dream became true. They have no way to compare because where they come from is a lot worse at times. So here we are with the opportunity to bring \$50 million for this community to revitalize businesses, support better education, support economic development and more important, support humans that every single day in their life get on the street to provide not only for their families, for this community. I appreciate the time you give me today. I always like to speak from my heart, and that also means that there's not anything in writing, but happy to answer any questions.

STINNER: Questions? Seeing none, thank you very much. Good afternoon.

BLANCA MEJIA: OK. Hola a todos. Hello, everybody. OK.

STINNER: Hola.

BLANCA MEJIA: My name is Blanca Mejia, B-l-a-n-c-a, and Mejia, the trick is to use the H as a H. I mean, the J as a H. OK. Blanca Mejia, M-e-j-i-a. OK. I have been-- I am a lawyer in Mexico, but I live in the United States, especially in south Omaha since almost 20 years ago. I live in south Omaha. I go to the gym in south Omaha. I go to the bakery in south Omaha. My children, they went to elementary school in south Omaha. But when they went to high school, they went to west Omaha, one of the privacy schools, and it was very sad. It was very, very sad to see that sometimes his friends, they don't-- they didn't want to come to south Omaha. They have a misconception about it. And some of them, I don't want to offend nobody, OK, but this is the way that my, my children say we don't want to go to the ghetto is the way that they call south Omaha. So you have the power to give us the opportunity to prove to you that we can do many things if you gave us this money. Let me give you-- if you want to see it as economical way, just in one weekend when we have the celebration of Cinco de Mayo, according to the information, we provide \$7.5 million just in one weekend. We-- everybody, some businesses and everything. You have the power to become very proud yourselves because you make one community, one city like a landmark. I know that many of you have been traveling.

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When you go to San Francisco, most of the people, they want to go to the Golden Gate, right? When you go to New York, you want to, to visit the Statue, the Statue, Statue of Liberty. So let's make sure that when people they come to Nebraska, they want to go to south Omaha where you're going to have diversity, you want to have food, you come, you're going to have tacos, you're going to have many, many beautiful, beautiful things. And your children, they're not going to have fear to go in this part of the area that we want to become together. I love the United States. I think it's one of the best, the best country on all the Earth. That's why many people, my country, sometimes they die trying to cross to this beautiful country. So you have the power to say, why not? Let's do it, south Omaha a landmark. Let's make sure that people, when they come to Nebraska, they don't say, well, they don't have anything. Yes, we do. We do. So we have, if you give us the opportunity, you're never going to feel regret. I am the director of Generation Diamond, a nonprofit organization. We provide many services to people who have been incarcerated that they don't have hope, that they don't have anything. When they have been arrested, they don't have a state ID, they don't have a Social Security card. They don't have a place to take a shower. They don't have a place to, to feel like it's a home is what we provide. We help people. We help between 600, 800 people every month and we need to continue open. During the COVID-19, we were closed only one week and a half. We had to close, but you know what, people went, can you open the doors for us? And we did it. We continue with that. So we remove that the tools is something that makes us unique as a, as a nonprofit, we remove all the tools that they have. Sometimes our guys, they, they have to be like a 20 years sitting in jail-- I mean, in prison, but for COVID-19 now they tried to-- have started to releasing people. So we receive them and we remove that the [INAUDIBLE], that has stopped them to get a job. I know that I have a thick accent, but you know what, I'm my heart and I love south Omaha, so please, please give us the opportunity to-- you'll feel very proud by. OK? Any questions?

STINNER: Thank you. Questions? Seeing none, thank you very much.

BLANCA MEJIA: OK. Thank you.

ERIK SERVELLON: Good afternoon, my name is Erik Servellon, E-r-i-k S-e-r-v-e-l-l-o-n, and I wear many different hats in the community. Well, before that, thank you again for having this hearing. Thank you, Senator Vargas, for introducing this bill and for the LEDC and their leadership in bringing this matter before the committee. Many different hats in the community. I am deputy director of the Tri-Faith Initiative in Omaha, Nebraska. I serve on the OneWorld Community

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Health Center board of directors. You heard Andrea a little earlier. I also serve as a national-- in National Guard as a medic, and I volunteered on-- for several vaccination missions throughout this great state. Finally, I'm also a council member for the Learning Community Coordinating Council of Douglas and Sarpy County. I say that one last because when I decided to serve on this council, and I'll tell you what, I would bet all my different hats to tell you that the Learning Community is one of the best investments that this state is making for our underrepresented and under supported populations. My mom, she crossed back in '82 from El Salvador to the United States to give people like me the privilege, the opportunity to speak before you, to push for the different policy and, and, and organizations and, and just investments that can help our people, that can help people like me, can help people like the people that are behind me now. For a fraction of a fraction of all the money that this committee is going to appropriate to the state, you can impact tens of thousands of people in an unprecedented way. There are so many different stories that I want to tell you. But again, from my different hats and perspectives, I can tell you this one thing, all of them, as a National Guardsman, as, as a council member, as, as, as a board of director on Learning Community and a board director on OneWorld, people need your help. That is what it's telling me, all that service telling me that they need your help and they need your help urgently. I'm asking you and a lot of people here are asking you not for a handout, not for a give-me, for an investment to make a lot of different dreams come true, an investment to put south Omaha on a better path because we do need help. But your investment can make a lot of things happen. There have been so many stories of heroes like nurses and National Guardsmen. Let me throw another candidate into it. It's our early childhood educators and our educators in general, and there's been a lot of talk around that already. But on the Learning Community, for example, there are so many amazing people that have been supporting the south Omaha families across the many different things, helping them get food, helping them learn English, helping them get jobs, helping them become the citizens that they want to be here in the United States of America. And now we have a chance to even-- to make that an even, even stronger program. We have a chance here to make a population that is going to be 25 percent of the entire state of Nebraska population by 2050, probably by 2040, we have a chance now to make the investments and be proactive in our support of this burgeoning and emerging population now instead of being reactive many, many years from now. I, I got nothing else to say besides, thank you so much for your time. Make this investment and help so many people like me and the people behind me. Thank you.

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STINNER: Thank you. Questions? Seeing none, thank you.

MARIA VAZQUEZ: Good afternoon.

STINNER: Afternoon.

MARIA VAZQUEZ: My name is Dr. Maria Vazquez, M-a-r-i-a V-a-z-q-u-e-z. Thank you for this opportunity to testify on behalf of Metropolitan Community College in support of LB1238. This is personal for me as I am not only the vice president for Student Affairs at MCC, but I grew up in south Omaha and earned my associate's degree at MCC before completing my bachelors and PhD. So I know firsthand how MCC has consistently provided the high-quality education and training for the best value. I've seen MCC respond to the tremendous need to bring students onto pathways for high-demand careers and to create a place for the community to gather and learn. In the neighborhood surrounding our South Omaha Campus, the 2021 estimated family income is \$44,069 compared to Omaha-Council Bluffs metro median family income of \$87,700. The investment of LB1238 is important for south Omaha to thrive. For example, through a public-private partnership, MCC recently completed a \$44 million capital project on our South Omaha Campus. In this transformative project, there were three significant goals: (1) Create the Center for Advanced Manufacturing to bring the manufacturing disciplines of welding, machining, electrical, and mechanical together. Students are more prepared to meet the challenging requirements of the manufacturing industry because they are able to build a comprehensive understanding of the manufacturing practices, processes, and systems. We've created a new degree program in advanced manufacturing to develop the entry-level technicians. Our students work on real-world manufacturing projects, ensuring the development of critical thinking, communication, teamwork, and problem-solving skills. (2) Create the state-of-the-art Automotive Training Center to bring the automotive technology and collision technology programs together into one location. With more than 30 automotive bays, expanded student workspaces, and other specialized training, our programs are developing students who are prepared for high-skill, high-demand, high-wage automotive careers. Planning for this new MCC facility inspired Toyota to locate its regional T-TEN master mechanic training program to Omaha. So now MCC's program is the only training option of its kind in the Midwestern region that includes Nebraska, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, and the Kansas City metropolitan area. (3) Provide a welcoming space for veterans to capitalize on our region's military presence and provide opportunities for the many servicemen and women who return to Omaha with an exemplary work ethic, rigorous technical training and experience. The

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new Veterans and Military Resource Center is a one-stop center with a comfortable meeting and study spot for students to access enhanced career services, tutoring and community veterans resources. Even during the pandemic, this investment led to an 11 percent increase in unduplicated automotive-related enrollments and a 15 percent increase in the unduplicated manufacturing enrollments since 2017-18, which was before the pandemic and before the South Omaha Campus improvements began. The physical improvements to the South Omaha Campus will enhance the learning environments for all students, regardless of where they are on their educational journey. For the adult learner, MCC also has the MCC South Express, a dedicated facility, facility at 24th and Vinton Street, where we help English language learners and GED students prepare for the next phase of their journey. Our South Omaha Campus extends a hand to the adult learner with the Language and Literacy Center to support English language learners, as well as the faculty who teach them. And our success navigators include bilingual staff ready to assist students to complete their educational goals. As I mentioned, I grew up in south Omaha, just a few blocks from the South Omaha Campus, and I've seen how much MCC's investment has benefited our students. When students succeed, the community thrives. They go on to earn high wages and give back to the community. We've seen the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on the Latinx community due to being over-- overrepresented in industries that were hardest hit. Let's not lose this opportunity to invest in what we know works. MCC will be there to provide the educational system and support structures in partnership with organizations that this bill will empower. Our community will be much better for it. Thank you.

STINNER: Thank you. Questions? Seeing none, thank you very much. Good afternoon.

LUIS MARCOS: Good afternoon, honorable senators and distinguished community leaders behind me here today. Before I say anything else, just want to express gratitude for all your work on behalf of our human family.

STINNER: We do need to have you say and spell your name.

LUIS MARCOS: My name is Luis Marcos, Luis, L-u-i-s, Marcos, M-a-r-c-o-s.

STINNER: Thank you.

LUIS MARCOS: I am-- I belong to the Maya [INAUDIBLE] Maya Nation. We are a displaced Indigenous group in the United States. We estimate

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that there is about a million people of Maya origin living in the-- in different urban areas in the United States. We estimate that there is about 8,000 people of Maya origin in the state of Nebraska and approximately 2,000 in Omaha. Of course, this is-- these, these are, these are only estimations because there is no data about Indigenous communities in the different urban areas. It is assumed that everyone that comes from south of the Mexican border-- from south of the border is of Hispanic or Latino origin. Reality, it's not the case. We speak our native languages, many of my community members. I am executive director of Comunidad Maya Pixan Ixim, which means spirit of corn, and my constituents do not speak Spanish or English. We speak our native language and that brings a-- that means that we bring to the table distinct gifts, but also we have distinct needs. I am here to support this LB1238 because most of our people live in the south Omaha area. Indeed, our community center is in 68107. That's-- so we are right there in the heart of-- every single community member that I know survived COVID, COVID-19. I am here to express gratitude to Senator McDonnell and also Senator Vargas for introducing this LB1238 with hopes that we get your support and this really does represent an opportunity for us as Indigenous peoples to contribute to our collective efforts of fighting COVID-19 and also just the historical inequities that have existed and, and many more. We have a proposal to do regenerative agriculture, do agriculture in the way that will put fresh and nutritious, locally produced foods on our tables. We have a lot to contribute. This legislation here is-- just represents hope for us. And with that, I thank you honorable senators and my fellow leaders, community leaders behind me here for coming from all different walks of life. Thank you.

STINNER: Thank you. Questions? Seeing none, thank you very much.

LUIS MARCOS: Thank you.

KATIE WEITZ: Uh-oh, earrings. I don't know what happened. OK, so I'll just pull it down. Hi, senators. My name is Katie Weitz, W-e-i-t-z, and Katie is K-a-t-i-e. And I really was excited to bring prepared testimony today and then I didn't realize this bill was going to go first. I feel lucky to be able to testify on this bill. I'm the executive director of the Weitz Family Foundation. As you may recall, I'm really passionate about working with refugees and small and emerging businesses, and the Weitz Family Foundation has invested about \$4.6 million in the south Omaha area over the last ten years and I can just testify that the folks here behind me are doing amazing work and many others as well. We have a, a world-class exhibits that come through El Museo Latino, but their home really could use some,

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some love. Also, happy Valentine's Day. We are so grateful for the appropriation to help the south Omaha community build back up. And I am so grateful to all of you for making this appropriation. I know you guys don't decide how it gets spent, but, but I'm grateful that you are making this appropriation. Of course, there are way more needs than can possibly be stated at this time. I learned during COVID about folks who are here and have ITIN numbers. So the Nebraska Hispanic-- or the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce explained to me that these are folks who are paying taxes but don't get the benefits that are appropriated to citizens. And so our family foundation spent about \$600,000 through the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Lending Link, and the Center for Rural Affairs helping these small businesses that didn't-- they weren't eligible for the-- for stimulus money or for federal grants, PPP, that sort of thing. And so their businesses were really in danger. We really care a lot about folks who are here. I just, I just can't say enough about what people were saying about the hard-working ethics of the south Omaha people and how much good they're bringing to our community. And also, if you visit south Omaha, I recommend El Rancho. But OK, I'll, I'll stop there unless you have questions.

STINNER: Any questions? Seeing none, thank you.

KATIE WEITZ: OK, and I'll have prepared testimony for the next round.

RICARDO CASTRO: Good afternoon.

STINNER: Afternoon.

RICARDO CASTRO: My name is Ricardo Castro, R-i-c-a-r-d-o, last name is Castro, C-a-s-t-r-o. Thank you, committee members and Senator Tony Vargas and McDonnell for bringing this bill to your attention and hopefully you'll listen to us. Thank you. I'm an immigrant heading a team of nine real estate professionals and based in south Omaha. We had opportunity to purchase an old mortuary building 16 years ago, converted into office building in the heart of 6801-- 68107 zip code, which as you were explained, it's one of the worst zip codes hit by COVID-19. We're doing business in, in the area since 2003, two years after my family and I arrived to this country, and last year we had the-- we were blessed to represent 256 families and business and investors, and most of them-- and most of our activity, most of those 256 real estate transactions that we represented were in the southeast part of town of Douglas County, Omaha. Some of those buyers and sellers were investors coming out of the-- even out of the country finding good business and working ethics in the area and willing to

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spend and invest in real estate in south Omaha. Some of those transactions also, although we are without bragging, have to say that we lead the real estate segment or, or market in the area. Mostly, we are part of Nebraska Realty, 900 agents. And in the last seven years, we sold-- were the team that sold more units in the whole company. And most of those, about 75 percent of those transactions are coming from south Omaha. And but some of them, although we are one of the lucky ones-- businesses who succeed, we even have to say that many transactions fell through in 2020 and later because right before closing, either some families were facing COVID-19 themselves, some buyers, some people just passed away before closing, as easy as that, and some other investors and business owners decided to do the right thing, to don't invest and stop buying because they want to take care of their payroll, their-- for their small businesses. We had bank preapproved people ready to close and they didn't do it because of the consequences of, of COVID-19. And please, we would ask you to seriously think about the situation. I want to focus on not what we did. I put an example of my company or the people that I lead, but it doesn't mean that we couldn't do way much more for our city and for the city of Omaha. There's many-- we're used to welcoming many leaders stating that south Omaha business-- South 24th business corridor or Leavenworth or Q Street, L Street, 13th Street, Vinton Street corridors are so successful and they show us as an example of how to run businesses and how to prosper, how to, how to contribute. But I have to say that most of that, that's-- we did it ourselves. I mean, it's-- we almost never had the help and almost never had the guidance, except for a few family foundations and professionals helping us. We think that we are asking for something that we, we deserve. On a daily basis, we prove and we show you and the whole state of Nebraska that we work with what we have and we make results out of it and good results. I don't know that we still expect we keep doing business based on creativity or, or resilience because that's the way we've been doing business for those many years. And I just-- I decided to be brief. Thanks for your time. Thank you all.

STINNER: Thank you. Questions? Seeing none, thank you very much.

RICARDO CASTRO: Thank you.

SHERIE THOMAS: Hi. Good afternoon--

STINNER: Good afternoon.

SHERIE THOMAS: --Chairman Stinner and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Sherie Thomas, S-h-e-r-i-e, last name, Thomas,

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T-h-o-m-a-s, and I'm acting deputy chief with the Omaha Police Department. I'm here on behalf of Chief Todd Schmaderer and the Omaha Police Department in support of LB1238. The American Rescue Plan Act provides an extraordinary opportunity to provide funding to address specific needs in the Omaha community, specifically the south Omaha community. The passing of this bill would provide necessary and needed funding to public and private entities to counter the negative impact of the COVID-19 public health emergency. The public health emergency has had an excessive negative impact on unemployment, wage losses, homelessness, and food insecurities that the south Omaha community has been impacted by. The Omaha Police Department has been intentionally working with organizations throughout the south Omaha community on addressing crime and public safety. There is more work to be done and the funding would allow entities to address some of the root causes of crime, such as "un" or underemployment, poverty, affordable housing, and education. Chief Schmaderer has previously stated that the greatest opportunity to address the quality of life and crime reduction is to address the root causes. The Chief has also stated that he would rather have 1,000 jobs strategically placed in the right part of our city to affect poverty that would reduce violent crime far more than 1,000 more police officers. In closing, the Omaha Police Department is in support of LB1238 and thank you for allowing me to testify in front of you all today.

STINNER: Thank you for coming. Questions? Seeing none, thank you.

SHERIE THOMAS: Thank you.

STINNER: Good afternoon.

JAVIER SALDANA, JR.: Good afternoon. My name is Javier Saldana, J-a-v-i-e-r, S-a-l-d-a-n-a, Jr. I'm here representing MYLPA, Metro Young Latino Professionals Association. MYLPA supports LB1238, which aims to bring \$50 million in American Recovery-- Rescue Plan Act, ARPA, funds in direct support to south Omaha recovery efforts. About MYLPA, we are a network of Latinos and allies in the greater Omaha metropolitan area from all backgrounds, professions, and industries. Our organization is a completely volunteer-run 501(c)(3) nonprofit, and our mission is to amplify the power and voices of Latinos through professional and civic engagement. As you can tell, many MYLPA members are behind me in support of this bill. South Omaha has a history and continues to be one of the most cultural, diverse areas in the state of Nebraska. The community was the first home of many new Americans who immigrated from many European nations. Many of these immigrants chose to work in the meatpacking industry in order to pursue the

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American dream. In addition, these immigrant communities built homes, established businesses, found local worship centers, and created organizations in order to meet the needs of their communities, ultimately, in order-- all in order to have a small resemblance of their home country. If we fast forward to today, many Omahans can trace their family history to south Omaha. These Omahans now are local leaders, prominent business members, and educated persons who contribute to the greater good of Omaha. Today, the exact story continues. Latinos are the largest ethnic group in Omaha and across our state, with many Nebraska communities that are Latino majority. Omaha Latinos contribute in terms of labor, business, and tax revenue for the city and state. Sixty-one percent of Latinos are under the age of 35 nationally. When it comes to youth, that means education. Trends in education are headed in a positive note. According to the Postsecondary National Policy, PNI-- PNPI, 36 percent, 36 percent of Latinos are enrolled in college. This is true locally. UNO has-- had a record enrollment by underrepresented communities, with High-- South High, a Latino-majority school being their largest feeder. We see the trends evident in professions that these students are pursuing and accepting in Omaha. This bill is an opportunity for the state to invest in the most hardworking and highest potential talent, as we have been-- have disproportionately overlooked in terms of investment and opportun-- and involvement by the city and state. We are asking that the committee address funding for south Omaha for the ARPA dollars that are meant for communities like ours, committing \$50 million solely. We hope that you just-- excuse me, we, we hope you come to a just and inclusive decision. Whether we want to admit or not, the, the future is Latino and the future is bright. South Omaha can contribute to this positive narrative. On a personal note, I am a son of immigrants, a grandson of immigrants, also a grandson of a second-generation American. My family is one of the first Mexican-American families in the state. We can trace that. But we grew up-- I grew up in between Columbus and Grand Island, mostly rural area, but south Omaha was a place where we could get a resemblance of home. Some of the services and needs that were not provided in our community, we would go to Omaha for those needs. Which, you know, I can see that in your, in your, your represented districts, some of those are not being able to be provided there. And I-- in addition, many of the folks, hardworking folks in south Omaha work in the meatpacking industry. If you have not worked in the meatpacking industry, it is a grueling industry. When I graduated high school, I had to get a job at a meatpacking industry and it was tough work, taught me a lot of value, hard work, and the goal was to go to college. And from there, I joined the National Guard and I am a

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veteran of the Afghan War 2011, so I have a great appreciation for my community. That is all. Thank you.

STINNER: Thank you. Questions? Seeing none, thank you very much.

JAVIER SALDANA, JR.: Thanks.

STINNER: Afternoon.

ARMANDO SALGADO: Good afternoon. My name is Armando Salgado, A-r-m-a-n-d-o, Salgado, S-a-l-g-a-d-o. Good afternoon, Chairman Stinner and esteemed Appropriations Committee. I'm in support of LB1238. I represent the Latino Economic Development Council as VP and various other organizations in the Omaha community. I understand there's a statewide need for the ARPA funds and many are greatly deserving. My focus today is the south Omaha and more specifically, the Latino community who, as you already know, has been one of the most negatively impacted by COVID-19. This pandemic has been particularly hard to this community and tragically deadly for many. Mid, mid last year, 40 percent of residents who, who were hospitalized with the virus identified as Hispanic. Even though the group represents just 11 percent of the state's overall population according to the state data, Hispanics also accounted for about 20 percent of the state's coronavirus deaths. The numbers speak for themselves and the obvious facts as to why the American Rescue Plan funds are greatly needed in this, in this community. Let's talk about the bottom line, dollars and cents. If the harsh impact to the Latino south Omaha community is not evidence enough as to why your assistance is needed, I'd like you to focus on the economic impact that south Omaha Latino-owned businesses have increased our state's bottom dollar. Why should you assist the community get back on its feet? I'll tell you why. The south Omaha Latino business community is resilient, is a resilient community, essentially surviving without any local, county, or state assistance for many years. Many invest their own hard-earned life savings without any banking support and with the mentality of survive or survive, as that's the only choice they have. If you visited south Omaha, you will see evidence of the many years of sweat equity the Latino community has invested into South "O" and the state. Increases of employment, immigrant or otherwise, generate income tax revenues for the state. In addition, in addition, sales tax revenue is generated on spending, on excise tax revenues as generated on the sale of gasoline. These are fiscal contributions to the state and local economies that account to billions of dollars in Latino fiscal contributions. These positive effects must be considered as part of the overall impact of our community. But COVID, COVID hit us all and

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the economic development impact of south Omaha Latino community went from thriving to surviving. So even if the pandemic ends tomorrow, the long-term impact on our community and other factors compounded will contribute to a very poor result for Latinos and other people of color. With this pandemic and the consequences for opportunities to move and advance financially and socially for our Latino community are going to be devastating because this crisis has set us back enormously. I believe several of you are business owners, such as, such as myself. As business owners, we'd always like a guaranteed ROI, right? If you look at the upward trend pre-pandemic, you will see that this community was not only growing leaps and bounds in population numbers, but in revenue in the state. I teach business and construction at Metropolitan Community College and I've personally have assisted over 160 businesses, Latino businesses form in our state paying taxes, insurance, hire more people, and much more. I can assure you the south Omaha Latino business community is, is great to invest into, which will generate an even greater ROI for the state. I'm not asking for a handout, but a reinvestment back into our community invests into our overall state. Thank you very much.

STINNER: Thank you. Questions? Seeing none, thank you.

ARMANDO SALGADO: Thank you.

DIANA ROGEL: Hello, members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Diana Rogel, D-i-a-n-a R-o-g-e-l. I am the alumni chair for a local nonprofit, New Leaders Council, that offers a cross-sector changemaker-based training. We build ecosystems of leaders who center equity and reflect communities we serve. I am also a community advocate and public health outreach professional that has served the south Omaha community for many years. I have served Latino families and our youth focusing on advocacy and self-efficacy. However, there comes a point where resiliency, hard work, along with community efforts can go so far. The American Rescue Plan Act is intended to provide relief funds to communities across Nebraska. South Omaha, as is the case now, is often forgotten. Both north Omaha and south Omaha have been severely impacted by the pandemic, therefore relief is greatly needed for both communities to recover. As the biggest, as the biggest ethnic group in the United States and Nebraska and in Omaha, Latinos are the future. We are an aging nation with our most rapid growth being among those 65 and over. The Latino sector has significantly contributed to local economies by its large size and strong work ethic. The 220-- the 2021 Latino GDP report by the nonprofit Latino Donor Collaborative puts it all into perspective. If Latinos in the U.S. were an independent country, their 2020 GDP would

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be larger than France, which is the world's seventh-largest economy. Our economic output is the fastest growing, even faster than China and India. However, we are not our own country, we are Americans. If we continue to suffer inequalities, such as not being included in federal relief funds, all Americans suffer. We were the frontline workers during the pandemic that kept our economy afloat. Meatpacking plants made sure we had something to serve at our dinner table. Grocery clerks risked their lives to make sure we could live ours. Healthcare and government workers ensured our country operated, yet how is that these same individuals are struggling with job security, food insecurity, paying rent, and medical care? At least one family member in half of Latino households either lost employment or were cut wages. Still, you cannot mistake hardship for weakness. With lower rates of public assistance program use, Latinos lean on one another to make it through heavy times. As, as resilient as we are, the fact remains we are one of the lowest paid and undervalued populations. As tomorrow's biggest population, wouldn't it be a good idea to put relief dollars into ensuring our future has access to basic needs and education? As the future is ever glaring, our rich community of entrepreneurs, hardworking families, dreamers, students with bright futures, business professionals will one day, if not already, be of service to you and lead many. The heart of the Latino community resides in south Omaha. If we are to move forward in prosperity, we need to ensure south Omaha is included in that plan. We have had enough loss and hardship that has been exacerbated by the pandemic. The federal government's American Rescue Plan's promise is to begin to beat COVID and rescue the American economy through direct relief. Let's face it, Latinos face disproportionate health and economic impacts from the pandemic because we overrepresent as workers in industry's hardest hit. According to the CDC, we are 1.7 times more likely to contract COVID than our white counterparts and four times more likely to be hospitalized and two times more likely to die from this deadly virus. For us, these numbers are not just a statistic, they are real people, abuelitos gone far too soon, and countless breadwinners ripped away leaving their families in financial struggle and anguish. We are the hardest hit. I call for equity. I call for inclusion. Put us back on track as a thriving city, leaving us to survive on our own, ignored, is simply not just. Thank you to the Appropriations Committee for your time and for listening to my request to address south Omaha's equitable inclusion in the COVID-relief bill and to Senator Vargas for proposing it. The American Rescue Plan design meets the very definition of our community needs. In adding our district, you are ensuring all of our future and committing to south Omaha's sustainability and future for generations to come.

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STINNER: Thank you. Questions? Seeing none, thank you.

DIANA ROGEL: Thank you.

STINNER: Good afternoon.

KAREN PESEK: Good afternoon. My name is Karen Pesek, K-a-r-e-n P-e-s-e-k. I am here in support of LB1238 to appropriate \$50 million of ARPA funds for south Omaha. I am a property owner and an employer in the historic district of South 24th Street. I am also a Mexican immigrant. As a property owner in the-- in one of the most dynamic, busy commercial corridors of the state, I give some of my time to organizing through the business improvement district and through that I have met countless hardworking, community-focused leaders and entrepreneurs that are committed to bring prosperity to the community as a whole. Many of those leaders are here today. The ARPA funds are supposed to be helping the most hard-hit population by the pandemic. South Omaha really fits, fits that definition. My own employees have lost fathers and cousins and other family members to COVID-19. We have a law firm that serves primarily Spanish speakers in south Omaha, and we hear directly from our clients how the pandemic has affected every aspect of their life. In south Omaha, we get the most out of everything we have. Setting apart the \$50 million will enable us to improve the communities where we live and work. The money should be spent in south Omaha as suggested, because it would be up to us, the people here, the people that show up to prioritize issues in our own neighborhood. You can imagine it is easy to get left out of the conversation, so I am happy that Senator Vargas and Senator McDonnell brought this bill forward. I don't know the statistics, but I'm sure you're aware that south Omaha is home to thousands of Latinos and other immigrants, and it has been determined that these populations were disproportionately hit by the pandemic. Many of these people in our community were deemed essential workers. We must show up for them. It's time to support these Nebraskans, businesses, and organizations with the funds they need to thrive. To not appropriate funds for south Omaha would be a blatant disregard for the safety and well-being of the backbone of our economy. Thank you for your time today. I know there are lots of ideas and there are many worthy projects, but we want to make sure that the south Omaha community has its fair share. And one more thing I want to say. You know, sometimes I hear everybody talk about hardworking people and how our community is very resilient. But, but I feel like sometimes that resiliency works against us because we make the most out of what we have. And sometimes it can come across as, you know, they don't need the support because they'll make it work either way. It has been like that for many years and, you

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know, it has been different causes. But today, this year, we have many community leaders that are ready to move ahead with the plans and the things that we need, need to happen to help our neighbors. So please help us by appropriating this \$50 million to get our fair share. Thanks.

STINNER: Thank you. Questions? Seeing none, thank you. Afternoon.

JAMIE BERGLUND: Good afternoon. Thank you, Chair Stinner, Senator Vargas, and members of the Appropriations Committee for the opportunity to testify in support of LB1238. So my name is Jamie Berglund, spelled J-a-m-i-e B-e-r-g-l-u-n-d. I'm the executive director of Spark, and we are a community development organization in Omaha that partners with stakeholders to catalyze community-driven holistic investments in neighborhoods across east Omaha. For the last three years, we've worked with neighbors, nonprofits, and the city of Omaha to redevelop Brown Park, a public park located near 15th and U Streets that provides a vital space for neighbors to gather, host celebrations, play, and exercise; all things that were desperately needed and still needed during COVID and now. COVID-19 threw a wrench in this project. However, we're on track to complete the redevelopment of the park this summer. In addition to Brown Park, we are partnering with Canopy South, where we have supported that effort with community engagement, planning, and other technical assistance. Through this work and our long-standing connections in the community, we have grown deeper relationships and understanding of the challenges in south Omaha, including higher than average rates of unemployment, food insecurity, and housing instability, all made significantly worse by the pandemic. And while there are challenges, south Omaha is also full of opportunity. Funding through LB1238 will be critical to fulfilling this potential, bringing vital resources to, to support public-- excuse me, public spaces, housing development, and other community needs. On a personal level, I want to share, spent the majority of my life in east Omaha. I grew up in south Omaha, had family in north Omaha, and so shuttled back and forth between the two communities. I've committed my career and, and, and my own personal investment by living in south Omaha to the community, and I can't think of an area that's more deserving of investment than the east part of our city. So thank you so much for your consideration and I appreciate it.

STINNER: Thank you. Questions? Seeing none, thank you very much. Good afternoon.

JOSE GARCIA: Hola. Buenos dias. I am Jose Francisco "Chato" Garcia. I'm a third-generation Mexican- American born north of the Rio Grande.

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I'm a 76-year-old Vietnam veteran. I have a degree out of University of Missouri.

STINNER: Would you spell your name please for the [INAUDIBLE].

JOSE GARCIA: Yes, sir. Jose, J-o-s-e with the accent on the e. The last name is Garcia, G-a-r-c-i with the accent on the i -a.

STINNER: OK. Thank you.

JOSE GARCIA: I am before you representing 45 years of being a Chicano activist, a provider of exhibits and presentations representing the many facets of south Omaha's American experience. I am a father and husband whose wife, Linda Garcia, has been a lifetime teacher, librarian, artist serving multiple generations. I also wear the hat of a businessman, who since 2001 has established Casas de le Cultura, Houses of Culture, that acted as a community center for the arts and cultural traditions centered around the methodology of mestizaje and self-determination. Retiring from the Union Pacific Railroad in 2007, our communitarian mission led us to organize a 501(c)(3) historical society, thus establishing a process with a mission to lead us to a place where our holdings will become consistently accessible and available to the public at large. The American Rescue Plan is a ray of hope that over the past two years has nearly been extinguished. The infrastructure of south Omaha being a generational product of self-determination was consumed and totally subject to the horrors of the pandemic to the point that Nebraska Unicameral Representative representing many succumbing to the pandemic, Tony Vargas on July 29, 2020, proposed a suspension of legislative rules to allow for the introduction of a new bill to address the safety measures of the biggest employers of Latinos, of mestizos, of Hispanics, the packing houses in the industry that representing nearly 20 percent of pandemic cases statewide and at least 21 deaths. LB1238 will mobilize the repair of not only infrastructure but hasten the mental anguish and confusion of a population by creating jobs and spurning economic development. As a citizen that since 1976, I have experienced matters pertaining and reflecting a south Omaha way of life. Beginning in the spring of 2020, I have come to realize that I am witnessing an unprecedented breakdown in civic order. With our politicians consumed with commitment and building defenses, with our educational system becoming an epicenter of wide destabilization, with people everywhere losing their jobs and their businesses, becoming ill, with some children and young adults fending for themselves, our society, our way-- our American way of life is in free fall. In an area underserved for so many years and a part of the city populated by many newly

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experiencing the American way of life, I see these funds as an opportunity to instill normalcy through building infrastructure, through creating learning centers for kids eager to catch up, direct health services, clinics for those dependent on OneWorld, assist homeowners, businesses, civic and social organizations to rebuild and empower economic development. Our community has been impacted on a scale unseen over the history of our city. This pandemic continues to erode the normalcy of our society. The impact of LB1238 on our part of Omaha is critical to stop the deterioration of so many aspects of our society and accelerate our government's commitment towards normalcy and stability, empowered by economic development and nurturing the welfare of the population. I am in support of LB1238. Thank you very much. Any questions?

STINNER: Thank you. Questions? Seeing none, thank you. Afternoon.

CRISTIAN DONA-REVECO: Good afternoon, Chairman Stinner and members of Appropriations Committee. My name is Cristian Dona-Reveco, that's C-r-i-s-t-i-a-n, last name is D as in Daniel -o-n-a-R-e-v-e-c-o. I'm the director of the Office of Latino/Latin American Studies united-- of the University of Nebraska at Omaha. As part of our almost 20-year-old history of community-engaged research and with objective of supporting Omaha's Latino community since June of 2020, OLLAS, as you know our office, has been collecting interviews, doing surveys, and analyzing publicly available data to understand the effects of COVID-19 in our community. You've heard many times, one in five of every case of COVID in Douglas County is Latino, while one in eight is a proportion of Latinos in the entire community. And knowing that more than half, 57 percent of all Latinos in Douglas County live in south Omaha, as you've already heard, it's safe to say that COVID's effects on Latino citizens have been felt hardest there. For example, one survey that we've been carrying out that we are working on, on analyzing the data right now on Latino-owned businesses shows that before 2020, only six businesses that had opened before 2020 had, had to close at some point for any reasons. On the other hand, 47 of those-- of the total of the 121 we surveyed had to close at least temporarily during the first year of pandemic and 10 more also closed during 2021. Now, the interviews that we've done-- we've interviewed more than 25 community leaders and citizens of south Omaha-- show a strong and resilient community where community organizations join forces to help each other and the people they work for. As Albert Varas, executive director of the Latino Center of the Midlands, told me in August of 2020, we're doing more work, so in some ways we're doing more of the same. So, you know, the virus has increased the need and thus has increased our responsibility to respond to it. This

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response has been from the ground up and is-- there is a perception among Latino-owned business owners that we interviewed, that we surveyed, that both the city and the state have not provided significant help to the community. For example, 91 percent of the Latino-owned businesses we surveyed, saying that the city has not been supportive of their businesses and 64 percent think the state has not been supportive. Their support has come from their clients and from the Latino community, more than 50 percent of those interviewed and surveyed saying that the support has come from the clients and the Latino community. Now of all the numbers that I've seen, all the data that I analyzed, there is one that I keep coming back to it because of the possible effects on the long term. The average age of those who died of COVID-19 in Douglas County is about 79 years old. The ever age-- average age of Latinos who died is 65. The loss of so many Latinos in their working ages, which is a similar thing that's happening with African-Americans and Native Americans in the city of Omaha, means that without any assistance, the cultural, social, and economic effects of COVID will be felt for a long time in south Omaha, impacting today's recovery and the future involvement of a community that is more than 100 years old. There's one more number I want to give that I just found out today, 2 percent of all Latino students of UNO withdrew completely from the university in the last year. That is more than of non-Latino whites, about 1.3 percent of non-Latino whites withdrew. And I saw firsthand how-- what-- that happened. I talk to students. I teach. I teach students. And they tell me, you know, Professor, I couldn't finish my assignment because I had to care-- take care of my children-- sorry, of my siblings or my parents that were sick and some of them had to withdraw. So it is a long-term impact that you're going to help prevent here. Thank you.

STINNER: Thank you. Questions? Seeing none, thank you.

CRISTIAN DONA-REVECO: Thank you.

STINNER: Good Afternoon.

ANTHONY CONNER: Good afternoon. Good afternoon, Chairman Stinner and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Anthony Conner, A-n-t-h-o-n-y C-o-n-n-e-r. I'm president of the Omaha Police Officers Association. We are here in support of LB1238. I represent the police officers in Omaha and the police have a front row seat to the needs of the community as we respond to the needs of callers daily. I can tell you from my experience and the experience of the officers I represent, police officers realize quickly that we will never arrest or incarcerate our way out of some of the problems facing the communities

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that we serve, including south Omaha. Police officers know this because of the nature of our job. We connect daily with citizens who are victimized by choices of others. We find ourselves in situations where ordinary people run out of moral and legal options to solve their problems. We respond to those who have buckled from the stress caused by generational poverty, food insecurity, homelessness, mental illness, and drug abuse. We have a unique opportunity with funds from ARPA to help close some of these gaps created from generations of neglect. We urge you to pass LB1238. I would like to thank Senator Vargas and Senator McDonnell for bringing this bill to this committee. Any questions for me?

STINNER: Thank you. Questions? Seeing none, thank you very much.

ANTHONY CONNER: Thank you.

STINNER: Afternoon.

EVELIA GUTIERREZ: Good afternoon. My name is Evelia Gutierrez, E-v-e-l-i-a, last name, G-u-t-i-e-r-r-e-z. I am in support of LB1238 and I am a resident of south Omaha. And today I decided that I want to be real, I want to be-- I want to share my personal story so that way you know that there's a lot of people like myself in south Omaha. Back-- I grew up-- like I said, I'm going to be vulnerable. I don't know if I'm going to share, be too personal, but I-- that's, like I said, it's real. My father was kidnapped and murdered when I was seven, leaving my mother with-- a widow of five kids. She moved to the United States and brought us all for the American dream. Not having a father figure, I moved in with my boyfriend, super young. By 21, I had three kids, high school dropout. So then I worked at meatpacking houses and doing all those odd jobs because of lack of education. So 17 years ago, I decided to move to Omaha, Nebraska, especially south Omaha, where I-- it was my, like a second opportunity for me. I brought, like-- I came with my three boys. I enrolled at Metropolitan Community College. And during that time, I had pancreatic cancer, and one of my first visitors to the hospital after surgery, it was Dr. Maria Vazquez. And out of her busy, busy schedule, she took the time to go see me. That meant the world for me. South Omaha, it's like a family. Because of that, now I work for a, for a nonprofit. I'm a youth academic navigator for-- at the D2 Center. And now I get-- ironically, I get to mentor students who are disengaged, dropout students that I help them get reenrolled back in high school, and I help motivate them so they can finish their last credits. And I took a little pause because then I wanted to focus-- before that, I wanted to focus on my children's education. They all graduated high school, one

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of them already with a political science degree and the other one is serving-- right now he's in training over at Georgia with the National Guard, and, and also the youngest is also in school. So and currently I am finishing up my bachelor's and I am happy to report that I'll be graduating on May 13 from UNO. So and that's, that happens because of the difference for our-- and out of all my siblings, I'll be the only one and first one. And I feel that, that that's the reason that that's happening is because I got the support from south Omaha. I am a product of Metropolitan Community College. I am a product of subsidized housing because I could not afford a regular payment to go to school and be a mom and wear so many hats. So I am a product of subsidized housing, low-income housing. I live on 27th and Harrison, where I was able to continue my school and, and that's because of my south Omaha community. They invested in me and now I feel that as, as you can see, you know, I turned out to be OK because of that support. And I feel that now it's your opportunity to invest in other people like myself to give back to the community. So that's-- like I said, I wanted to speak from the heart because this is who we are. We are resilient. We are not quitters and we are here to move forward, but we need your support to do that as well for us.

STINNER: Appreciate that. Thank you.

EVELIA GUTIERREZ: Thank you.

STINNER: Questions? Seeing none, thank you. You know, it's now 3:00. Is there hands of how many more testifiers? OK, we'll stay with five minutes.

GARY KASTRICK: Good afternoon.

STINNER: Afternoon.

GARY KASTRICK: My name's Gary Kastrick, G-a-r-y K-a-s-t-r-i-c-k, and I'm an old SOB, south Omaha boy. I grew up in south Omaha. My dad was a bartender, and as a kid, I used to have to bring him supper. And when I went into those bars, I could listen and see the people, and I saw all the people, the hard work, what they did. They'd walk in and if they were missing fingers, you knew that they were boners. If they were walking in stiff, they were working in the cold storage, you could smell the poop. And by the time we got to be old, we became connoisseurs of poop. We knew the difference between hogs, sheep, and cow poop. We all know hog poop is the worst. I was an educator at Omaha South High School for 30 years, and I educated the best people in the world. South Omaha people are, to me, the strongest, best

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people I've ever been around. I live in south Omaha and I come up with this speech as a historian. First of all, I'd like to thank you for allowing me to testify on behalf of south Omaha. I'm here in the capacity of a historian specializing in the study of local history. However, my main purpose for addressing you is in the role of a character witness in behalf, not of an individual defendant, but of a community of people. As the character witness, I am here to testify on the belief of the positive characteristics, traits, and reputation. In this case, as previous stated, not of an individual, but of the individuals that were nurtured, as Martin [INAUDIBLE] stated, as planted in the soil of the area known as south Omaha. For those that understand the law, a character witness must logically address three specific areas in order to achieve reasonability. I realize that the most important position of that individual is to allow people making the decision not to judge just on what is simply stated today, but on a historical rationale that is brought with us here today as Aristotelian law identity shows the true nature of a community known as south Omaha. First and foremost, I must establish why I ought to be listened to as the character witness on the area of south Omaha. I am the proud son of Polish immigrants and grew up witnessing the lives of people around me. They were hard-working, tough, self-dependent, and self-oriented-- success-oriented people. I saw this in individuals and the diverse ethnic and racial groups in general. When I became an educator, I was determined to incorporate local history into my classroom. In 1986, I created the first local history classes in Omaha Public Schools, and in 1999, I received a state lottery grant and created the first local history museum in any school in the nation. But most importantly, I started Project Omaha where my students and I interviewed hundreds of people not only in south Omaha, but throughout the metro area and the state as a whole. In fact, my favorite thing we did was I took these kids from south Omaha and north Omaha, and we went out to the small towns and we interviewed the people that used to bring their cattle and hogs and sheep into south Omaha. And the one thing they told me more than anything else, south Omaha was, was where they went for a stable situation in Nebraska. It brought us all together. When the 150th anniversary happened, we did a mural in south Omaha and what we showed was all these trucks and everything else coming from all over the state to south Omaha. And when I interviewed the people, the last thing they told me was they are so sad that stockyards were no longer there because they said they felt like that trip was their trip to come to south Omaha and enjoy south Omaha. This will be my 42nd year of promoting local history, not just as a teacher, but as a tour guide, presenter, and project creator. For my efforts, I was awarded the James Olson award from the University of

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Nebraska and State Historical Society for the promotion of Nebraska's culture and history. Now, the most important part of, of, of being an advocate for south Omaha is the discussion on why south Omaha deserves to be part of the distribution of the COVID-19 funds. As I stated, the character of the community immigration after immigration has remained hard-working, tough, self-determined, and most important, successful. However, throughout its history, it was a prideful self-determination that allowed south Omaha's success to be taken for granted. When one studies the history of south Omaha, which is the people of south Omaha, they see an economic success story second to none in the state. Nebraska reaped the benefits of the industrialization of south Omaha from its very conception in 1882. South Omaha was christened the Magic City because of its phenomenal growth. And within ten years, it created \$3.5 million in revenue a year. South Omaha was considered the most innovative meatpacking operation in the world and the most productive labor force and creative entrepreneurship in the world. In 1955, it became the world's largest meatpacking center. At one time, close to 65 percent of Omahans were working directly or indirectly for the meatpacking industry in south Omaha. In its heyday, it produced \$1.7 million a day in revenue. In the last half of the 20th century, the packing plants and stockyards became antiquated, overcome by the modernization of the industry. Most communities would have disintegrated like many cities in the United States, but not south Omaha. The new immigrants with, immigrants with the same values and tenacity as their predecessors revitalized the community and south Omaha, like a Phoenix, rose from the ashes.

STINNER: Your red light is on, sir.

GARY KASTRICK: Oh, OK. Can I say more?

STINNER: Go on.

GARY KASTRICK: South Omaha's success story is second to none, but the stubborn south individuality has plagued south Omaha throughout its history and affect it today. There is no better investment in Omaha that would be guaranteed a substantial return than south Omaha. Its history, people, and traditions have always and will always be a positive impact on Omaha and Nebraska in general. Thank you.

STINNER: Thank you. Questions? Seeing none, thank you.

MARCOS MORA: Good afternoon.

STINNER: Afternoon.

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MARCOS MORA: My name is Marcos Mora, Marcos, M-a-r-c-o-s, last name, Mora. And today I'm testifying on behalf of the Casa de la Cultura, a cultural arts organization and nonprofit group that operates our two festivals: Fiestas Patrias Omaha and Cinco de Mayo Omaha that are located in the heart of south Omaha along historic South 24th Street, and in 2020, recognized 100 years of Mexican festivals in Omaha, Nebraska. You know, it was always a joke when we traveled to Chicago or East Coast, West Coast, they'd say Mexicans, Latinos in Nebraska, what? You know, they just don't believe it. And to, to signify this, that we had 100 years of Mexican festivals, of rich cultural history here in Nebraska is really remarkable. I'm here today on behalf of the organization to ask you to support LB1238 that would allocate \$50 million, much needed, into south Omaha economy. In 2019, that was a great year for south Omaha. There was a lot going on. The festivals were just vibrant. According to the Omaha Police Department, we were ranked and we were the biggest, largest festival event in Omaha. We're actually the largest Cinco de Mayo festival, top five in the country. We've definitely put our mark here in Omaha, Nebraska, in Nebraska to signify that we've done something remarkable. And 2019 was an incredible year, but then we hit COVID, 2020, and it was devastating. Everything was-- no one knew what to, to do. Right? South 24th Street, if you go down there, it was vibrant. And then when you look at 2020, it was dead. There was nothing going on. Families were hurt. And you know, when we came to Cinco de Mayo in May, the press says, what are you guys going to do? We don't-- we didn't know we're going to do because we didn't-- this is something new and we didn't know what, what was going to happen. And I did an interview with the owner of La Michoacana on 24th Street and his place, there was nobody in it, but we still did, you know, the interview. And two months later, that individual was gone. He died. He died from COVID. He kept his business open and he tried to survive because he had nothing else. He just had his business, and that's what a lot of the businesses in south Omaha have. They just have that livelihood and, and we've seen-- and that's why that statistic is so high, because we had to keep, we have to keep working for our families. We have to keep our businesses open for our families, and that's been really, really hard. Now we're in 2022, we're still facing that economic hardship. So today we have a difference that we can help this community survive. And they're still working hard. But unfortunately, Omaha is kind of a have and have-nots. The haves have the money, they have the resources and there are the other ones that-- the have-nots, they don't. And south Omaha is one of the most underfunded areas in Omaha. We're the have-nots, you know, and we just keep working hard and today we can make a difference. Our Cinco de Mayo festival had at one time in the peak

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generated \$7.5 million back into the economy. We have people coming in from six surrounding states with a quarter million people coming, and that's a lot that generates back into our community. And it's, and it's a great thing. Are we back there yet? No, we're not. We have a long ways to go, so I would appreciate anything you can do for south Omaha. It would be well appreciated. Thank you very much.

STINNER: Thank you. Questions? Seeing none, thank you very much.

MARCOS MORA: Thank you.

STINNER: Good afternoon.

CAROL BODEEN: Good afternoon, Chairperson Stinner and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Carol Bodeen, C-a-r-o-l B-o-d-e-e-n. I'm the director of policy and outreach for the Nebraska Housing Developers Association, and our offices are here in Lincoln. I'm here to testify in support of LB1238. The Nebraska Housing Developers Association is an organization with over 70 members from across the state. Our mission is to champion affordable housing. It's our goal that Nebraskans of every income have the cornerstone foundation of a healthy and affordable home, and our members include both nonprofit and for-profit developers and organizations. You've heard such heartfelt and informative testimony, and I can't add much more to that, but I can state that our organization supports the use of the funds from the American Rescue Act-- American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 to help low-income neighborhoods meet the challenges and difficulties that have occurred as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The public and private entities within qualified census tracts will be designated as eligible for benefits. These areas, by definition, include a majority of households with incomes below 60 percent of area median income. We're encouraged that a portion of these funds will be used to address housing and homeless needs in these areas. The ability to obtain decent, affordable shelter is the foundation of a strong family, a strong community, and a strong economy. Please advance LB1238. This investment will grow and it'll have a long-term impact.

STINNER: Thank you. Questions? Seeing none, thank you.

CAROL BODEEN: Thank you.

ALFONSO VACA-LUBISCHER: Good afternoon.

STINNER: Afternoon.

ALFONSO VACA-LUBISCHER: My name is Alfonso Vaca-Lubischer. I am the research coordinator for Voices for Children in Nebraska. Senator Stinner and members of the Appropriations Committee, all our children deserve every opportunity to thrive regardless of circumstances, you know, they are born in. And I think we believe this as Nebraskans and as Americans. Unfortunately, in Nebraska right now access to opportunity is often determined by the zip code in which the child lives. Voices for Children supports LB1238 because it would be a historic investment in a community that we have underinvested in many years, as we have heard before. In Nebraska, there are 68 qualified census tracts, as defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Of those, six are located in south Omaha, which are, you know, roughly defined by the area north of Harrison Street, east of 42nd, and south of Vinton Street. More than 60 percent of the population in south Omaha lives in a QCT. That is around 21,000 people, of which 7,000 are children. Despite accounting for only 11 percent of Nebraska's population, Hispanics make up 64 percent of south Omaha's QCTs, so overwhelmingly represented by Hispanics. The median household income in these census tracts is around \$41,500, which is 36 percent less than the rest of the state. Across Nebraska, 32 percent of adults over 25 have a college degree, which is four times higher than the adults living in south Omaha's QCTs, around-- which is 8 percent. Both the unemployment rate and the poverty rate are more than double the state averages. See, what's important about these statistics is, is that they have very strong historical implications. South Omaha consist in part of formerly redlined neighborhoods where mainly Black Americans, but also Latino immigrants, were denied federally backed mortgages until 1969. And all those redlined neighborhoods in south Omaha are now located in QCTs. And another important thing to note about the statistics, that they are based on data collected before the pandemic. While there's no current data that exists to depict how the post-COVID-19 experiences of families and children living in these QCTs, it is a fact that these communities went into the pandemic with pandemic-like outcomes and making them such vulnerable to the ongoing health and economic crises. The federal funding currently available is an opportunity to make the transformative investments in the next generation of kids in south Omaha and make progress towards making Nebraska a place where opportunity is no longer defined by zip code. We hope that along with the significant investment, the Legislature will also work towards policy reform that eliminates structural barriers to opportunity that exist for families based on race and income. We urge to-- the community to advance LB1238, and thank you. And I think I forgot to spell my name, is that correct?

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STINNER: Thank you.

ALFONSO VACA-LUBISCHER: Thank you. You want me to spell it? Yeah. It's A-l-f-o-n-s-o, last name, Vaca-Lubischer, V-a-c-a- L-u-b-i-s-c-h-e-r. Thank you.

STINNER: Thank you for that. Any questions? Seeing none, thank you.

ALFONSO VACA-LUBISCHER: Thanks so much.

STAN ODENTHAL: Good afternoon and happy Valentine's Day. My name is Stan Odenthal. It's S-t-a-n O-d-e-n-t-h-a-l. I'm the director of business relations for Heartland Workforce Solutions. We are a nonprofit workforce development entity. So my message today is about jobs and workforce development, which is a topic that all of us can get behind. We support LB1238 that aims to bring \$50 million in ARPA funds to the south Omaha recovery efforts. Heartland Workforce Solutions is the designated local workforce development area for federal workforce development programs in the three-county area of Washington, Douglas, and Sarpy Counties. And so our work in south Omaha is a big part of what we do, and we are seeing more and more partnerships and more growth in that area, and, and this funding would, would drastically help that as well. In our role, we actively try to bring partners together to build talent pipelines and connect job seekers with available jobs. For example, we work very closely with Latino Center of the Midlands with our youth program, as well as with our, our young adults that we serve. We work very closely with Catholic Charities in south Omaha, with business development and resources for entrepreneurs. And we work very closely with other organizations such as the Nebraska Hispanic Chamber with business outreach as well as Metropolitan Community College with credential attainment with a lot of our programs. This sometimes entails investing in workers through training programs to meet the ever-changing needs of businesses in Nebraska. We believe that this bill will help our community of workforce partners to be even more effective in south Omaha. So what does that mean? That means more job search assistance, more career coaching, more resume building, more hiring events, more entrepreneurship resources. If you look at the Omaha metro area, we are drastically-- we are lacking when it comes to business incubator space, entrepreneurship support, all of that compared to other areas around the country. This funding would, would, would definitely help in that area. We also build industry and sector partnerships to develop those talent pipelines into specific industries, and we're looking to engage even more within the, the south Omaha community. As has been mentioned by so many people before

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me, south Omaha has been hit disproportionately hard by the pandemic, which is what these funds are meant to address. Economic hardship is still abound in south Omaha at a higher rate than much of the state. Heartland Workforce Solutions is actively seeking out more space and building more programs and partnerships in south Omaha to address this. As we build in south Omaha with our programs and people, we encourage you to do the same with this funding. One of our board members, Armando Salgado, talked about the return on investment when, when he testified, and I, I can guarantee you that to you, that this would be an investment and you would see a return on that investment. So we, we at Heartland Workforce Solutions support LB1238, and I'd be happy to answer any questions you might have.

STINNER: Thank you. Questions? Seeing none, thank you very much. Any additional proponents? I knew we couldn't have run out of any, right? Good afternoon.

WILLIE BARNEY: Good afternoon. Good to see you, Senator. Willie Barney, W-i-l-l-i-e B-a-r-n-e-y. I just wanted to stand in support of our friends in south Omaha. As been stated, south Omaha is a strong community doing great things, but it's been hard hit by the pandemic and we stand in support of the legislation that has been introduced by Senator Vargas. And just wanted to say that investing in south Omaha, there will be a great return. There are good businesses and it helps the entire state because it generates tourism; 24th Street connects north and through midtown through to south. That tourism brings dollars, it brings shoppers, it brings people that stay overnight. And so impacting in north and south Omaha, it's been shown that it will impact the economic activity of this community by over \$4 billion. So it is a high level of return, strong people doing great work and looking, as has been stated, to support east Omaha and specifically, in this case, south Omaha. So we stand in support of that and we look forward to the senators appropriating funds to help south Omaha move forward. They have been incredibly hit hard by this pandemic. We recognize that and we stand in support. So thank you for your time.

STINNER: Thank you. Questions? Seeing none, thank you. Any additional proponents? Any opponents? Seeing none, anyone in the neutral capacity? Seeing none, would you like to close, Senator Vargas?

VARGAS: Members of the Appropriations Committee, I'll keep it brief. I, I really appreciate you taking the time to listen to the testifiers. I think what you heard is from healthcare CEOs, chamber members, small business owners, real estate agents, nonprofit individuals, lawyers, developers, teachers, artists, you name it. One

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of the main themes that you've heard across here, which I want to make sure is really clear, this community has not been invested in, in a very, very long time, and we've been taking care of ourselves. And for the first time in a very, very long time, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the Latino community in this area were keeping meatpacking plants going, keeping construction companies going, keeping the restaurant industry going. They did not complain. They kept working to take care of themselves and their family and their loved ones in the community. Nonprofits took care of each other. Healthcare institutions took care of each other and the community. They did it because it was the right thing to do and they were still hit the hardest. What we're asking here is for equitable recognition of investing in this community. You heard the word hand-up, investment, because this truly is an investment. The return on investment is extremely clear. You heard these stories of individuals. These individuals are job creators. They did that without the help, historically. Can you imagine what would happen if we did invest the money in them? There are companies that are relying on the education, workforce, academic excellence, and us to bounce back as a community in south Omaha. And I'm really lucky I've gotten to serve with you members because I've also realized that we've invested in our state in so many great ways. This is the time where I'm asking you to invest in my community because I know it's going to help change the face of Omaha when we invest in south Omaha. I want to thank Senator McDonnell for cosponsoring this legislation and I want to thank you for listening to the people behind and thank you for everybody that came and testified. And I hope everybody is listening that this is about economic development. This is about investment in people and it's long due and this COVID dollars clearly designates that it's for COVID-19 recovery for those hit the hardest. Thank you so much.

VARGAS: Questions? Thank you for your brief conclusion. OK, we have nine letters of support for LB1238. That concludes our hearing on LB1238. I do not have a listing of the next one. We'll now open the hearing up for LB1025. Well, Senator Wayne, it's good to see you again. Senator, when you're ready.

WAYNE: Good afternoon, Chairman Stinner and the Appropriations Committee. My name is Justin Wayne, J-u-s-t-i-n W-a-y-n-e, and I represent Legislative District 13, which is north Omaha and northeast Douglas County. Today, I want to start off by posing a question. What if there was a federal program that set aside a billion dollars and said within that program that we wanted to make sure rural Nebraska, i.e. farmers in particular, were to receive this money? And how we-- the federal program worked is it prioritized rural small farmers and

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it said that if you give farmers money, no matter what they do, it's already deemed eligible. And we really want farmers to have this money so they can build resiliency with-- on their farms so they can overcome any new crop drought that might come. But yet this body took this appropriation or dollars of a billion dollars and moved 80 percent of it to Omaha and Lincoln. Would that sit well with this Appropriations Committee knowing the purpose behind the federal dollars? Well, what the north Omaha plan is designed to do and what we're going to talk about today is to ensure that the federal program for ARPA, which is heavily focused on and incentivized to qualified census tracts, is where those dollars should go from this committee. If it was a farm program, like I said, this committee in no way would let Omaha and Lincoln take 80 percent of it. And what I hope today I hear from this committee, the 80 percent of the ARPA dollars are going to make sure to go to qualified census tracts because that's truly, truly what the federal government is telling us to do through its incentives and through its own prioritization. So a little bit about the north Omaha plan and thank you for those who attended the briefing. I'm going to quickly kind of go through the slides that are in front of you to keep, keep it simple. This is a pro-business plan. We are not looking for a handout. We are not looking for charity. We are looking for an opportunity to demonstrate that our community can build within itself the resiliency to when the next COVID happens or something similar, we won't dip, we won't need to rebound because we'll be just as strong. The first thing I want to point out is what Chief Schmaderer said in LB1024, which kind of sums up the entire plan, that he would rather have 1,000 jobs strategically placed in north Omaha than 1,000 additional police. Because the true way to prevent crime and the true way to lift the entire community is through jobs. The qualified census tracts are not just in north and south Omaha. There are qualified census tracts in Hastings, Norfolk, South Sioux City, but the purpose and the incentive of this program is qualified census tracts. So I'm going to talk a little bit about the needs of north Omaha and make sure we have those clearly on the record if ARPA funds ever got litigated. As far as the business impact of COVID, December 2020-- December 5, 2021, 55 percent of the local businesses and small business continue to report large to moderate negative effects from COVID. That reality is "acerbated" inside of north Omaha due to not only the pandemic, but the things-- or the disinvestment that we had throughout the last 50 years to 100 years. Crime rates have increased, which is part of the reason why crime, underneath the federal law during the census tracts or federal program, is heavily prioritized. Rape has gone up 6 percent. Theft has gone up 9 percent. Property crimes have gone up 5 percent. Overall

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crimes have gone up 3 percent. As it relates to unemployment, as of December 2021, for most of black residents in Omaha, particularly most of north and south Omaha, we are still seeing signs of unemployment that we saw during the 2008 recession. In fact, most census tracts in north Omaha have anywhere between 5 to 12 percent unemployment rate. Most of that is tied to COVID. What you'll see, as it relates to ARPA assistance or rental assistance in Douglas County, Senator McKinney's district, District 11, received almost \$6 million-- that would be this slide-- almost \$6 million, 25 percent of total allocation of Omaha's ARPA funds-- I mean emergency rental assistance funds. My district, District 11 [SIC], received 13.2; Senator Hunt's, 9.1; Senator Cavanaugh, 8.1; and Senator DeBoer previous district, 7.9. That coincides with the census tracts and the need of overall how COVID disproportionately impacted our community. I want to turn to the next page, which is simply the 211 call and text volume of 2021; 211, I'm sure McDonnell-- Senator McDonnell has told this committee about over the years. It's an-- it's a way for people who need assistance to reach out. If you look at District 11 and District 13, in 2021, District 11 had over 12,000 calls or texts, District 13 had over 11,000. That is triple the previous year. And if you look at the remainder of the districts, there is not a district that comes close to those two districts. Most of them, actually all of them are less than 6,000. The greatest need and the greatest impact of COVID can clearly be stated it happened in north Omaha. Why is this money needed and why this is a pro-business plan, I'm only going to talk about really two main items, housing and a business development. I'll allow other people to talk about other programs behind me. The biggest thing is housing coordination and what I am extremely happy about is the fiscal note from DED, which says if we send this money to DED, one of the things they will hire is a man-- a division manager. That is so important to me because what they're saying is they are going to create a whole new division to carry out this goal of the north Omaha plan to be a coordinated plan. The city of Omaha has already committed \$20 million of ARPA dollars. The philanthropic community, which you'll hear about, has already committed \$20 million. We have not committed anything that is coordinated. If we go through the typical housing grants that we go through, there will not be a coordinated effort and in fact, it'll be piecemeal, which would destroy the whole reason behind this process. With DED proposing a division or going through the committee that I-- in LB1024, we can create a coordinated process through an RFI, RFQ, and RFP process. There is a question that's continued to be asked is could we build it? Do we have enough contractors? Do we have enough supply? The answer is yes. It's really simple. One how-- one nonprofit is a part of the RFI process. One

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nonprofit right now has 457 buildable lots. Out of that, if money wasn't an option, they could only build 391 with their current workforce. By having a coordinated approach to solving-- a holistic approach, not just coordinated, to solving north Omaha's problems, we could literally buy the other 100 lots and turn them over to the private market to develop, who have their own contractors, who have their own developers and their own architects to get it done within the time frame we need it to be done. That's why it's so important and that's why you'll see behind me that we have never had the type of alignment that we have from state, county, community, and city level that you'll see coming up to testify behind because this plan has pulled all the plans together. This is not a plan that Senator McKinney and I just decided we were going to come up with on our own. In fact, north Omaha has been overplanned and overstudied for the last 40 years that you can find a plan every three years that's supposed to address these issues. All we did was spend a month reviewing all the plans and taking the best from each one and putting them into one plan. The issue has always been alignment and dollars and this year, we approached this committee saying we have both the dollars and the alignment. One example of the alignment is on this slide where the city of Omaha, every year, puts in roughly \$1 million in both of these programs; one is a rental rehab program, one is a owner rehab program. The purpose of that is to fix their exteriors of their homes. And if there's a rental property fix, there's exteriors too. So it's almost like a-- you have to pay it upfront and they'll reimburse you for your expenses a certain amount. And they also serve the same area that we serve. By combining our dollars with the city dollars, we can leverage this program to turn around an entire neighborhood. So as we build new houses and buildable blocks and buildable spaces, the house that is sitting there that is weathered with time of 40 years, we can also use these dollars to leverage to build that house up to code and make that house fit into the new area. So we're not driving people out, but we are aligning. A second one that I want to discuss is the airport park district. Again, this is not a Justin Wayne idea or a Senator McKinney idea. In fact, Senator-- Mayor Suttle ran on this idea and lost because he focused on Iowa a little too much more than he did the Omaha airport, I think. My point is, is this project has been on the shelf for years. But as we continue to focus on south Sarpy and the growth there, which is a great thing, north Omaha continues to be left behind. And in fact, the one on the left is something I handed out in 2018, when this committee appropriated \$175,000 for a study of Highway 75 that runs through north Omaha and Florence and possibly getting the roads going-- getting down the road of building a bridge across 16th Street. That study is currently underway by MAPA. They've held two,

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two hearings in the last two months. They are compiling the data points and to let you know, one of the data points, Senator Stinner, is that little red line you see right here is Highway 75. There's about 1,800 trucks going through there a day so there has to be an alternative. And that was the result of this Appropriation Committee funding the idea of doing a study and that study is yielding results. But this fits right into where we're going today. Somebody from the chamber will talk about-- behind me. Direct impact on the airport, 468 jobs. That's over 18 hund-- 18-- I'm sorry, \$818 million generation of income and economy-- economic activity generated in this area that-- once it's fully built out. The problem with housing in Omaha is that we do a lot of affordable housing, but we're focusing on the housing piece and not the job piece. And what we saw through all of these plans is that while we build homes, people can't live in them unless we don't create the jobs next to where they're working. So that's why this airport park is so important to us. The first phase will cost \$60 million, second phase will roughly cost another \$60 million. The city of Omaha has committed to doing the sewers and roads and site readiness through their sewer bonds and through other funding mechanisms. My point is there's alignment. This is the opportunity to strike where we can fundamentally transform a community that has been begging, begging for the opportunity just to compete fairly. Now, why is this important to everybody? It's important to everybody because there's this notion among a lot of people on my aisle, and a little farther left than I am, that America isn't working for everybody. America is not working for those who are struggling to get a leg up, but they continue to have to work three jobs just to stay broke. And that's why you hear a lot of talk of socialism. That's why you hear a lot of talk of big government because they don't have any other answers. They get up every day and see a letter from PEI saying, if you build it, we will be there, we will create 50 high-paying jobs tomorrow, and yet we can never get the investment. But we do get it everywhere else. We get a lot of investment in other parts of this town and other parts of the state. We're looking at \$15 million for a beef packing plant. I'm fine with that. I think we need it. But my community is looking at an opportunity to finally transform itself, to finally have good-paying jobs and become a mecca of entrepreneurship, that they can live, work, and play in their own community that they so desperately been trying to change. We aren't looking for a handout. We're looking at measurable results. You'll hear one gentleman testify that we can move 5,000 people from unemployment, underemployment to full employment in highly, highly trained jobs. Programs are out there. We continue as this body to invest in community colleges. We spent a lot of money on community colleges and there's one in this

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district, but there's still a disconnect. You've got to be able to go and meet people where they are and the programs we're looking at investing in are the programs where people will go meet them where they are, not trying to say come to us. And that's what changes. Programs don't change people. People change people. And we're just asking for a fair shot. I want to remind everybody with my closing in here is if this was a farmers program, would we allow 80 percent not to go to farmers when the federal government is telling us here is the incentive? The reason you have a problem with the affordable-- rural workforce housing using ARPA funds, because that's not what it was designed for. The reason you can use ARPA funds to build affordable housing in our qualified census tracts, because the federal government is telling us to put the money there. That is the clearest distinction. There are so many more eligible uses in qualified census tracts and presumptions that it's automatically presumed to be a good job because the government is telling us to put it there. And it would be a disservice if we don't put 80 percent of what the federal government is begging us to do to build these communities into qualified census tracts. Thank you, Mr.--

STINNER: Questions?

WAYNE: --Chairman.

STINNER: Seeing none, thank you, Senator.

WAYNE: I also handed out our north Omaha plan. I will tell you to read it. It's a lot of data in there and I wanted to make sure to have both of those as part of the record in case there's a lawsuit.

STINNER: Thank you.

WAYNE: Thank you. I will be back for closing.

STINNER: Proponents, please.

CHRIS RODGERS: Chairman, members of the committee, my name is Chris Rodgers, C-h-r-i-s R-o-d-g-e-r-s. I serve as the vice chair of the Douglas County Board of Commissioners and also the president of the Douglas County Board of Health. Being in your situation before, I'm going to cut my remarks down tremendously because I know how these days can be. But I want to say-- first on the record, I want to thank Senator Wayne and Senator McKinney for the plan that they put forward and the bold ambition that's in it and say that depending on where it goes funding wise, I would advocate for you that it's worth consideration for those of you all that aren't term limited to be on

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the shelf for serious consideration in the future. I want to come here in support of LB1025, but also say that I do support LB1238 and their efforts. I think they work side by side in regards to what we're trying to do. I want to talk specifically to the parts of the north Omaha plan and where it fits in regards to county government. There's a national saying in regards to counties that if you've seen one county, you've seen one county. And I say that in respects to I understand that the issues that we deal with in Douglas County are on a whole different magnitude. So I want to talk to areas just in the plan that the county has put some skin in the game for and I want to talk to a term that I've heard on the floor in some debate and kind of explain to you how I think that your investment will go a long way in helping us reach our goals in Douglas County. Four areas of that plan address issues that we've been working on in Douglas County here in the past: one, adult corrections and the high amount of mental health patients that sit in our jail. Our jail can be characterized as the largest mental health facility in state of Nebraska; 60 percent of the people that are in there have some diagnosis of mental health and probably should be in another place other than the Douglas County Jail. Also, I want to talk about juvenile justice and efforts that we made in that respect and in related services. We put a substantial amount of effort there and are continuing to make long-term investments in that area, particularly public health. We all felt the effects of that and the effect that the coronavirus has had in Douglas County, but there's other areas in this plan outside of direct investments in mental health that help us in that regard and then the underlying thread that mental health goes to through it all. Let me just start with mental health and saying that the county, out of the ARPA funds it has had, our first \$55 million that we've had, have probably spent, in these certified census tracts that are noted here, somewhere of close to \$5 million with the potential of another 6 to 10 that could be directly there, indirectly. From the next tranche that we get coming down in May, we are going to put down \$50 million in mental health. And when I say mental health, I don't mean chronic mental health, which is long-term beds and things of the state, but in increased community-based mental health. We feel that's going to benefit us in regards to the growing concerns that are happening mental health wise that the pandemic may leave behind. It helps us get at the mental health issues that are in our adult jail and it helps us get at some of the growing youth mental health issues in the juvenile justice area. Particularly in regards to public health, I want to advocate for the affordable housing piece. Since the coronavirus has come about, the health department has stood up a public health line, a direct line that has additional information in regards to-- in

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addition to 211. One of the leading issues that has come through there ever since and consistently has been public housing-- well, not public housing, but affordable housing. And it's my sincere belief that one of the major social determinants of health is housing and that the housing elements in this plan, if they are addressed, will not only help us in regards to public health, but some of the underlying elements that we have in education that's been there for a while. That initial investment will help us in regards to solving some of the mobility rates in education and things that are going around in that respect. Also, additionally, the mental health aspects that come down and that spread throughout, the increased investments that we're going to have in mental health hopes that the work that we've done in juvenile justice and right now trying to reduce our population. Right now, we have about 57 kids in there, 25 of them are serious offenders and that's usually the, the point that comes. There is another half or so that are sitting there, 12 or 13 are sitting there in respects to double issues with juvenile justice and the child welfare system, which is in the state's hands. We believe that increased investments in the mental health piece will help us get the numbers down there and get those kids that aren't serious offenders in the treatment that they need and also help us budget wise. A kid is \$300-plus a day sitting there when they can be in some treatment and it could be for lower-level care and cost in some other places. So with that, I'd like to just advocate on behalf of the efforts and I thank you all for your consideration.

STINNER: Thank you. Questions? Seeing none, thank you.

WISHART: Next proponent.

MARCOS MORA: Good afternoon again. Marcos Mora, M-a-r-c-o-s, last name, Mora, M-o-r-a. I was appointed by the mayor for the South Omaha Business Improvement District and I'm also a realtor. I have a Nebraska realtor license. And I tell you that because we were recently working on a property down in north Omaha and we were working on that. You know, we got a chance to kind of go out and check out some of the corridor. And really, when I look at south Omaha and north Omaha, again, you see the effect that it's had. You know, going out to a restaurant, we don't-- there's just a limited amount of, you know, income out there and you don't see the same "vibrance" as we did before when we look back and now that we look at this time period. And like south Omaha and north Omaha, we have the stigma that says south Omaha, north Omaha are dangerous, you know, and this hurts our economy. It's like we have beautiful families. And I know north Omaha has a beautiful culture. They have a lot of history, a lot of

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beautiful history, and I would like to see nothing more than to see this bill pass in support of north Omaha. North Omaha has so much potential. It's just-- it's a large array of area, but we need, again, that influx of assistance for north Omaha and I believe it can be vibrant again, just like south Omaha. So I'm here today to say please support north Omaha and this bill. Thank you very much.

WISHART: Thank you. Any questions? Seeing none, thank you.

ITZEL LOPEZ: Buenas tardes again. Good afternoon again. My name is Itzel Lopez, I-t-z-e-l L-o-p-e-z. As I mentioned earlier, I'm the vice president of advancement at the AIM Institute, an innovative, not-for-profit community in downtown Omaha. With a mission to grow a strong and diverse tech community, I am also the president of the Latino Economic Development Council, a 501(c)(3) empowered network that's focused to create outreach, development, and funding opportunities for south Omaha. As well as a member of the Great Omaha Young Professional Council, I'm also a small business owner. I am here today to support LB1025 to aid north Omaha, south Omaha, east Omaha, or just one Omaha. Omaha is a great community. East Omaha is a vibrant and diverse community, though, and it's also one of the most impacted by the COVID pandemic. Latinos are the largest ethnic minority in Omaha and let me tell you, we live everywhere, that includes north Omaha. The Latino Economic Development Council would like to support the efforts of our neighbors in north Omaha. We also want to make sure that this committee addresses the structural barriers and oppression laid bare by the pandemic. It is time to right some of the wrongs by investing in our BIPOC communities who live all over east Omaha, really in all Omaha, as I mentioned earlier, as they've been hit the hardest by the pandemic, and who have not historically, historically received equitable funding. The impact of COVID in east Omaha requires an equitable distribution of federal funds. We come to you today for you to make a just and inclusive decision not only for north Omaha, but it will also, as I said earlier at the other bill, it will build future generations of Omaha in the great state of Nebraska. Muchas gracias.

WISHART: Thank you. Any questions? Seeing none, next testifier.

MICHAEL YOUNG: Good afternoon. Hope you can hear me OK. I've been known to be a little loud, so I apologize. Michael Young, M-i-c-h-a-e-l Y-o-u-n-g, and this is a beautiful thing to see. I want to say thanks for having us here today, for taking and receiving my testimony. I'm thankful to Senator Wayne and Senator McKinney for introducing this. I've worn many hats in our community. I'm going to

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speaking from my heart, from economic development. I'm going to talk about it as a business owner and elected and appointed official. A little bit about me: I'm a father, first and foremost. I also like to call myself a part-time child shepherd. I've been elected to the Metro Community College Board of Governors, ended my term in the end of 2020, and was formerly the vice chair of that board. I chaired the Transit Authority for the city of Omaha for over ten years. I appreciate your funding over these years. Currently, I sit on the board of Carol's House of Hope, working with aged-out foster mothers in our state, as well as work with Code Black, getting black and brown folks into the tech industry, which I'm in. I'm a business owner, Technology Consulting Solutions. I've worked for technology management consulting for 25 years as well as I started an art gallery, thinking that we were coming out of the pandemic, in the 24th and Lake district. Both of my businesses are in 68110 and 68104. And I say all that not to talk about myself. I talk about that I am exactly what we're trying to address here in north Omaha. My father had tried to be the one to break generational chains. He is a Razorback from Arkansas-- woo pig, I have to say on record for him-- but he was taken from me, loss of life at age five, leaving my mother to depend on the systems that we're all trying to alleviate ourselves from, but that safety net is also needed in our community. You guys have a tough job. Pulling tax levies in the last 10, 15 years of my life, making impacts and decisions, it's hard. You have to slice up the pie and I will be unjust if I don't say north Omaha deserves a slice of that pie. But right now is a beautiful time that we get to change the recipe of that pie. These people behind me are people I've worked elbow to elbow with, sometimes in front of, sometimes behind, sometimes next to and that's an honor. And as a business owner who would really like to have resources that would make exponential changes in my business, in my home, in my community of people I could employ, people that I could work with, having access to capital and a program, a well-vetted program that really moves the needle in the right direction in our community. Because crime, violence, and all the things, the disparities that we have-- all of our districts kind of have those, but that's not just my district. That's not just Omaha. Those are Omaha problems, those are north Omaha problems, those are state of Nebraska problems. And right now, you have a unique ability to do something that we've never been able to do with these ARPA funds. We're able to take a look back and say, how did we get here? We're able to take a look back and say, where are we really are today and additionally, where do we want to go? It's kind of a magic wand. It's something we've never had to do. We have funds, we have programs, we have leadership. We have state, city, and county-level officials

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coming together. And as a business owner and as a father-- hopefully one day I'll be on this side in the near future-- I couldn't be more excited about seeing the synergy being built, momentum in the way that we have. There's three things that we really need in our community: live, work, and play. Right now, north Omaha has some of the most disparate landowners. Working, most of the jobs that we want to have and need in our community are not within our own districts. And playing, well, we get to spend all of our dollars in other districts. Imagine if we had that investment in our own. So I yield the rest of my time, but as a person who's had COVID-19, has a-- started another brick and mortar, I've lived the American dream and I'm very thankful for it. But I couldn't imagine-- this is what I've had to do, pulling my bootstraps up. Imagine somebody said, hey, we've got a program and a system for you. Right now, you could do that. Thank you.

WISHART: Thank you. Any questions? Seeing none, thanks for being here.

MICHAEL YOUNG: Thank you.

WISHART: Next proponent.

SHERIE THOMAS: Good afternoon again, members of the Appropriation Committee. My name is Sherie Thomas. Sherie, S-h-e-r-i-e, last name, Thomas, T-h-o-m-a-s. I am an acting deputy chief with the Omaha Police Department and I am here on behalf of Chief Todd Schmaderer and the Omaha Police Department in support of LB1024 [SIC]. And as I previously stated during my testimony for LB1238, the American Rescue Plan Act provides an extraordinary opportunity to provide funding to address specific needs in north Omaha. We all have been impacted by the COVID-19 public health emergency. The passing of this bill would provide necessary and needed funding. The public health emergency has had an excessive negative impact on unemployment, wage losses, homelessness, and food insecurities, especially in the north Omaha community. The Omaha Police Department has been intentional in working with organizations throughout north Omaha in addressing crime and public safety. There is more work to be done and funding would allow entities to, to address some of the root causes of crime, such as "un" or underemployment, poverty, affordable housing, and education. Chief Schmaderer has previously stated that the greatest opportunity to address quality of life and crime reduction is to address root causes. And I know Senator Wayne spoke about his, his quote that he said previously about the jobs, but I'll just also state it again that he would rather have 1,000 jobs strategically placed in the right part of our city to affect poverty that would reduce violent crime far more than 1,000 police officers. So in closing, I would just like to say

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the Omaha Police Department is in support of LB1025 and I would like to thank you all for your time to testify in front of you this afternoon.

WISHART: All right, any questions? Seeing none--

SHERIE THOMAS: All right, thank you.

WISHART: --thank you. Thank you for your service. Welcome.

LEO LOUIS: Leo Louis, L-e-o L-o-u-i-s, human first. First, I want to say I'm in support of LB1025 and before I get into this-- my title, I'd like to tell you a human story just real quick. So I'm born and raised in Omaha, Nebraska; single mother, poverty, north Omaha. Survived, luckily, the different environments that I had to navigate; police encounters, gangs, etcetera. Graduated Omaha North High School and still spent a stint on the street. I did get employment at 16. I continued to keep a steady job, but I had a lot of people around me who were negative influences. Those influences almost got me a felony gun charge. Luckily, the individual who had the gun actually took ownership of it and I was able to get a second chance. That second chance landed me in a technical college, which was a private college, and it didn't yield out to be good for me because it was one of those college scams where they call themselves a private college and they charge you a bunch of money and then you try to fill out the paperwork to get more funding and they say, we don't have any, you got to pay us out of your pocket. And I couldn't do so, so I had to drop out of that college, only spent about a year there. Meanwhile, I ended up having a little brother who went to jail on a robbery charge. I hope to get him out. And after a number of crazy incidents, I happened to survive a shooting and a car crash and decided that I needed to change my life. I found a religion that helped me do so and continue to go to church, found a beautiful woman who decided that I was fit enough to marry and got married. We got married very young. She had three children already. She had had her first child at 13. We raised three children, graduated all three of them, been married for 17 years at this point. And throughout that time period, in about 2007, I decided that I wanted to change the lives of other young men so we didn't have those problems again. We had Sunday meetings every Sunday. We meet at 4 o'clock and I ran into some very great individuals, such as Willie Barney, who's here, Roy Davenport [PHONETIC] and others in the community, Ben Gray [PHONETIC], etcetera, who saw what we were trying to do to change young men's lives and decided that they would support us. We started a gang intervention program. I became a gang interventionist. After that, I saw that many of these men were

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unemployed in north Omaha so we started to grow food at community gardens. We did urban agriculture. I established about 12 community gardens with the help of the Omaha Community Foundation, other organizations who found us and then continued after that work to work for NorthStar, which is an organization that supports young men right now and exists on 52nd and Ames. And that organization hired me as the agriculture coordinator. I built a half-acre garden on 48th and Ames. I had individuals who were on probation who were from north Omaha who would come through there and help me move physical bricks, stones and we built a half-acre garden into the hillside. I duplicated that effort in 2018 for the Malcolm X Memorial Foundation, who I happened to meet in 2010. The Malcolm X Foundation didn't have a actual physical building, but they did have ownership of approximately nine acres of land at that time and they wanted a community garden so I helped them build a garden too. I was able to luckily hire five young men from north Omaha, two of them which had felonies, and we successfully curated some more gardens in Omaha, attempting to create employment for young men. Now, I myself had a very serious passion about that and still do to this day because I believe that we can do for ourselves and change for ourselves and this how I discovered the teachings of Malcolm X, even though I was a Christian at the time. And so I started to affiliate myself with the Malcolm X Memorial Foundation. I got so heavily involved that I was able to curate a number of town hall meetings, work with thousands of individuals from north Omaha, hosted hundreds of individuals in rooms to talk about problems and help solve those problems within north Omaha at the Malcolm X Memorial Foundation. In 2019, we lost our board president because of some politics, so to speak, and I ended up becoming the board president of the Malcolm X Memorial Foundation. So today I sit before you as the board president or serving as the board president of the Malcolm Memorial Foundation and a serious community advocate and organizer. And what I'd love to see is that I have an assumption that you all are here to make the right decision and make sure that those funds get appropriated as they are outlined in the North Omaha Recovery Plan. And I would hope that you would support the North Omaha Recovery Plan because it would explicitly support the Malcolm X Memorial Foundation and the work that it does and people like myself who are there to change the lives of individuals in north Omaha who have dedicated over a decade like myself to that type of work. That's all I have to say.

STINNER: Thank you. Questions? Senator Hilkemann.

HILKEMANN: Do you work with the Abide Ministries as well?

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LEO LOUIS: Abide did approach us in 2020, but I have not had a chance to meet with Mr. Dotzler, who I was supposed to schedule a meeting with. He's just been a busy man. It's not on our side.

HILKEMANN: Thank you.

LEO LOUIS: Thank you.

STINNER: Additional questions? Seeing none, thank you very much.

LEO LOUIS: Thank you.

STINNER: Afternoon.

ANTHONY CONNER: Good afternoon. Good afternoon, Chairman Skinner-- I'm sorry, Stinner-- and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Anthony Conner, A-n-t-h-o-n-y C-o-n-n-e-r, president of the Omaha Police Officers Association. I've served the citizens of Omaha for nearly 22 years as a police officer. For 18 years, the majority of my career, I patrolled the same north Omaha neighborhoods where I was raised. What I can tell you from my experiences that most police officers quickly realize that we will never arrest and incarcerate our way out of the systemic problems facing north Omaha. Police officers know this because of the nature of our job. We find ourselves in situations where ordinary people run out of moral and legal options to solve their problems and we connect daily with citizens who are victimized by choices of others. We respond to those who have buckled from the stress caused by generational poverty, food insecurity, homelessness, mental illness, and drug abuse. Under my leadership as president of the OPOA, we have renewed focus on preventative and restorative measures to help address the root causes of crime and the years of neglect in north Omaha. We have financially supported the Center for Workforce Development and their Project Reset program. We have supported PACE financially with our-- and with volunteer hours coaching kids. We have helped Operation NETS and a host of other community service projects. Our commitment to the real and lasting change in north Omaha is genuine and so I'm here today in support of LB1025 and while I stand firm in the need of fair and impartial policing, we also realize that with this community-- what this community needs most is opportunity. We have a chance with available funds to make an immediate impact. The issues caused by generational poverty, lack of quality education and opportunities are limited. Economic growth and job creation must be addressed to end the violence and crime that continues to plague north Omaha. The OPOA proudly supports LB1025. One, one more thing I would like to add is the more

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crime is reduced with jobs, with job creations, the streets are safer for citizens, but it's also safer for police officers. So if you support the police, you support creating jobs for communities like north Omaha that needs them. I'm available for any questions.

STINNER: Any questions? Seeing none, thank you.

ANTHONY CONNER: Thank you.

WAYNE HUDSON: I think we must continue on law enforcement theme. Please do not get me and Mr. Conner mixed up. People often do. I am the much handsome one. Good afternoon.

STINNER: Good afternoon.

WAYNE HUDSON: My name is Wayne Hudson, W-a-y-n-e H-u-d-s-o-n. I speak to you today in my official capacity as the chief deputy for the Douglas County Sheriff's Office and as a man who grew up in north Omaha and still patrols the streets today and engaged with the community. The state of which north Omaha community has been allowed to deteriorate makes passage of LB1025 not only a moral obligation, but an economic necessity. Because north Omaha has not benefited from the economic development like other parts of Douglas County and the city of Omaha, such as north downtown, Blackstone, and mid-city, the infrastructure necessary to support business growth and sustain a thriving community is nonexistent. Furthermore, practices such as predatory lending, mortgage and insurance redlining, along with other consumer disparity, has not only caused north Omaha all residents to pay more or be priced out of a quality service, but has also resulted in a denial of lending-- excuse me, lending impacting homeownership and business development. The residents of north Omaha and those of us who support its development are not here today asking for a handout. We're asking that north Omaha be afforded the same level of investment that is experienced in other parts of the city and the state of Nebraska. The north Omaha recovery grant will probably be the only chance we get in this state to make things right. It will provide an opportunity to make significant, long-lasting, and transformational changes on a large scale to our community. These changes will allow north Omaha community to be on par with the rest of the city of Omaha. In the end, we are one Douglas County. We are one community. I would like to add that I do also support LB1238 for the same reason I have just stated. Give me two seconds here. I have thoroughly reviewed this bill and the proposed distribution of the funds. One may ask what can come out about north-- about approving the north Omaha recovery program. What we will see is an increased economic development and a

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decrease in unemployment, an increase in school programs and other educational programs and a decrease in truancy and high school dropout, an increase in postsecondary education programs to include trade industry and a decrease in the unskilled labor force. An increase in home ownership and a decrease in homelessness. An increase in attracting and retaining professional people of color to the city of Omaha and a decrease in the brain drain that we currently experience today. An increase in cultural and ethnic programs, cultural events and a decrease in a group of people feeling the city doesn't care about their culture. Finally, if all I previously mentioned were to happen, you'll see an increase in community engagement, community pride, community activism, law enforcement and community relations, and tourism. I would like to thank Senators Wayne and McKinney for taking this bold step and presenting this bill. It is bold but necessary step not just for the city of Omaha, but for the state of Nebraska. Our country has made bold steps before with great success. I ask that this bill be voted out of committee and senators on this committee join Senators Wayne and McKinney in vigorously supporting its passage. Thank you.

STINNER: Thank you. Questions? Seeing none, thank you very much.

YOLANDA BARNEY: Good afternoon.

STINNER: Afternoon.

YOLANDA BARNEY: I'm Yolanda Barney, Y-o-l-a-n-d-a B-a-r-n-e-y, and I'm vice president of SNB Enterprises and co-founder of Revive Omaha. I'm also a co-owner of the Revive Center and the Carver Legacy Center, located at the historic 24th and Lake district. Prior to moving to Omaha 21 years ago, I worked in the media field for 30 years, working in some major markets in Kansas City, Dallas, and Atlanta. And it was during that time I helped hundreds of businesses with their marketing, their advertising and sales needs, and I also helped them launch numerous products and expand their businesses. And since living in Omaha, my partners and I have formed the Revive Black Business Network, which we've worked-- we've had the opportunity to actually work with over 350 black businesses. The founders and owners of those businesses have told us consistently their greatest needs are access to credit and capital and technical assistance. Each of them has the capacity to grow with investments and assistance. In fact, many of these businesses have weathered the pandemic but need support to fully get back on their feet and can be the foundation to help drive north Omaha forward. Just within this group, we cover every sector and every category of businesses. With the investments included in this bill,

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together, we can create jobs and create hundreds of millions of dollars in north Omaha and each of these businesses could hire-- if they can just hire just one or two employees, we could create 300 to 600 jobs, primarily in north Omaha. My partners and I invested in north Omaha and we launched the Revive Center, which is an event center, it's a marketplace, and it's also a food hub for blacks in north Omaha, cooks and chefs so they can showcase their talents. Though we had to close our business like most businesses during the pandemic-- we did have to close down, especially being primarily an event center-- we have reopened and business is starting to pick up, but we have also launched the Carver Legacy Center, which is a black-owned financial institution in partnership with American National Bank. The partnership has allowed us to start receiving deposits in all of their American National Bank locations throughout the city. We have already made loans to businesses and homeowners. We are now working towards a formal opening of our main location at 24th and Lake. It will also feature a business hub and accelerator and that was based on the needs of those 350 businesses that said they needed access to credit and capital and they also need technical assistance. The investments identified in LB1025 will allow us to accelerate the economic progress in north Omaha through business and home ownership. So as we are moving forward, we ask for your support to do even more. Thank you.

STINNER: Thank you. Questions? Seeing none, thank you.

YOLANDA BARNEY: Thanks.

STINNER: Afternoon.

ELIZABETH EVERETT: Good afternoon, Chairman Stinner and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Elizabeth Everett, spelled E-l-i-z-a-b-e-t-h E-v-e-r-e-t-t, and I am the deputy director of First Five Nebraska. First Five Nebraska is a statewide public policy organization and we support policies that provide quality early learning environments for all children in Nebraska. I am here today to testify in support of LB1025 and the child components of the North Omaha Recovery Plan. The North Omaha Recovery Plan includes efforts to help families, childcare providers, and the community. Among other items, the plan proposes stipends for individuals in job training programs to defray the costs of things such as childcare and it also creates a forgivable loan program to help sustain and stimulate growth of new and existing childcare businesses. First Five Nebraska supports these programs and believes they will have a significant and positive impact for the north Omaha community. The childcare industry is the

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backbone to our state's economy. Our working parents cannot fulfill their roles without access to quality childcare options. Yet over the past year, we have seen a 7 percent decrease in childcare programs and a 7.4 percent decrease in childcare employees. The reduction in staff and reduction in childcare programs has a substantial impact on the capacity of Nebraska's childcare system. At the same time, quality childcare is expensive. The average yearly cost of childcare in Nebraska is roughly \$12,000. For most working families, this is an unaffordable expense. The North Omaha Recovery Plan will help families and childcare providers. First Five Nebraska looks forward to working with Senator McKinney and Senator Wayne on this important issue and I'd be happy to answer any questions at this time.

STINNER: Any questions? Seeing none, thank you.

ELIZABETH EVERETT: Great, thank you.

RAHEEM SANDERS: All right.

STINNER: Good afternoon.

RAHEEM SANDERS: Greetings, greetings and salutations, fine members of the committee. I am Raheem Sanders, R-a-h-e-e-m S-a-n-d-e-r-s, and today I have a question for you today. Do you know the greatest public health need for the north Omaha community? For those that don't know, public health is the science of protecting and improving the health of families and communities. One of the most essential pillars of ensuring adequate public health is the ability of those families and those communities to foster economic progress. But what is economic progress? Despite what many may misinterpret, economic process-- progress is not solely financial, but it must encompass more than a material and financial side of people's lives to expand human freedoms. That's why all the data across the world shows a direct correlation with areas of low economic progress to high incidence of negative public health. We're talking about things like low education, essential resource insecurity, high violence, crime, poverty, drug abuse, infectious and chronic disease, and mental health. Economic progress is important to public health because economic progress is a multidimensional process involving the reorganization and reorientation of entire economic and social systems to accelerate economic growth, reduce inequalities, and eradicate poverty. Fundamentally, economic development is about the caliber of environment that defines who a person is or can be and what that person does or do. It's about the ability to meet basic needs to be the person they have the purpose, the purpose to be and the ability to

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be able to choose with respect to the resources accessible to them in their environments. Positive economic progress is ensuring the free enterprise system works for everybody. Ensuring that people have access to things like capital resources, the ability to support progress, innovation, freedom, liberties, removing disadvantages, and ensuring the protection of people. The engine of economic progress is the growth that propels the development of many of today's most advantaged cities, counties, states, and countries. However, data has also shown that many impoverished areas experience a deteriorating trade position. For the black community, in the past 450 years, intentionally or unintentionally, this country has been deteriorating the value of black Americans, especially those black Americans experiencing and exhibiting advancing positive economic progress. However, for black communities and Americans, even after the apartheid, such as slavery, Jim Crow, and the adverse effects of segregations, black Americans still had the ability to exhibit economic progress in the development of multimillion-dollar communities based off the value that they foster, only to be met with intentional or unintentional acts of terrorism exhibited by the same leaders and members of those communities that should have protected and supported them. Now with the impact of COVID-19, this economic progress have been further "stifened" the economic and social systems and the overall quality of life of north Omaha residents. So I ask you again, do you know the greatest public health need for the community of north Omaha? We've all seen examples of black excellence, even without the support of the free enterprise system, but with the support of you guys and this bill, LB1025, we have the ability to change that. As I close, I ask you to look at the state of north Omaha. Look at the numbers and ask yourself who are we doing business with? How are we investing in a way that improves the lives of the people that live there? Because if we don't put something in place to advance north Omaha now, then the COVID-19 impact is going to directly impact economic progress and create one of the biggest public health dangers that north Omaha will never be able to recover from. Again, I'm Raheem Sanders. I'm an epidemiologist, owner of PPRP Innovations, and thank you for all your time. Any questions?

STINNER: OK, questions? Seeing none, thank you.

RAHEEM SANDERS: Thank you.

JONATHAN CHAPMAN: Good afternoon.

STINNER: Afternoon.

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JONATHAN CHAPMAN: My name is Jonathan Chapman, J-o-n-a-t-h-a-n C-h-a-p-m-a-n. Thank you, Senator Stinner and the entire Appropriations Committee for the service that you provide to the citizens of Nebraska. My presence with you today is in demonstration of my support for LB1025. My wife and I, along with our four children, live, work, and play in north Omaha. Our children attend school and participate in sports and dance classes there. I am employed in north Omaha, invested as the outgoing board chair of my neighborhood association after serving for two years through the pandemic. I also am privileged to lead the Village Zone Pastors and Faith Leaders Collaborative, comprised of pastors and faith leaders of all denominations from across north Omaha who come together to share resources and strategize on opportunities to advance the lived experience of each soul in our community. Over the last five years, I've been blessed to pastor a small congregation of amazing people in north Omaha. Seventy-nine percent of our adult membership are small business owners, developing entrepreneurs, or are currently incubating ideas for new businesses. I myself launched a company called RealQuick Solutions in the fourth quarter of 2020 that trains and employs teens in our community to provide virtual event management for businesses and organizations in Omaha and beyond. LB1025 has been intentionally developed to facilitate strategic investment in needed and necessary areas for my community. The business owners of my church, like those that I speak with all throughout north Omaha, are passionate about providing their services to the community. But even beyond that, they are passionate about the prospect of being able to provide living wage job opportunities. Currently, only, only one of the business owners that's a part of our church has a business large enough to employ someone full time that doesn't live in the same home. All of the businesses are desperately in need of guidance and support required to serve and employ more residents in north Omaha. As has already been mentioned multiple times, in order to do this, they need access to capital and to credit, along with the technical assistance that goes to help build quality businesses. The funds available through the North Omaha Recovery Plan will help them grow and expand, resulting in a measurable return on investment through job creation and workforce development. Where the unemployment rate has consistently been higher in north Omaha than surrounding areas, which means less tax revenue and the perpetuation of a cycle of dependence on others, this is not because of a lack of desire within the people to do their part. We don't need you to save us, but we do need you to support the plan that we have to save ourselves. For the last four years, I've been actively involved with the community through the Empowerment Network's transformation plan and I'm glad to see that many of the key elements

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and strategies from the community are integrated into the North Omaha Recovery Plan. This commitment of these resources as an investment in north Omaha has the potential to be the catalyst needed to tip the scales for our community from struggling reliance on social services to innovative expansion through private development. We have the will. Pastors and churches are ready. Small businesses are ready. The community is ready. This is the way. Thank you in advance for your support of LB1020 [SIC] and this historic moment for north Omaha and the state of Nebraska.

STINNER: Thank you. Questions? Senator Hilkemann.

HILKEMANN: What's the name of the fellowship that you're a part of?

JONATHAN CHAPMAN: The North Omaha Village Pastors and Faith Leaders Collaborative.

HILKEMANN: Thank you.

STINNER: Any other questions? Seeing none, thank you very much.

JONATHAN CHAPMAN: Thank you.

STINNER: How many more testifiers do we have? Can I see your hands? OK, when it hits 5 o'clock, we go to the lightning round. They have to be three minutes. How-- we've got one, two, three more and so I've got to be somewhat sensitive to the other people that are sitting here.

TERESA HUNTER: I'll go fast.

STINNER: OK.

TERESA HUNTER: Good afternoon, Chairman and members of the Appropriations Committee. Thank you for allowing us this opportunity to speak to you. I'm Teresa Hunter, T-e-r-e-s-a, last name, Hunter, H-u-n-t-e-r. I serve as executive director and CEO for Family Housing Advisory Services. We are a 50-plus year HUD-certified housing counseling agency. We are-- we provide a lot of services to help people to get the things that they need in order to move forward and like you-- it has been said before, not giving handouts, but hand-ups and helping people get along. So one of the things that we do too is we're a COAD, or community organization active in disaster. That means we've distributed a lot of rent and utility as well as mortgage assistance throughout this COVID pandemic. So we've been able to help people to save themselves from becoming homeless through no fault of their own. As you know, restaurants closed down, all kinds of

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businesses closed down, so people who were self-sufficient found themselves with no income. So we were able to distribute dollars on behalf of the state of Nebraska to make sure that those dollars got to people who needed them. So we've been very grateful for that. And in this north Omaha development plan, we're looking to see how we can make a better impact just in the development of housing. We don't want things to go backwards because of what has happened, but we want to go forward, right? And I grew up in a community where I was able to see this investment happen. I was able to see houses run down and deteriorated and then people come back and rebuild and that's exactly what we're asking to happen today. One of the areas that we work in in our organization, financial stability is one as well as housing is the other. And homeownership is one of those things that I think is very important to help people to build their assets, build their equity and their net worth over time. And I think that what is important about this bill especially is that although it encompasses a really broad range of different types of services, it also makes sure that going forward, we will be progressive. And so the other organization that I work for too is Omaha 100, which is a community development financial institution that helps people get mortgage loans. So we do the housing counseling part of things and it's not a revolving door type of a thing. We actually work with people, whether it's one month toward homeownership or ten years. We work with them through that process. And as you know, in north Omaha, things are-- historical disinvestment has happened for a number of years. That place has been neglected. And so your support of LB1025 would allow us to make progress and re-- and do that over again and to make a difference. So for Omaha 100 doing mortgage financing, one of the things that we do is helping-- a lot of people that come through our doors are first-time or first-generation homeowners. And so you will help us to reach the homeownership dream for folks because during that, it helps them improve their credit and they're going back to see how much more income I can make, all those types of things as they strive to move forward. So by investing in this project, you will also be helping people be progressive. That will also help them, like I said, with their, their credit and all those types of things, but it also says that in, in doing that, the strategies for investment will increase for them as well. And think about too how this will impact the per capita income for people, the median income and all those types of things. And the net worth, you can say, oh, Nebraska improved its net worth. You'll be able to say that. And so by investing in this, you can make improvements not just in this local community, but for Nebraska as a whole. So we do ask for your support.

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STINNER: Thank you. Any questions?

TERESA HUNTER: Thank you.

STINNER: Seeing none, thank you. Afternoon.

WILLIE BARNEY: Good afternoon. Willie Barney, W-i-l-l-i-e, Barney, B-a-r-n-e-y. I've-- this is my third time being before the group. I was here for eight hours when you had the conversation about the Governor's budget and it was a very interactive time period with probably 70 people. And I was here two weeks ago in front of the Urban Affairs Committee with the same piece. And as I've sat here today and been thinking about why should you care, why is this important to you? Because these arguments about the need for north Omaha have been made for 50 years. From A.V. Sorensen, the former mayor, he said that we need to invest at scale if we're going to ever solve the issues of north Omaha. He said we need to invest in jobs, education, housing, and building strong relationships between police and community. He said that in order for that to happen, there would have to be a coalition, a broad coalition of police, elected officials, community-based agencies, pastors, faith leaders, neighborhoods coming together to focus on a core goal and mission. That was in 1968 before he left office. I mentioned this to Urban Affairs. In 1968, Dr. King. We talk about 1963 and "I have a Dream," but Dr. King, in 1968, gave us a vision. That vision happened to coincide with the exact same thing that A.V. Sorensen said, that unless the state of Nebraska, unless the city of Omaha invest at scale to tackle these issues, we will face what Dr. King called the other America, the other Nebraska, the other Omaha. We have worked. I have a whole speech prepared that-- but I just wanted to hope to speak to you and I hope we can still have some kind of engaged conversation of why you should care about north and south Omaha and the other census tracts in the state that have been historically hit with unemployment and poverty. Even in 2019 when everything was moving forward and we were making substantial progress, the unemployment rate in north Omaha was 9 percent. If 9 percent was the unemployment rate across the state and your district, if it was 9 percent across this entire state, there would be such a sense of urgency to address that. And that is exactly what the Biden administration and Congress has said is use these funds to address the qualified census tracts that have been directly impacted by COVID, but also historically disproportionately impacted through economics and health. And so my, my challenge in, in sitting in the seat is what will move senators from across the state to invest in something where we have shown the need? We have shown the brilliance of north Omaha. We have shown that there are elected officials, business owners,

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homeowners, private foundations, business community, police department, sheriff's office, bankers association, and on down the line that have said we are in and we believe that now is the time to do this. I don't know what it's going to take at this point. I don't know how many more speeches we have to give; how many pieces of data have to be presented. I have stacks, thousands of pages of data, thousands. Over the last 15 years, we have worked with over 8,000 people to poll and research and get their ideas or recommendations. And I want to thank Senator Wayne. I want to thank Senator McKinney. I want to thank Senator Vargas for putting these things on the table once again because the federal government has said this is the opportunity for us. We don't believe it's coming again. This is the opportunity that this community has been waiting for and working towards and we're not asking you to do it all. The community is willing and has been rolling up its sleeve to do its part. And this community has brilliance, it's bold, and it's ready. It needs your support to take it to the next level. The commonality between all of this, from '67 to '68 to 2022, has been now let's invest at scale and you hold it in your hands. The Urban Affairs Committee holds it in their hands. You hold it in your hands as a part of the Appropriations Committee. What we're asking you is can you now take it to the rest of the body? If you believe that, that it will impact your district as much as it impacts our district when we have increased incomes, more businesses, we can close the gap because we've shown collectively that we can do it. We helped create 2,500 jobs. We helped build 1,000 homes. We helped reduce gun violence by 74 percent. We helped 7,000 kids get their first job, internships, and entrepreneurship. With your support, we can double that and we can add 5,000 people to the workforce of Nebraska that will impact all of us. Thank you for your time.

STINNER: Thank you. Questions? Seeing none, thank you very much.

WILLIE BARNEY: Thank you.

STINNER: Afternoon.

MITCH ELLIOTT: Good afternoon. I will be brief in good stewardship of your time. My name is Mitch Elliott, M-i-t-c-h E-l-l-i-o-t-t. I'm an architect and principal with RTG Planning and Design. We're an architecture firm committed to downtown Omaha. Our address is 1302 Howard Street so we're right in the midst of everything. I'm speaking in favor of LB1025 and on behalf of the Omaha International Soccer League. Some of our speakers earlier, I was pretty convinced revival was going to break out here so I want to share a practical side of

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what, what can lead-- come from revival. The Omaha International Soccer League is one of the organizations that-- and it's a project they have-- that this funding, this bill could truly impact in terms of the investment. Our architecture firm has been assisting the Omaha International Soccer League in planning, programming, and analysis of the proposed-- of their proposed soccer residency academy. This is a high school-based student athlete program for 100 students that will focus on soccer and academics. It's very values based. They will be developing the whole person and will attract soccer players and student athletes from Omaha, around the surrounding state, the Midwest, and actually internationally. There's an international organization called Benfica that will be providing a training structure and support for the International Soccer League program. It's-- they're securing-- they're attempting to secure land along Abbott Drive between downtown Omaha and Eppley Airfield. This property has remained undeveloped and woefully dormant for way too many years. We anticipate that if this bill were passed and appropriated, that a project like this would really focus on the infrastructure needed to make the property developable. The, the owners, the, the developers with the Omaha Soccer Association have secured funding and sources in terms of funding for the development of the programs. But we really see that this is a fine opportunity for the investment in north Omaha and the investment in infrastructure to support this type of program. So I thank you for consideration of this bill.

STINNER: Thank you. Questions? Seeing none, thank you. Somehow, I got to figure out how to turn my phone off.

JAMIE BERGLUND: Good afternoon. Thank you, Chair Stinner and members of the Appropriations Committee, for the opportunity to testify in support of LB1025. My name is Jamie Berglund, spelled J-a-m-i-e B-e-r-g-l-u-n-d, and as I shared earlier, I'm the executive director of Spark. We're a community development organization based in Omaha that partners with neighborhood leaders and groups to help catalyze community-driven holistic investments. As I shared with the Urban Affairs Committee hearing a couple of weeks ago, LB1024, one of the key-- on LB1024, one of the key areas of focus for our work includes capacity building programs, technical assistance, and real estate financing for new and emerging real estate developers, the majority of whom identify as black, indigenous people of color and women. In partnership with emerging developers, we work to accomplish our mission of transforming disinvested neighborhoods into prosperous and thriving communities. While Spark is holistic in its approach, housing is central to our work and the North Omaha Recovery Plan outlines numerous critical housing initiatives that would begin to address the

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longstanding need for more housing, including the need for more affordable and workforce housing, which has been exacerbated over the last two years by COVID-19. And while we must increase the number of housing units in north Omaha to address this housing crisis, it must be done equitably and inclusively in partnership with property owners and developers from the north Omaha community. LB1025 will have a dramatic impact on the north Omaha community and reflects the type of investment needed to begin to make a real and significant difference in partnership with north Omaha stakeholders. Thank you for your time and consideration and I'm happy to answer any questions.

STINNER: Any questions? Seeing none, thank you.

TAMMY GREEN: Good afternoon. Thank you--

STINNER: Good afternoon.

TAMMY GREEN: --for this long day of testifying and listening to the community in, in support of really two very, very important legislative bills. I'm Tammy Green, T-a-m-m-y G-r-e-e-n, and I'm the director of workforce and IT innovation for Metropolitan Community College. Thanks for the opportunity to allow Metropolitan Community College to testify in support of LB1025. MCC has established and invested in all of the communities that we serve. That includes both north and south Omaha. The Fort Omaha campus recently invested over \$240 million in state-of-the-art training facilities and has invested heavily in providing training to employment opportunities for individuals and families who are working full time at one or more low-wage jobs. We are the premier provider of both trades education and linkages to advance educational programs for people who typically have been marginalized and kept out of the educational programs. We lead to high-skill, high-wage, and high-need jobs in the communities we serve. This focus impacts individuals by increasing their knowledge and skills. By increasing knowledge and skills, we also focus on increasing a person's wage earnings. MCC also addresses careers by focusing on high-need and in-demand jobs. This impacts the economy, crime, and healthy families. The students we serve have a solid work ethic and growing families. They have dreams for the future. However, the issue is often students need support to complete training, as many individuals who are living paycheck to paycheck found themselves continuing to struggle to get by and still trying to answer the very same questions that we've been trying to answer for years. How do you find time to gain new job skills? How do you pay rent during job training if your current job doesn't offer that paid time off? If you have to quit your second job to make time for training, how would you

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replace that income? These are the kind of challenges facing low-wage earners, motivated people who want to better their lives, themselves, and their families despite the availability of free training programs. MCC has a lot of opportunities for people in our community, but without the support, it's very difficult for them to gain the training necessary to take all of those open jobs, which further perpetuate, perpetuates a skills gap. This legislative bill for both LB1238 and LB1025 really helps provide access for individuals in our community, the support for them to get to those free training programs and the support for them to get to high-wage jobs, which only advances the entire state of Nebraska along with our communities. MCC has supported the educational system in places to partner with organizations this bill that-- this bill supports. This year MCC's workforce innovation division served over 6,500 students through workforce training programs. These programs include support to pay for those training programs, MCC's GAP training program, scholarships, Pell Grants can assist with the cost of the training. Career skills coaches, they're ready to help support students when they get there. MCC also offers the workforce-- the work for-- the Work Forward initiative, which is a really unique opportunity where students have the opportunity to earn \$16 an hour while they're attending the training program. This was offered by COVID-19 relief dollars. One of the missing components of that is making sure that on the other end is the case management support, making sure that when the person is facing the situation where they're going to lose their home, they're not going to be able to feed their families, they're not going to be able to buy those homes or they don't have the resources to do that, that the case managers can also be a major connection for us. Paired with MCC's career coaching, job placement services, transportation support, and other wraparound supports, MCC helps bridge a significant barrier that these individuals face in jumpstarting their careers. As we work through community service agencies, we want to make sure that you understand that MCC is ready to provide that training and we're ready to partner with those entities that were-- that will receive these funds. And also, if you don't support this to the fullest extent, we'll not be able to truly impact poverty, employment, and address skills gaps that is really threatening our communities not only for all of Nebraska, but definitely for the Omaha community.

STINNER: Thank you. Questions? Seeing none, thank you.

TAMMY GREEN: Thank you.

TIM CLARK: Hello, everyone. Hello.

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STINNER: Afternoon.

TIM CLARK: My name is Tim Clark, T-i-m C-l-a-r-k. Of course, I have a lot of notes, but I-- with the time that we have, I just wanted to speak from the heart. I'm here-- I support both bills, LB1238 and LB1025, and I also-- I work for Metropolitan Community College. And so really as a strategy that I feel that will impact both plans, I think we-- it must lie in ability to skill up both communities. When you talk about sustainability-- and I hear over and over not a handout, but a hand-up, but really, this is about proving that the free enterprise system works for everyone. And I'm an artist and so I'm here representing LB1025, really the art piece of that, that when you think about how devastating COVID-19, that insidious virus, it had into the impact of artists, the art community, poetry events, and tourism, north Omaha as well as south Omaha was hit in a very huge way. And so when you think about how do we get back in terms of the small businesses for-- not only the small business but the events, it-- really what this bill will do is help subsidize and buy down the fee structure in terms of just when you think about fees, tickets to get in different live events and festivals all over the state of Nebraska, how do we bring that back? Because we do have to someday arrive at this-- what we're calling this new, the new norm and that's bringing people together so we can get back in terms of that feeling and touching and that sense of feeling the rhythms and the beats and of really what I think really connects us as people, the arts, the arts. And so I ask that you really give strong consideration to supporting both of these bills. And as an artist-- and I have friends that they, they earn a living-- they depend on venues hiring them weekend after weekend so they can play to earn a living to take care of their families. They were impacted in a significant way. The venues can't afford to pay them. And so when you think about even national or regional artists that come to Nebraska, particularly north and south Omaha, in order to bring and get people back out, what this-- partly what this bill will do is support those venues. Significant events that take place in north Omaha, one is Native Omaha Days. It's a weeklong event. You're talking about thousands of people and before COVID, millions of dollars that had an impact, just like Cinco de Mayo. And so this bill will help support that. In closing, I would just say that, you know, it's-- it really is an opportunity for this state to invest. It's an investment. And when you invest, you expect a return, but when you think about north Omaha, unlike any other community in the state of Nebraska, its rich culture and history especially when it comes to music, jazz, a original art form of these United States, and the significant part that north Omaha played as

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being in the middle. Folks on their way to the East Coast, West Coast, from Count Basie to Duke to James Brown, we have an opportunity to continue that legacy and celebrate that legacy and use that as a form of stimulating that economy in terms of north Omaha economic development. Thank you so much.

STINNER: Thank you. Any questions? Seeing none, thank you.

TIM CLARK: Thank you.

JENNIFER CREAGER: Chairman Stinner and members of the committee, I'm Jennifer Creager, J-e-n-n-i-f-e-r C-r-e-a-g-e-r, vice president of public policy at the Greater Omaha Chamber. I'm here to express our support for LB1025. We thank Senators Wayne and McKinney for bringing this to the committee and for soliciting our input as the package was put together. I'm going to cut this way down, but Senator Wayne had asked us specifically to address the Airport Business Park, Business Park today. Our chamber has been looking for opportunities to create an employment center in the north Omaha area for over a decade now. We have evaluated many sites and opportunities for redevelopment, but we always came to the same conclusion. There just are not many sites where you can find a site of any mass. We first looked at what we call the Airport Business Park 2 location in 2011. It provided the opportunity for up to 140 acres of contiguous property through the acquisition of multiple properties. We conducted some preliminary engineering studies on the site and determined a potential development price tag of \$50 million at that time, so \$30 million of acquisition, \$20 million of infrastructure costs. At the time, this seemed like a daunting price tag, so we continued to look for other opportunities. We looked at multiple sites and buildings, but always ran into an obstacle of some sort and always came back to the Airport Park 2 as the best alternative. Early last year, with the help of DED and OPPD, we contracted with Lamp Rynearson to update the Airport Business Park 2 study to look at the best way to structure development phasing and update infrastructure costs. Looking at the acquisition of property and how new infrastructure needed to be installed, as well as storm water management, it was determined that it was best to acquire all the properties at once and develop the main core of the property. This would provide for an initial 100-acre core development area and the ability to add a 22-acre phase two and a 25-acre phase three. 2021 cost estimates put acquisition at \$50-60 million and new infrastructure at \$30 million, including contingencies. The North Omaha Recovery Act, along with potential other funds from the city funds and private contributions, would be able to accomplish this project. This would get us the massive land we would need to create a

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major employment center easily accessible to the north Omaha community. As our potential prospect, we've talked about many businesses could locate on the site. The chamber prepared an economic impact analysis, demonstrating the potential of the site. I've passed that out. There's both a Nebraska economic impact analysis and a Douglas County one. We assumed that seven projects could locate in the phase one core area of 100 acres and employ 1,700 people. At full build-- a full build-out would generate a direct and indirect economic impact of \$650 million annually to Douglas County. Statewide, that impact is \$738 million annually. As you can see, this provides a substantial return on investment. Again, we support LB1025 and the effort to create an industrial park and other business opportunities in north Omaha. Thank you for your consideration.

STINNER: Thank you. Questions? Senator Clements.

CLEMENTS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Ms. Creager, is the current Airport Park all built out in full?

JENNIFER CREAGER: You know, I will get you-- they don't let me in on the project side of the chamber's work very often. I'll get you an answer on that, Senator Clements. I don't know.

CLEMENTS: I'm just wondering if it's, if it's maxed out or not.

JENNIFER CREAGER: I'll check.

CLEMENTS: I'd be curious. Thank you.

STINNER: Additional questions? Seeing none, thank you.

JENNIFER CREAGER: Thank you.

STINNER: This will be the last testifier on the five-minute rule. We're going to the speed round.

ALVIN OKEREKE: I'll try to keep it extremely short. My name is Alvin Okereke, A-l-v-i-n O-k-e-r-e-k-e. I'm in support of LB1025. I was given short notice, so I didn't have anything prepared, but I certainly want to-- actually for both this and the prior bill, I wanted certainly to speak in strong support of Omaha International Soccer League, which is a great organization that could stand to benefit from this bill. And I'd like to make sure I present this to everyone as an opportunity to make a, to make a significant impact to multiple communities that can benefit from this and to actually hopefully see the strongest difference in, in a large part of

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Nebraska. So this is an investment in Nebraska, as a lot of people have mentioned, that this particular opportunity provides. There a lot of support-- there is a lot of support. There are a lot of people aligned to see this make a significant impact. And I think if others obviously haven't made it clear, this is certainly again another opportunity to make a very visible impact that this bill presents for the state. I do thank you for your time so hopefully [INAUDIBLE].

STINNER: Thank you.

ALVIN OKEREKE: Thank you very much.

STINNER: We're now going to go to three minutes. OK.

KATIE WEITZ: Hello again. My name is Katie Weitz, K-a-t-i-e W-e-i-t-z, and thank you, senators, for letting me be back here with you. Thank you, Senator Stinner, for chairing this committee and working so hard to ensure that these federal funds are spent as intended on all these worthy endeavors. I am very thankful that the Appropriations Committee sees the importance of the North Omaha Recovery Act. As the executive director of the Weitz Family Foundation, who works to create equity throughout Omaha, including but not limited to, those who are living and working in north Omaha, I have found strong partners and places for deep investment by our family foundation. The Weitz Family Foundation has invested \$11.8 million in the past ten years to physical projects in north Omaha and we are committed to continuing our work in partnership with the community. We have targeted our dollars during this pandemic to initiatives that address those who have been devastated by the pandemic. This includes providing dollars to Nebraska Enterprise Fund to give loans to those too small or not yet connected with banks to receive PPP. We know that this saved businesses and jobs through our-- throughout our state and provided access to capital to those deeply affected by COVID. We are also doing business with the Carver Legacy Center, which is helping to provide loans to small businesses and creating a hub for entrepreneurs at 24th and Lake. As you may remember from my previous appearances before this committee, the Weitz Family Foundation is committed to hiring small and emerging businesses for all the renovation of the Yates Illuminates Project and other physical buildings that we are-- capital projects that we're working on. Because minority-owned businesses were disproportionately affected and we are awarding contracts to these individuals, we are multiplying our efforts to create equity. We're also providing capital grants to the Union for Contemporary Art, which is an amazing art facility. Tim Clark didn't use his jazz hands, but it's an amazing facility, and the Great Plains Black History Museum

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and OEC, the Omaha Economic Development Organization, which will continue to increase tourism and generate economic activity in north Omaha. We also support Seventy Five North and the expansion of their greenhouse program. We invest heavily in Malcolm X-- well-- I'm sorry, no more empty pots, and we've-- and projects related to the Malcolm X Foundation. We provide matching funds to the Governor's housing grants. We believe much more could be done along similar lines with your investments and that will generate similar enthusiasm by private philanthropists. Many of these projects here are well known to me and I can vouch for them and I hope that you will help us achieve our vision of greater equity throughout Omaha and I appreciate your recognition and time.

STINNER: I appreciate your three minutes. Questions? Thank you.

KATIE WEITZ: I do a lot better with prepared remarks.

CAROL BODEEN: Hello again.

STINNER: Yeah.

CAROL BODEEN: My name is Carol Bodeen, C-a-r-o-l B-o-d-e-e-n. I'm the director of policy and outreach for Nebraska Housing Developers Association. I will also be as quick as possible and since I cannot be as inspirational as those that have been testifying-- and I'll try not to be redundant, but the reasons for our support of LB1025 are, are, of course, similar to our reasons of support for LB1238 previously. The, the parts that, that we support, it's, it's public and private. The qualified census tracts is important to us, with it being 60 percent of-- incomes below 60 percent of area median income. Of course, the fact that it's-- that some of these funds will be used for housing and homeless, like the fact of combining housing with jobs. We're impressed with the coordination of effort between city and county and community, private foundations, all of that, bringing in south Omaha and making that a coordinated effort of all of those census tracts. So we are supportive of LB1025. Just as with LB1238, we feel that it is an investment that is important and that can have a great impact. And I'll take any questions.

STINNER: Thank you. Any questions?

CAROL BODEEN: All right, thank you.

STINNER: Seeing none, thank you. Oh, we couldn't have run out of testifiers already. Any additional proponents? Any opponents? Anyone

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in the neutral capacity? Senator Wayne, are you here? I think Senator Wayne must have vanished.

WISHART: He said he'd be here.

STINNER: I thought he was too. Not seeing him. We do have ten letters of support for LB1025 and without seeing Senator Wayne, that concludes our hearing on LB1025. We'll now open with the hearing on LB1210. Thank you. We're on LB1210.

WAYNE: Well, I want to close.

STINNER: Well, we waited for you.

WAYNE: You called me back up.

STINNER: All right, go ahead and close.

WAYNE: All right. I want to close on, on this. I think it's important. I did run down here. Transcribers will hear some breaths in between this, but here's the reality. You heard a lot of testimony today and right now it's time for bold and assertive leadership, not just from a couple of individuals, but from this entire, entire body. I know we think about campaigns during campaign season. Oftentimes, our future is kind of sad. We got negative ads and polarizing, but this is an opportunity for us as Nebraskans to get it right. In short, we have had economic stagnation, decline in our community-- that was testified by Mr. Barney-- back in 1968 to about the same it is today. If we continue to keep doing the things we've been doing, nothing's going to change. So I'm willing to work across the aisle. I'm willing to work with everybody to help move to Nebraska from good to great. But unlike all the other bills you might see in this, in this particular committee, there's an actual plan and data that is fundamentally around Omaha that supports the plan. That plan was done with a lot of free time for my kids. See, I struggle in Nebraska on why we should stay here. You look at every chamber survey in Omaha and across the state, African-Americans and minorities are fleeing this state. They are fleeing because there isn't investment top down in their communities. That's all political sides. Mayor, city council, county board, Governor, and this body from all political aisles in the last 50 years have refused to invest in the community. I'm not here to say that we got to right a wrong. I'll never forget the first year that Senator Erdman voted for my felon bill. He said, you don't have to talk to me about black and white. If it's a good bill, it's a good bill. I didn't talk about black and white here today. I'm talking

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business case of why we need to invest like we do in every other community throughout this state. You have almost a dollar-for-dollar match on everything we're talking about and sometimes three-to-one match from the private sector. There's not a better investment we can make in the state right now than in north and south Omaha. And the timing is right because we're losing people. We have companies who are trying to come here and won't come here because we don't have enough people. In our committee hearing, the chamber talked about four companies who wanted to come into north and south Omaha but couldn't find a spot. We now have the ability to create that spot, over 500 jobs in a community that desperately has been begging for leadership from this body, the Governor, city council, everybody to invest. And for the first time, we're all aligned, first time ever. I don't think people understand that I didn't ask anybody to come here today. The only person I talked to was Willie Barney. These people showed up two weeks ago and they said, when's the next hearing? I said on the 14th. They in the community have been talking about it. In fact, I told you this morning, I think maybe ten testifiers. There was more. You have people in this room who will never sit in the same room again because they don't get along, but the plan is that important. The plan is that important because we are dying for investment, because when I look at my little girl, I say, we got this thing called the American Promise. It promises you that if you work hard, you go to school, you can get a good-paying job and you can live in the community that you grew up in. That's not true for so many people in my community and this gives them the opportunity to make that true, that they can live, work in a safe environment in their neighborhood. We're just asking for a chance. We're asking that our community, like a phoenix, can rise up from the ashes and be something, but that chance will not happen without us here. So this isn't a, this isn't a political ploy. This isn't just something that we need help with. You're hearing north and south Omaha say you guys can be the difference for the first time and we're hoping you all will step up. Thank you, Chairman.

STINNER: Thank you. Questions? Seeing none, thank you.

WAYNE: Thank you.

STINNER: You have another bill that you're--

WAYNE: Am I going next? All right.

STINNER: I think we got Senator--

WAYNE: Oh, I'll be back.

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STINNER: --and then-- OK.

VARGAS: Senator Slama.

STINNER: I just wanted to make you aware. I didn't want you to head out. Good afternoon, Senator Slama.

SLAMA: Good evening, Chairman Stinner. I--

STINNER: Usually I say evening--

SLAMA: --feel bad about following that.

STINNER: --after 6, so.

SLAMA: Oh, OK.

STINNER: We're still, we're still in the five zone.

SLAMA: Well, Happy Valentine's Day, all.

STINNER: There you go.

SLAMA: My name is Julie Slama, J-u-l-i-e S-l-a-m-a, and I represent District 1 in southeast Nebraska. I'm here today to introduce LB1210, which would use \$10 million of ARPA funding to give financial assistance to small businesses in villages and cities of the second class. The COVID-19 pandemic hit small businesses hard across the nation. According to the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the U.S.A., 41.3 percent of businesses reported they had to temporarily close, close because of COVID, directly impacting their revenue and fiscal stability. Also across the country, the average small business experienced a 50 percent decrease in revenue. A similar situation occurred in Nebraska. The Department of Economic Development launched a survey in April 2020 to determine the impact of the pandemic on Nebraska businesses. The top concern of businesses responding to the survey was the financial strain caused by the pandemic. Across the board, revenue was down 44.2 percent and employment was down 35.2 percent, most likely due to businesses' inability to pay its employees. These businesses that LB1210 would help had a low profit margin before the pandemic and COVID only intensified this issue. Even though many small businesses are back in action now, our main streets are still struggling to get back to where they were financially prior to the pandemic. After spending two years struggling to stay afloat, many businesses had to send renovation projects to the back burner. This would include any projects relating

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to development, acquisition, and repair of their infrastructure. LB1210 would create a grant program through the Department of Economic Development specifically geared towards these back-burner investment projects. Unique challenges come with being a building located in a small-town Main Street district. Many of the businesses there are located in historical buildings. Although these buildings are beautiful and add a lot of charm to our towns, they are historic and often need some work. Because of the pandemic, any structural work that may have been discussed or started had to be halted since nearly every small business had to spend most of their money just to keep their doors open. Even two years later, with the financial state of our rural small businesses, projects like this are likely not to happen unless we, as a Legislature or some other entity, gives these small businesses a chance to thrive in these historic buildings. Downtowns and Main Street districts are the lifeblood of our rural communities. They're a critical role in bringing residents together to socialize, shop, and eat. The grant program outlined in LB1210 is a qualified use of ARPA funding and would only use \$10 million, which is less than 1 percent of our total ARPA dollars. This program is vital and will greatly assist the small businesses in my district and in other rural communities that have been overlooked by some other funding streams. Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

STINNER: Any questions? Seeing none--

SLAMA: Fantastic.

STINNER: --can I have-- see hands of testifiers? I got one, two, three. OK. We'll go with the five-minute rule on this one.

SLAMA: And if anything comes up during the hearing, I'll close, but I'll just plan to waive my close now.

STINNER: OK.

SLAMA: Yeah, I don't anticipate it to. Thank you.

STINNER: Oh, boy.

KRISTEN HASSEBROOK: Good afternoon, Chairman Stinner and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Kristen Hassebrook, K-r-i-s-t-e-n H-a-s-s-e-b-r-o-o-k, and I'm here today on behalf of the Nebraska Chamber to support LB1210. In Nebraska, Main Street businesses took some of the toughest blows from the pandemic. Many were forced to shut down and suffered operating losses, which could

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have fatal and long-term consequences. It's these same businesses that are across the state that are relied upon as the heart of our communities. According to a UNO Center for Public Policy Business survey conducted throughout the pandemic, the number one concern during and throughout was the need for flexible and accessible cash flow during this pandemic. In circumstances where businesses had to shut down through no fault of their own and experience a demonstrable level of profit loss, a government assistance program could be an effective way to bridge the gap until these businesses can fully recover. Also, in a world where people increasingly live, work, and-- live and work where they wish, our people, resources, and quality of life in small towns puts Nebraska in a better position to compete and win as we come out of the pandemic. But to be successful, Nebraska businesses must have the, the necessary investments to enhance and build out vibrant communities. Similar to the experience like you've maybe seen with the Civic and Community Center Financing Fund, state investments can support communities as they carry out local projects that preserve, develop, or improve the local quality of life. Many communities and small businesses across Nebraska would benefit from investment in such spaces as those envisioned under LB1210 and such an investment could also put local engineers and contractors to work while providing quality-of-life benefits to local communities. And many of these are projects that are uniquely beneficial among infrastructure projects since they can be constructed quickly and by smaller contractors looking to gain experience and reputation in a much-needed workforce area. With that, I'd be happy to answer any questions.

STINNER: Senator Clements.

CLEMENTS: What's the population of a city of the second class?

KRISTEN HASSEBROOK: I do not know the answer off the top of my head.

CLEMENTS: How many are there in Nebraska?

KRISTEN HASSEBROOK: I do not know the answer off the top of my head.

CLEMENTS: Thank you.

CRYSTAL DUNEKACKE: It's 5,000.

KRISTEN HASSEBROOK: The next testifier will--

CLEMENTS: OK.

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STINNER: Additional questions? Seeing none, thank you.

KRISTEN HASSEBROOK: Thank you.

CRYSTAL DUNEKACKE: Good afternoon.

STINNER: Afternoon.

CRYSTAL DUNEKACKE: I practiced at the three-minute level, so I think I'm going to be OK today.

STINNER: OK.

CRYSTAL DUNEKACKE: My name is--

STINNER: Three minutes is terrific.

CRYSTAL DUNEKACKE: Perfect. My name is Crystal Dunekacke, C-r-y-s-t-a-l D-u-n-e-k-a-c-k-e. I'm here to testify on behalf of the city of Auburn and the Nebraska Economic Developers Association in support of this bill. I'm the city administrator and economic developer for the city of Auburn, Nebraska. Auburn is one of the cities of a second class, a population of 3,470 people in Nemaha County. Nebraska [SIC] is only one of the 117 cities of the second class who would benefit from this bill, along with the 380 villages in the state of Nebraska as well. And so it would be 500--5,000 and less are cities of the second class to answer that question. So the proposed \$10 million in this ARPA bill funding would help support us that way. In addition to my role as a city administrator, I was also formerly worked for a development district and helped cities of the second class and first class-- couple of them-- and lots of villages build buildings with the community development block grant funds, CCCFF and some of the programs that were aforementioned, so this funding will be right up that alley and we'll definitely know how to put those dollars to use in our small communities. I'm also a recovering public servant because I've been a small-town mayor and city council member and school board member so I can guarantee you that when you put funding together for small communities, we'll put our dollars together, match those funds, and put those dollars to work in our communities. Businesses and cities of second class and villages suffered through the pandemic. Between decreased travel and tourism that brought less traffic to our communities, as well as other barriers like the closing of schools and daycares that limited our already depleted workforce can just quickly respond to the crisis by investing public or private dollars. In our own community, the Auburn Development Council put together a \$20,000 program to match gift cards

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and to give out disaster relief to our local businesses. And there are many other second-class cities and villages that did the same thing to help our local businesses recover. As the directed health measures expired and commerce began to return to normal, some, some businesses did manage to bounce back on to face the realities of rising costs and record workforce shortages. Still, others were not able to recover from the economic impact of the pandemic and have closed permanently, leaving a gap in our communities. Add to this the rising cost of construction to renovate our existing downtown storefronts and you arrive at a perfect storm. We have entrepreneurs who are ready to join into the economic recovery that help-- need help to fill that gap between what they can afford to invest in themselves and the investment that it's going to take to make them successful. And this is the area in which economic development, specifically through this bill, LB1210, can help rural Nebraska thrive. Economic development in cities of the second class and villages is tough work I can tell you. I get calls from small businesses nearly every week with questions about where can I get funding, what kind of funding is out there for those that want to start new businesses or they've got a home-based business or a hobby that they want to turn into a full-time job and fill into one of our empty storefronts. In Auburn, we're lucky because we do have some tools for economic development like tax increment financing, but as you know, community development law limits that to a very narrow portion of funding. And I can refer them to local lenders and other entities, such as the Southeast Nebraska Development District revolving loan funds or the Center for Rural Affairs, but again, there's still that gap that they're looking to fill. You know, and for us and the local villages around us like Johnson and Brownville, there's even less options. So I really believe that the ARPA funds that can be allocated for this bill would help to add to our toolbox. And on behalf of the small businesses in my city of the second class, the villages around us, the Nebraska Economic Developers Association, I ask you to support the bill and be glad to answer any questions you might have.

STINNER: Thank you. Questions? Seeing none, thank you.

CRYSTAL DUNEKACKE: Thank you so much for your patience today.

STINNER: Any additional proponents? Any opponents? Anyone in the neutral capacity? Seeing none, Senator, would you like to close?

SLAMA: Just one minute. I will keep it under a minute. First off, no opponents, no neutral. I think this is set for consent calendar. But I failed in my opening to mention why I brought this bill and I'll just

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briefly hit on that. I think that a lot of our larger communities in Nebraska are very blessed to have folks whose job it is to seek out the different grants, the different funds available for investment in their communities and it shows. If you look at the historic downtowns of some of our larger communities, millions have been invested in those historic buildings to maintain them, bring them as close as they can to their former glory. When we're talking about our small towns, our villages, our cities of the first class [SIC], 5,000 and under, you just don't have access to a person who can seek out those kinds of resources. So I wanted to design this program and go through the DED in doing it to have a program that truly is accessible for communities that are often overlooked with these programs. So thank you and I'm happy to answer any questions you all--

STINNER: Thank you.

SLAMA: --may have.

STINNER: Questions?

SLAMA: Thank you.

STINNER: Seeing none, thank you. There were two letters of support for LB1210. We'll now open on LB1120, Senator Wayne. Good to see you again.

WAYNE: Welcome, Chairman Stinner and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Justin Wayne, J-u-s-t-i-n W-a-y-n-e, and I represent Legislative District 13, which is north, north Omaha and northeast Douglas County. This bill was a placeholder bill because on the first ten days, we didn't know what the city of Omaha and Douglas County was doing-- were going to do with their dollars and with shovel ready being passed last year, we were concerned. I say we, Senator McKinney and I were concerned about where all the ARPA dollars were going to go and so we wanted to have a placeholder bill to figure out if we should allow them to double-dip or not. So you can use this bill however you want, as a placeholder. I said ARPA at least four times in the opening, so if you didn't have a bill, this can now be your bill. Other than that, if you're here to testify, that means I'm not advancing the bill so have a good day.

STINNER: OK.

WAYNE: I'll waive closing.

STINNER: Questions? Seeing none, thank you, Senator.

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WAYNE: Thank you.

STINNER: Any proponents? Any opponents? Anyone in the neutral capacity? Seeing none and Senator waives closing. That concludes our hearing on LB1120. We'll now open with LB1163. There was nobody in support or against it.

McDONNELL: Brevity, Senator. Brevity--

STINNER: There were two against, I'm sorry. Senator Wishart.

McDONNELL: Can you ask how many people are testifying on this one?

WISHART: Thank you, Chairman Stinner and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Anna Wishart, A-n-n-a W-i-s-h-a-r-t, and I represent the 27th District in Lincoln, Lancaster County. I'm here today to introduce LB1163, a bill which seeks to appropriate \$20 million from the federal American Recovery Plan Act to the Business Innovation Act. Additionally, LB1163 seeks to change the BIA's annual program caps, which is actually a really important statutory change in itself. The Business Innovation Act was created in 2011 with the stated goals of improving the translation of the state's research and development base into new products and new companies, supporting the development of growth-oriented startup companies and upgrading the value-added activities and modernizing-- modernization of Nebraska's existing industry clusters. According to the 2019 report for the Center for Regional Economic Competitive [SIC], the Bureau of Business Research at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln found that through the BIE-- BIA, businesses raised \$55.1 million in matching funds, reported raising \$100.3 million in capital after receiving the BIA support. That's \$4.46 for every \$1 in state support and reported having earned \$100.6 million in revenue as a result of the state investment. That's \$4.47 for every \$1 in state support. That means the BIA fund supported nearly \$285 million in economic activity, 1,436 jobs, and helped generate an additional \$6.5 million in state and local annual taxes. Additionally, LB1163 seeks to change the BIA's annual program cap from four-- \$4 million per year to \$6 million per year for the following subsections: phase one and two planning grants-- you know what? I'm just going to let you review that in the bill itself because of time. For the small business investment program, it also increases that cap. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all Nebraska businesses, many of which are still feeling the effects of the pandemic today. Many businesses are now facing continued supply shortages, staffing issues, and rising costs, among other challenges many of us don't even understand. Bolstering the BIA Act programs with ARPA dollars and

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allowing for increased utilization by increasing the annual award caps is one more tool in Nebraska's toolbox for businesses to stay competitive, keep innovating, and continue to employ people right here in Nebraska. I do want to address the fiscal note quickly. I am open to adding language to LB1136 [SIC] to ensure that these specific ARPA dollars are used to give awards to businesses that can demonstrate the negative economic impact to their businesses. And also, we just heard some very compelling testimony from representatives of north and south Omaha and areas of our state that fall into qualified census tracts. I'd be also willing to look at narrowing BIA to support businesses in those areas and so we can have further discussion about that. With that, I'm happy to take any questions.

STINNER: Any questions? This is an existing program, is it not?

WISHART: Yes.

STINNER: And we're adding \$20 million of ARPA funds?

WISHART: One time.

STINNER: And--

WISHART: And then we're, we're changing the caps.

STINNER: And the, and the Department of Economic Development needs three and a quarter more people. OK. Any additional questions?

JOSEPH YOUNG: Afternoon or evening, Chairman Stinner and members of the committee. For the record, my name is Joseph Young, J-o-s-e-p-h Y-o-u-n-g. I don't need three minutes or five.

STINNER: OK.

JOSEPH YOUNG: And I trust that, of course--

STINNER: Yeah.

JOSEPH YOUNG: --you'll give this bill extra points because of that. So today I'm testifying on behalf of the Lincoln Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Omaha Chamber, the Nebraska Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and Invest Nebraska, of which I am the current chairman. I was part of the group that put together LB387 in 2011 that created the Business Innovation Act and that stemmed from a report by a research organization called Battelle. One of the things that they noted at the time was that we were basically second to last when it came to venture

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capital and/or angel funds/startup capital for small businesses. My colleague and friend, Richard Byer [PHONETIC] likes to say thank God for Mississippi because otherwise we would look really, really bad. Since then, I think we're just over-- in the top 25 states for venture capital. And the reason that that, that that's the case is because LB387 allowed this state-- not just the bill, but the private sector as well-- allowed the state to really create an ecosystem for startups. And you know, ten years ago, we could not have sustained or managed \$20 million of extra capital in this program, but today we can because of Invest Nebraska, because of the ecosystem that, that was created because of LB387 and other, and other private ventures. So when we talk about ROI on appropriations that you all approve, it's almost six to one for this program. Almost \$6 to every \$1 coming out of state funds comes from the private sector to these folks. So it's been wildly successful, more successful than we thought it was going to be. And so for that reasons, we would appreciate approval of LB1163.

STINNER: Thank you. Additional questions? Seeing none, thank you very much.

JOSEPH YOUNG: Thank you.

BEN JOHNSON: Afternoon. So I need three?

STINNER: 5:30, we're still in the afternoon.

BEN JOHNSON: I agree. So good afternoon, Chairman Stinner and members of the Appropriations Committee. For the record, my name is Ben Johnson, B-e-n J-o-h-n-s-o-n. I appear before you today as cofounder and chief innovation officer at Grain Weevil Corporation in support of the concepts outlined by LB1163. I'd like to thank Senator, Senator Wishart for introducing this proposal for discussion. Grain Weevil is a grain bin safety and management robot startup company based in Aurora, Nebraska. The project started with a challenge from a family friend to build him a robot so his kids never have to get into a grain bin and has grown into an award-winning rural startup. We have benefited from the Business Innovation Act by receiving a prototyping grant, participated in a combine incubator, and received investment from Invest Nebraska. The prototyping grant provided funding for us at a critical time in our development. This allowed us to increase our pace from side project to startup company. The funding was used primarily to engage with local small businesses in Aurora and the surrounding areas to help us build five prototype robots. Those units were used for on-farm trials to test and prove many of the key design

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requirements for our first-of-its kind robot. This input of funding helped lay the foundation for our early success and that includes a Lemelson MIT Student Innovation Award and being named the 2022 American Farm Bureau Ag Innovation Challenge winner. In addition, the combine and Invest Nebraska have been key partners in our development as a company. The combine gave us necessary assistance in our business development when we were focused on creating a product. Invest Nebraska was the lead investor in our seed funding round that we closed this November. The funding has allowed our team to grow to four full-time employees and we continue to engage in our local businesses and their communities. There's a groundswell of rural innovation happening-- taking place in Nebraska right now. Agriculture opportunities in Nebraska make it a perfect place for ag tech companies like ours to thrive. Other Nebraska industries like manufacturing, energy, and healthcare are also primed for disruptive, disruptive innovation. Additional funding for the BIA will help accelerate this development. As we've shown, the economic impact of additional funding doesn't just help the commute-- the companies receiving the grants and investments, it helps build a robust economy throughout the state. On behalf of Grain Weevil Corporation, we encourage the Legislature to continue additional investment in the Business Innovation Act. At this time, I'd be happy to answer any questions.

STINNER: Questions? Seeing none, thank you.

JACOB HOGBERG: Good afternoon--

STINNER: Afternoon.

JACOB HOGBERG: --Chairman Stinner and members of the Appropriations Committee. I'm Jacob Hogberg, J-a-c-o-b H-o-g-b-e-r-g. I appear before you today as the engineering team lead at Marble Technologies, a Nebraska-based ag tech startup and recipient of the Nebraska Innovation Fund prototype grant. Marble was founded to accelerate food system technologies for people and the planet. We're creating intelligent automated systems and software solutions for food processors using the latest advancements in computer vision, automation, robotics, and artificial intelligence. Focusing on the meat industry, one of the weakest links in the food supply chain, Marble is working to decrease excessive labor requirements highlighted by this pandemic, advance worker safety, and reduce waste in the meat processing process. High-tech startup companies require significant funding for R&D and product development. Difficulty accessing early-stage funding is a barrier that keeps potential companies from

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turning an idea into a strong Nebraska business. Early-stage funding programs such as the Business Innovation Act prototype grant are invaluable for tech startups like Marble. Marble received a \$150,000 grant from the Nebraska Business Innovation Act prototype grant program. We have used these funds to develop a prototype version of our first product. Money from the grant has been applied to wages for engineers, software developers, and meat scientists here in Nebraska, as well as to purchase raw materials for the prototype. These funds have helped us reach the pilot phase of product development. Throughout development, we've been collaborating with a Nebraska beef processor and they will be the first to pilot Marble's new technology. In addition to the prototype grant, Marble received seed funding from Invest Nebraska, which, coupled with the support of the team at Invest Nebraska and the prototype grant program, mentors and advisors from UNL, and animal, agriculture, and meat processing industry experts throughout Nebraska, this has been critical to the growth of our company. As we build our company, we're adding needed jobs to our state. To date, Marble has hired 12 full-time employees. Seven, including myself, are graduates of the University in Nebraska. The jobs created by Marble and other tech startups aren't limited to Omaha and Lincoln, but also provide opportunities for people in rural communities around the state. For example, our director of business development works remotely from her farm in Albion. Challenges in the food supply chain, especially the beef supply chain, must be solved. These are Nebraska challenges and should be solved by Nebraska startups. Programs like the prototype grant are critical for building companies such as Marble in this state. I encourage the Legislature to consider additional investments into the Business Innovation Act to further support the growth of ag tech and other startups in our state. Thank you.

STINNER: Thank you. Any questions? Seeing none, thank you very much.

ERDMAN: Senator Stinner.

STINNER: Yes, Senator Erdman.

ERDMAN: Thank you, Senator Stinner. What kind of grant-- how much did you get? How much did you get?

JACOB HOGBERG: \$150,000.

ERDMAN: OK, thank you.

JACOB HOGBERG: Thank you.

STINNER: Thank you.

SHANE FARRITOR: I might be the end of a long day, huh?

STINNER: Yeah.

SHANE FARRITOR: Good afternoon, Chairman Stinner and members of the Appropriations Committee. I especially want to thank Senator Wishart for introducing this proposal and for the discussion. My name is Shane Farritor, S-h-a-n-e F-a-r-r-i-t-o-r, and I appear before you today as cofounder and chief technology officer of Virtual Incision Corporation. I also happen to be a professor of mechanical engineering at UNL. I grew up a fourth-generation Nebraskan in a little town called Ravenna. I went to UNL for my undergraduate and then MIT for my master's and Ph.D., but came racing back to Nebraska because, like most of you, I'm Nebraska to my core. I'm very excited today to tell you about new high-tech opportunities we're creating here in Nebraska to keep and bring back our talent, thanks in part to the Business Innovation Act. I want to tell you about Virtual Incision, which is a spinout company based on research that we performed inside the university. I'm speaking in support of the concepts of LB1136 and want to tell you about Virtual Incision and how the Business Innovation Act has been important to us. I want to explain what the taxpayers got-- taxpayers of our great state got for their money. For Virtual-- first, Virtual Incision is trying to do something very big. We make small robots that are inserted into the body to perform surgery. Our first product is called MIRA and it's designed for colon resection. So you may be aware of minimally evasive surgery or laparoscopic surgery where they inflate you, create a little space inside your abdomen, and usually they put instruments in there. We put a small robot inside that has two arms and a head like we do. We basically shrink the surgeon down and put them on the inside. It's a big revolutionary concept. I mentioned colon resection. We received, in 2020, approval from the FDA to perform a human clinical trial and we've now completed ten human cases, with eight of those being performed here at Bryan Hospital in Lincoln. Colon resection is a serious and complicated procedure that's still largely performed open-- especially in rural parts of our state, very likely to get an open procedure, which involves an eight- to ten-day-- excuse me, eight to ten-inch incision and results in about a ten-day stay in the hospital. In our first ten cases, the average hospital stay was 2.6 days. This is a huge benefit to patients and we all know about the high costs of healthcare and the COVID strain has placed on our healthcare system. So eight Nebraskans have now been treated with our technology and I hope this number grows to millions worldwide in the coming years. Virtual Incision plans to

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change the way surgery is performed. Our smaller, simpler, and less expensive devices have the potential to bring surgery to more operating rooms and to more patients. And this has special significance to me because our rural and critical access hospitals across the state generally do not have access to robotic surgery and this-- our smaller, cheaper technology could enable that. Virtual Incision is located on Innovation Campus. I understand you guys are going to visit Innovation Campus soon. I invite you all to stop by and try the robot. I won't let you do any surgery, but we'll let you drive the robot around. We have 38 employees and about 25 here in Lincoln; 20 of those 25 are alumni of UNL and I'm very glad we were able to keep those talented people here and excite and provide them with exciting opportunities. Last November, we announced a \$46.5 million venture capital round. I believe that's the second largest in Nebraska history and that brings the total investment in our company to more than \$100 million. It's not been easy to raise venture capital. Honestly, I think much of that has to do with the fact that we're in Nebraska and we're not on the coasts. Most of the venture firms are on the coasts and most of them don't want to get on an airplane to come to board meetings in Lincoln, Nebraska. All except about one of that \$100 million came from outside of our state. I'm very happy to bring those \$99 million back into our economy. However, the \$1 million in Nebraska capital has been very important and I believe the Business Innovation Act has been a big part of that. The first investment got us started with angel investment, which is part of the Business Innovation Act, and then a-- later, an investment through Invest Nebraska. Virtual Incision is expanding. I want to triple the employees we have on Innovation Campus. I'm excited about our future and we are continuing to grow right here in Nebraska. I believe we need to be good stewards of the tax dollars of the people of our state and of the federal dollars, but I'm supportive of the concepts in the Business Innovation Act and helping our entrepreneurial economy grow in Nebraska. I wish there were 10 or 50 more startups like Virtual Incision. So I'm excited about our future here. Be happy to answer any questions.

STINNER: Questions? Seeing none, thank you. Any more proponents? Any opponents? Anyone in the neutral capacity? Senator, would you like to close? Senator close-- waives her closing. We have one letter in support of LB1163.

WISHART: Senator Erdman has a question.

STINNER: Oh, I'm sorry.

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ERDMAN: That's OK.

WISHART: It's hard to see.

ERDMAN: Senator, Senator, how much money do they distribute now?

WISHART: How much money do they distribute now?

ERDMAN: How much is in the program now?

WISHART: Oh, I'd have to go back and look. We've added more money over the years to it. It's a significant amount, but there's always the need.

ERDMAN: So following up on Senator Stinner's comment, how is it possible that it's going to take three and a half more people?

WISHART: I have absolutely no clue. Every year, we've come in and invested in this fund and we've never had an FTE request in the past.

ERDMAN: According to the fiscal note, they asked the Economic Development Department to do this and that's where they got the information.

WISHART: Yeah.

ERDMAN: That's what it says at the top. That doesn't make any sense.

WISHART: Well, I will talk with Director Goins and--

ERDMAN: It's an existing program.

WISHART: Yes. And also, they have very capable and talented people who run the individual parts of the program in terms of Invest Nebraska and microenterprise loan. So I'll go and talk to Director Goins and clear it up.

ERDMAN: Because the first year, it's almost a half a million dollars.

WISHART: Yeah.

ERDMAN: It doesn't make sense. Thank you.

STINNER: I believe just for sake of-- I think we're at \$15 million in the program on an annual basis. We increased to that. That, that was the last I remember, so.

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ERDMAN: OK. Thank you.

STINNER: So it is a large program.

ERDMAN: But it shouldn't need three and a half--

STINNER: Yeah, and it's not the Senator's fault. This came--

ERDMAN: No, I understand that and I was-- I didn't indicate it was your fault.

STINNER: Yeah.

WISHART: No. Thank you.

STINNER: So that, that concludes our hearing on LB1163 and that concludes our hearings for this evening.