

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Education Committee February 1, 2022

WALZ: [RECORDER MALFUNCTION] Education Committee public hearing. My name is Lynne Walz from Legislative District 15. I serve as Chair of the committee. The committee will take up the bills in order on the proposed agenda. Just want to note that if you would like to testify on multiple bills, please make sure that you fill out a separate testifier sheet and speak separately for each bill. If you would like your position on a bill on the official record but do not wish to testify, please sign the yellow form at the back of the room, so. Our hearing today is your public part of the legislative process. This is your opportunity to express your position on the proposed legislation before us today. To better facilitate today's proceedings, I ask that you abide by the following rules. Please turn off or silence your cell phones or other electronic devices. The order of testimony is introducer proponents, opponents, neutral, and closing remarks. If you will be testifying, please complete the green testifier sheet and hand it to the committee clerk when you come up to testify. If you have written materials that you would like distributed to the committee, please hand them to the page to distribute, to distribute when you begin. We need ten copies for all committee members and staff. If you need additional copies, please ask a page to make copies for you now. When you begin to testify, state and spell your name for the records. Please speak directly into the microphone so our transcribers are able to hear your testimony clearly. If you are not testifying in person and would like to submit written comments to be included in the official hearing record as an exhibit, you will find the required link on the bill page of the Nebraska Legislature's website. Comments are allowed once a bill has been scheduled for a public hearing and must be submitted and verified prior to 12 p.m. on the last work day prior to the public hearing. The comments submitted online and verified prior to the deadline and identified as comments for public hearing record will be the only method for submission of an official hearing record comments other than testifying in person. Letters and comments submitted via email or hand-delivered will no longer be included as part of the public hearing record, although they are a viable option for communicating your views with an individual senator. Finally, please be concise. Testimony will be limited to five minutes. You will be using the light system. Green, your time has started and you may begin speaking. Yellow, you have one minute remaining and you'll wrap up when you see the red light. The committee members with us today will introduce themselves beginning at my far right.

MURMAN: Hello. I'm Senator Dave Murman from District 38 and I represent seven counties and part of an eighth in the middle of the state along the southern border.

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LINEHAN: Good afternoon. I'm Lou Ann Linehan. I represent Legislative District 39, which is Elkhorn and Waterloo in Douglas County, Nebraska.

SANDERS: Good afternoon. Rita Sanders, representing District 45. That's the Bellevue-Offutt community.

WALZ: To my immediate right is research analyst, Nicole Barrett, and to the right end of the table is committee clerk, Noah Boger. And our pages today are Bhagya Pushkaran and Aleks Glowik. Please remember that senators may come and go during our hearing, as they may have bills to introduce in other committees. I'd also like to remind our committee members to speak directly into the microphones and limit side conversations and making noise on personal devices. We are an electronics-equipped committee and information is provided electronically as well as in paper form. Therefore, you may see committee members referencing information on their electronic devices. Please be assured that your presence here today and your testimony are important to us and crucial to our state government. And with that, we will start with a gubernatorial appointment, Darrin Scott Good with our-- for the Nebraska Educational Telecommunications Commission. That's a lot of words. Welcome.

DARRIN GOOD: Thank you very much. So again, thank you for having me here and good afternoon, Chairwoman Walz and members of the Education Committee. My name is Dr. Darrin Good, spelled D-a-r-r-i-n G-o-o-d, and I'm the president at Nebraska Wesleyan University. I'm pleased to provide remarks before the Education Committee today in support of my continued service on the Nebraska Educational Telecommunications Commission. I am humbled at the opportunity to be considered for this appointment and I'm eager to utilize my experiences and professional skill set to further the critically important work of the commission in promoting and providing noncommercial educational telecommunications throughout the state of Nebraska. Throughout the duration of my career in higher education, it has been apparent to me that access to impartial educational information is essential at cultivating a vibrant and well-informed citizenry that's tolerant, civically active, and innovative. In our state, Nebraska Public Media plays such an important role in making information readily available and easily accessible to a broad spectrum of people, most notably those who are likely to face barriers to quality informational content in its absence. Nebraska Public Media remains a critically important asset that our state can utilize in being an equalizer of quality educational content, which of course assists us in promoting our long-term economic vitality and quality of life as Nebraskans.

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Provided with my academic and administrative experiences, I'm prepared and excited at the prospect of continuing my service on the Nebraska Educational Telecommunications Commission. Thank you so much for your time and I'd welcome any questions from the committee.

WALZ: Questions from the committee? I don't see any.

DARRIN GOOD: OK.

WALZ: Thank you so much.

DARRIN GOOD: I know you have a lot on your plate.

WALZ: Thanks so much.

DARRIN GOOD: Thank you.

WALZ: Do we have any proponents that would like to speak? Any opponents? Anybody who would like to speak in a neutral capacity? I see none. Thank you so much for being here. Our next reappointment is Nicholas Baxter for the Nebraska Educational Telecommunications Commission.

NICHOLAS BAXTER: Good afternoon, senators, committee members. Thank you very much indeed for taking this time. On a side note, we did have a long discussion since the organization changed its name to Nebraska Public Media whether or not we ought to think about asking to have the commission's-- would have made it easier, I think, for everybody to say what we are, but anyway, so. Thank you. My name is Nicholas Baxter, N-i-c-h-o-l-a-s, Baxter, B-a-x-t-e-r, and I'm excited to have this opportunity to serve a second term on the commission. From a background standpoint, I will be the incoming chair succeeding Marilyn Hadley in that role, subject to confirmation. Prior to this, I also served on the Public Media Foundation for four terms and chaired that organization as well. So pretty cognizant of the role that public media plays in the state and especially on the commission's role in making sure that we have an infrastructure that is good-- great programming can make its way to the citizens of the state. I know you guys got a busy afternoon. So from that standpoint, I will welcome any questions you might have on this position.

WALZ: All right. Thank you so much.

NICHOLAS BAXTER: Thank you very much for your time.

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WALZ: Thank you. Any questions from the committee? I think we have one. Oh, Senator Linehan, good.

LINEHAN: Thank you, Chairman Walz. So I'm looking at your references and two of them that I know of maybe-- two of them are from Omaha, Dr. Thedinger.

NICHOLAS BAXTER: Britt Thedinger, yes.

LINEHAN: So how do you know Dr. Thedinger?

NICHOLAS BAXTER: Oh, I've known Britt and Kelly since I probably moved to Omaha in the early 1990s.

LINEHAN: And you came to Omaha from?

NICHOLAS BAXTER: Nashville, Tennessee, and prior to that, the U.K.

LINEHAN: So you live in Omaha now?

NICHOLAS BAXTER: I've been living in Omaha for 30 years.

LINEHAN: Well, welcome. We're very happy to have you. Thank you.

NICHOLAS BAXTER: I'm happy to be here.

LINEHAN: Thank you for your willingness to do this.

NICHOLAS BAXTER: Thank you.

WALZ: Thank you. Any other questions? I do have a question. There are currently two vacancies on the commission. Do you foresee this as a problem?

NICHOLAS BAXTER: No, I really don't. I think obviously, as a-- as the, the Governor selects additional and the state's-- the university selects additional people, we've got a very strong administrative role there. Good-- very good, strong finance department, which, as a banker is kind of-- was important to me, to make sure we know where the dollars are going. I think that's primarily the role that the Governor seeks to do, to make sure that the money gets spent properly and accounted properly and that the reporting is done and to make sure that we balance the needs. You know, we get funding from the state, from the public, and, and from the university. So I think it's critically important. I don't think losing-- having-- being down two commission members stops us being able to do that oversight properly.

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WALZ: All right. Thank you. Thank you so much.

NICHOLAS BAXTER: Thank you for your time. Good afternoon.

WALZ: Thank you. Any proponents? Any opponents? Anyone who would like to speak in a neutral capacity? I don't see any. Thank you so much again for coming today.

NICHOLAS BAXTER: Thank you, Senator.

WALZ: With that, we will open on LB1128, Senator DeBoer, to adopt the Student Loan Repayment Assistance for Teachers Act. Welcome, Senator DeBoer.

DeBOER: Thank you, Chairman-- Chairwoman Walz-- sorry-- and members of the Education Committee. My name is Wendy DeBoer, W-e-n-d-y D-e-B-o-e-r. I represent Legislative District 10 in northwest Omaha. I'm here to introduce LB1128 that creates the Student Loan Repayment Assistance for Teachers Act, which is the SLRATA. It doesn't really work. I tried to come up with an acronym. SLRATA doesn't really work. The number one thing that I'm hearing from teachers in my district is that we have a shortage of teachers in Nebraska. It's not just true in my district, it's true across the state. They tell me that they're overworked. They tell me they're worn out. This is something that I'm hearing and I get this firsthand. I have a brother who teaches high school in OPS and he has no planning hour because he's covering other things. He has to work at the zero hour, which is-- I don't even know how early that is, but it's early and it's because they're trying to cover some of these teacher shortages that they have. I don't think that it is particularly located within one school district, but that it's in a variety of different school districts. So I was thinking about ways that we might encourage more people to, to teach and ways that we might encourage more people to come to Nebraska to teach or keep some of our students in Nebraska to teach. And I remember that this same brother who taught-- who teaches at the public schools in Omaha, when-- we were in college at the same time and he was on a scholarship that as long as he taught in Nebraska, then like basically his money that he used for school would get over a number of years forgiven as it were. And I thought, well, this sounds like a good idea. And apparently it sounded like a good idea to more than just me because Senator Linehan has a bill that does a similar sort of thing and I think Senator Walz and the Education Committee has a similar idea as well. So one of the things that-- when I was looking into what the problems are with recruiting of teachers to Nebraska, there is-- there has been a problem before the pandemic, but the pandemic has

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exacerbated it because there were a lot of teachers who were maybe of retirement age but were not going to retire necessarily that maybe expedited their retirement. We also-- I'm getting information from some of the colleges in Nebraska that they have fewer kids going into education. If the question is why we have fewer students going into education-- you know, I don't have all the answers, but one thing that I think might help is incentives to pay for very expensive schooling so thus this idea here. LB20-- LB1128 creates a loan repayment program administered by the Department of Education for full-time teachers that provides repayment assistance of up to \$6,000 a year with a maximum individual, individual amount of \$30,000 over five years. So the bill requests funding of \$5 million per year. So I think I had a discussion earlier today with Senator Linehan. I do have a cap, it's a \$5 million cap, and I think that this is an investment in our state to ensure that we have the best quality education for our students. It encourages those who are teaching to stay in Nebraska and it will encourage new students to go into the profession and stay in Nebraska once they've completed their degrees. So I do have an amendment to hand out to you. Inadvertently when, when we put this bill together, we left out private school teachers. That was never my intention. I intended this to be-- I mean, it's all one pool of teachers in Nebraska. It doesn't really matter where you teach at so I never intended to have that happen. This amendment fixes that problem because I intended for this to be for both public and private school teachers. I think one of the things that, that helping with tuition costs for teachers will help do as well is to help bring a-- the, the opportunity to take a job in the teaching field to a wide variety of candidates. If you don't have the ability to afford to pay for your education now, you might pause at the, at the frankly lower-paid profession that teaching is when you're trying to figure out what to do with your life. So this is just an attempt to try to induce more people into teaching. I know that there are programs that are similar to this for getting doctors to rural Nebraska for-- I know Kansas has different kinds of things. So we see that in other sort of analogous programs, these have been helpful in the past to help pay for schooling for, for students to get into a field or to move to a particular area. My staff did a really nice job writing an intro and then I just used none of it. So if there are any questions, I'm happy to answer them. I'm sure I've missed something, so. But I'm happy to answer any questions.

WALZ: Senator Sanders.

SANDERS: Thank you, Senator Walz. Senator DeBoer, thank you for bringing this bill forward. Is there a cap per student loan? Because

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some student loans are a lot more than others, so are they capped per--

DeBOER: Yes. So the way that this is envisioned-- and I'm sure that there will be a lot of communication between the various introducers of similar iterations of this bill as to what's going to be the correct way to go forward. But the way I've designed this is it's \$5,000-- or \$6,000 a year with a maximum of \$30,000 per individual. So it will be over-- you could take it over five years to get to that \$30,000, but the most you could get would be \$5,000 per year-- \$6,000 per year. But I also understand that, you know, maybe that's the wrong number. Happy to talk about that. The other thing is mine is five years, I think Senator Linehan's is currently five years. I can't remember what the Education Committee's is for the number of years, but we can also look at is that the right number of years? One of the things I asked Senator Kolterman today was what is the, the number of years it takes to vest in retirement in Nebraska if a teacher and that's five years. So that's something that I would be interested in thinking about is do we want to sort of have all of our program, all-- this program line up with, you know-- I think there would be ways to talk about what the correct number of years is that would also be affected by other things that teachers are or are not getting in that same time frame.

SANDERS: Thank you.

DeBOER: Um-hum.

WALZ: Other questions from the committee? You talked a little bit about there might be some discussion on the amount.

DeBOER: Um-hum.

WALZ: Do you want to-- can you expand on that a little bit or--

DeBOER: Well, I mean, I think it would be in part largely up to this committee to decide what amount they think is going to be enough of a inducement to help teachers to stay in Nebraska. My amount might be too small, it might be too big. I don't know. So I'm happy-- you know, I chose this amount because if you look at the cost of education today, it's pretty astronomical. And, you know, teachers, student teachers-- I'm sorry, students of education, you know, spend quite a lot of money on their, their education. That's why I picked the amount I did. I'm not married to it. I want to do the right thing. I'm happy

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to work with you on what you think as a committee is the correct number.

WALZ: All right. Thank you, Senator DeBoer. Any other questions? I see none. Thank you. Proponents.

JACK MOLES: Good afternoon, Senator Walz, members of the Education Committee. My name is Jack Moles. That's J-a-c-k M-o-l-e-s. I'm the executive director of Nebraska Rural Community Schools Association, also known as NRCSA. On behalf of NRCSA, I wish to testify in support of LB1128, especially with the amendment that Senator DeBoer talked about. We do appreciate her attempts to help young teachers. We are experiencing a teacher shortage issue in Nebraska and from my angle, I think that's especially true in our rural schools. I constantly hear from districts about not being able to fill positions with qualified candidates or that they're also having a shortage of candidates in what have been traditionally somewhat easier to fill positions. NRCSA, along with other groups in the state, is looking at ways in which we can help districts fill their needs and part of that process is looking at making it easier and more attractive for prospective teachers to stay in Nebraska. Helping young teachers pay off their college debt is very much a part of that discussion and we see this as a great investment in not only our teachers, but also in education in our state. And in closing, I'd encourage you to move LB1128 out of committee or taken into consideration with the other bills, especially Senator Linehan's bill, together to move one of those out of committee.

WALZ: All right, thanks, Jack. Questions from the committee? I see none. Thank you so much.

JACK MOLES: Yeah, my student debt was a little bit less. My first year of college, a credit hour was \$12.50, so.

WALZ: Good afternoon.

KYLE MCGOWAN: Good afternoon and I would just note that Jack Moles also wrote his thesis on a stone tablet. Good afternoon, Chairperson Walz and members of the Education Committee. My name is Kyle McGowan, K-y-l-e M-c-G-o-w-a-n. Today I'm representing the Nebraska Council of School Administrators, the Nebraska State Education Association, who-- they're passing around a letter from NSEA-- and the Nebraska Association of School Boards. The shortage of educators in Nebraska is at a critical stage right now. It is, if not the number one thing, always within the top two in terms of concerns with schools as far as

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meeting the needs of childrens. Efforts to encourage people to enter the profession are more important than ever. We'd like to thank Senator DeBoer for her introduction of LB1128. We think the bill targets a very important issue and is written to be administered efficiently. We definitely like the amendment that Senator DeBoer just spoke about. Mr. Moles also mentioned Senator Linehan's LB945, which we'll support and talk about a little bit later. Pieces-- and there are some similarities and differences and I'll just talk on LB1128, but a recipient must be certified and have a current contract, must have completed a teacher education program in approved college or university. LB1128 has a maximum loan forgiveness of \$6,000 per calendar year and can accrue up to \$30,000 and priority is given to applicants with greater financial need. LB1128 also requires recipients to be a resident of Nebraska and, and of course, that's who we're targeting. So thank you again, Senator DeBoer, and thank you, members of the Education Committee and I'd be happy to answer any questions.

WALZ: Questions from the committee? I just have a quick question. As I'm sitting here listening, it's one thing for us to create repayment opportunities, but really it's another thing to get students excited about the opportunity to teach. So I'm just curious, do you have any ideas on how the information, if this is passed, how the information can be disseminated to students to make sure that they have heard about it and--

KYLE MCGOWAN: Yeah, when it comes to getting back \$6,000 a year, I think that information will be disseminated, you know, pretty quickly. I-- you know, there are a number of reasons and, and these past two years with COVID have been, you know, really unique in terms of people retiring. But with prospective teachers, educators, college is getting more and more expensive and you're really entering a field that's not paying-- not starting out paying a lot of money, that's for sure. And so the competition for other professions just are looking more attractive, especially when you are entering into maybe not all of the same rewards or the rewards are-- seem a little bit more difficult to appreciate as a teacher. So, you know, hopefully when we get past this, you know, current environment that we're in, there will be some more normality and there will just be people wanting to stay longer and enter the profession.

WALZ: Thank you. Any other questions? I see none. Thank you so much.

KYLE MCGOWAN: Thanks.

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WALZ: Next proponent.

BRIAN HALSTEAD: Good afternoon, Senator Walz, members of the Education Committee. For the record, my name is Brian Halstead, B-r-i-a-n H-a-l-s-t-e-a-d. I represent the Department of Education. We're here as a proponent on LB1128 and we'll be a proponent on LB945. The department wishes to acknowledge and supports the legislative efforts to address the educator workforce shortage that we're facing today and we're here to work with you on any type of program that will incent people to become teachers in Nebraska. Yesterday, we were a proponent on LB1218, which is a loan forgiveness program. The bills today are about remitting debt owed by students who actually want to teach in Nebraska. So I'll stop there. I'll take any questions you might have.

WALZ: Thank you. Questions from the committee? I don't see any. Thanks.

RACHEL GIBSON: Hello, everyone. Good afternoon. My name is Rachel Gibson, R-a-c-h-e-l G-i-b-s-o-n, and I am the director of education policy with the League of Women Voters of Nebraska. We are a nonpartisan organization that encourages active and informed participation in government and we also do research and some advocacy work on different policies being proposed. Thank you to Chair Walz and to the Committee for taking the time and thank you very much to Senator DeBoer and Senator Linehan for introducing bills that are related to this topic. We strongly, strongly support this, this bill and as I said, whatever iteration of it comes out of-- potentially out of committee. I would like to also thank the person who helped me write this letter and do a lot of the research. It's one of our committee members, Sarah Smolen, who actually is an educator. So she couldn't be here today. She's teaching. So we support this for, for several reasons. The league has a pretty strong stance about teacher pay being competitive with other states, being reflective of respecting the profession, and encouraging teachers to remain in the classroom. And previously, that's been in relation to taking on administrative roles because of a financial need, but right now, that really relates to what we're talking about with loan repayment. We have some really interesting data that we found from the National Educators Association. Nearly half of all educators took out loans to pay for their education and about half still owe an average of \$58,000. Fifteen percent of them owe over \$100,000. This is not specific to just one demographic or age group. You know, we talk a lot about young educators, but there are educators over 61 who still have debt and one-third of those owe over \$45,000. Black educators carry significantly more debt and one in five black educators carry over

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\$100,000. So there's very real personal and economic impacts related to this. Four in ten teachers say that these burdens have impacted their emotional, mental, and physical well-being not surprisingly. Young educators have said that it's impacted their ability to buy a house, return to school, or start a family and this was specifically related to their-- the question was about their loan payments. What was kind of shocking to us was that 61-- individuals who were above 61 actually said it was a significant hindrance in saving for retirement. So we feel this is a very important bill to be looking at. There's some additional information there about other sorts of things that people are foregoing as educators because of their student loans. The one that stuck out the most to me was buying food. Our teachers-- 25 percent of our teachers have a hard time buying food and skipping medical appointments; 40 percent of our teachers with loans struggling with that are, are missing those. In true teacher fashion, putting others before yourself, I suppose, but we don't want them to do that. So this is why we, we strongly support this. We have looked at both bills and kind of identified the things that we are the most focused on: one, Nebraska residents. We like that piece that it's a Nebraska resident, preschool-12 educator. We also are very glad to see the amendment that we're including private schools. We think that's very important, teachers who teach there. And preschool, primary, and secondary-- I think we have a slight difference of opinion than some folks about the certified position or requiring a degree in education. And this is where it was kind of asking our team member. In a school, are there people who are giving direct care who don't fit that classification? And there, there are some so we'd like to see how we can write that, that is inclusive of folks who, who have this debt. And then postsecondary loan, again, not-- it's an educational loan, but not tied to a specific major or degree program. We'd hate for people to miss out on that with nuances. I will be back to talk on, on LB945, but one last thing I wanted to point to was Senator Walz, you had asked about getting folks excited and I think that-- my background is career counseling at the university level. And so I think there's a lot of potential to work with our, our wonderful higher ed institutions here to work with their career centers so those first-year students are, are taking that into consideration because that is something they ask a lot of questions about. Again, I'll be back on LB945. Apparently I have a lot on this one. I've never gotten the yellow light before. I am happy--

WALZ: Congratulations.

RACHEL GIBSON: --to answer any questions.

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WALZ: Questions from the committee? I don't see any. Thank you so much.

RACHEL GIBSON: I'll see you again in a little bit.

WALZ: All right. Next proponent.

SARA SKRETTA: Good afternoon, Chairman Walz and distinguished members of the Education Committee. My name is Dr. Sara Skretta, S-a-r-a S-k-r-e-t-t-a. I'm the educator certification officer at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, but I'm appearing today on behalf of the Nebraska Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. We're going to call it NACTE. As past president of NACTE, I'm here to provide proponent testimony for LB1128 and want to thank Senator DeBoer for her leadership and work on this critical issue. I promise this is the first and only time you're going to hear this today, but the Nebraska Association of Colleges for Teacher Education serves as a state association for the national group, the American Association for College-- of Colleges for Teacher Education. NACTE is an organization of all Nebraska teacher education institutions that have been approved by the Nebraska State Board of Education. Our members include Bellevue University, Chadron State College, College of Saint Mary, Concordia University, Creighton University, Doane University, Hastings College, Midland University, Nebraska Wesleyan University, Peru State College, Union College, the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, Kearney, and Omaha, Wayne State College, and York College. NACTE provides a common means of support to assist all teacher education programs to be more effective at producing high-quality educators. We have a positive working relationship with the Nebraska Department of Education and our P-12 school partners and collaborate often for the greater good of the state's P-20 education system. Please note that NACTE will be offering proponent testimony for each of the bills before the Education Committee today. We are proponents of each bill because we believe in the education profession and that the educator shortage is an urgent workforce development issue that is significantly impacting Nebraska schools. Adopting an educator loan forgiveness program would provide incentives for going into and remaining in the field, which would assist in strengthening the educator preparation pipeline and serve as one key to tackling the educator shortage in the state. We echo some of the earlier research from the Nebraska Education Association that was shared with you earlier. That's also in our testimony and there are several facets of LB1128 that we support, including the higher financial amount our students would enjoy. The more money you want to give our students, the better. So we appreciate that and actually any amount and any of the bills is, is going to be tremendously

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appreciated. This will help our students coming into the profession know that they have a pathway out of that financial burden. And we also like how LB1128's language clearly defines what full-time teaching means. We appreciate the longevity of the funding mechanism mentioned, as well as the amendment that was presented today to include all teachers. Repayment options can be used as a workforce development recruitment strategy to attract people to the education profession. And for many individuals considering postsecondary education, financial assistance is a primary motivator in selecting a program or an institution. LB1128 recognizes the need for financial assistance as a support and incentive to address the educator workforce shortage in our state. Once again, we'd like to thank Senator DeBoer for her dedicated leadership and for introducing LB1128. On that note, if you have any questions, I'd be happy to answer them.

WALZ: Thank you. Questions from the committee?

DAY: Thank you, Chairwoman Walz, and thank you, Dr. Skretta, for being here today. And before I ask my question, I did want to mention that both of the Skrettas that come in and testify always say distinguished members of the Education Committee, which is maybe my favorite phrase. It makes me feel very fancy. So I just wanted to thank both-- both of you say it. I love it. I know that part of the issue with the, with the workforce shortage in education is related to less students going into education as a major. Do you have any, any statistics or percentages or numbers on that in terms of the last several years of how that's decreased?

SARA SKRETTA: Yes, there's a national-- I guess you'd call it a cliff-- an enrollment cliff at higher ed where a 35 to 45 percent decrease in enrollment in educator preparation programs will be seen. And that's going, that's going to vary, of course, between institutions, but-- and it's a real problem now. To piggyback on that to going to an earlier question, we have to talk to students before they get to institutions of higher ed about loan programs, about financial pathways to higher ed. So I would piggyback on what was already said with the statement that we need to talk to our students in high school and in junior high about being a teacher and about the financial assistance that would go along with it because for some of them, that will cement their choice very early on.

DAY: OK, thank you. And you-- sorry, can I just ask one more--

WALZ: Um-hum. Absolutely.

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DAY: You said 35 to 40 percent decrease.

SARA SKRETTA: Um-hum and that's a--

DAY: Is that in the coming years or is that--

SARA SKRETTA: That's a national, that's a national statistic and I would have to go back and find out because I'm not going to-- I'm going to toss a year out and it's not going to be the right one, but in the next five--

DAY: OK.

SARA SKRETTA: --to seven years, we're going to experience that.

DAY: OK. OK, thank you.

SARA SKRETTA: Um-hum.

WALZ: Any other questions? I see none. Thanks so much. Next proponent.

CARRI COLLINS: Good afternoon.

WALZ: Good afternoon.

CARRI COLLINS: Good afternoon, Chair Walz and members of the Education Committee. My name is Carri Collins, spelled C-a-r-r-i C-o-l-l-i-n-s, and I am the elementary principal supervisor at the Omaha Public Schools. On behalf of our board of education and Omaha Public Schools, I'm here to testify in support of LB945, LB1128, and LB1169 to provide student loan forgiveness to teachers in Nebraska. I am sure this committee is well aware of the current crisis facing the education community. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted employers all across the country and schools are no different. We feel the pinch as our employees, from paras to teachers, ask themselves whether to continue in their chosen professions. Even prior to the pandemic, school districts realized they were facing a diminishing workforce, pool of certified teachers. I have been a teacher for eight years and a principal administrator for 12 years. During all that time, I have never seen the level of teacher and staff shortages that schools are now facing. Schools across the state have been struggling for several years now to fill openings for full-time and substitute teachers. This is not an urban or rural issue. The issue spans the state and our nation. All schools need more qualified teachers. We are pleased to support all three of the bills introduced today by Senators DeBoer and Linehan because we believe whichever bill passes will have a

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significant impact on the ability of school districts to recruit and to retain teachers within the state. LB945, LB1128, and LB1169 would all create new incentives to entering teaching. Under these bills, full-time teachers could receive between \$5,000 and \$6,000 annually in financial support to directly pay down their student loans. We would like to thank Senator DeBoer and Senator Linehan for introducing these bills. They are an acknowledgment of both the teacher shortage as well as how student loans impact new graduates when entering such a vital workforce. We again support LB945, LB1128, and LB1169 and ask the committee to please consider advancing any one of these proposals to the floor. Thank you for your time and I'm happy to take any questions.

WALZ: Thank you so much. Questions from the committee? I don't see any. You got off lucky. Thank you so much. Next proponent. Good afternoon.

TREVA HAUGAARD: Hi, how are you?

WALZ: Good.

TREVA HAUGAARD: Chair Walz and is that distinguished members of the Education Committee? I wanted to get that right. Hello. My name is Treva Haugaard, T-r-e-v-a H-a-u-g-a-a-r-d. I'm the executive director of the Council of Independent Nebraska Colleges, also known as CINC. Senators, thank you for your time today and your focus on helping Nebraska citizens and those who teach-- those in the teaching profession. The CINC-- the Council of Independent Nebraska Colleges is supportive of LB1128, LB945, and LB1169 and appreciates Senator DeBoer and Senator Linehan for introducing these bills that, if passed, would create a student loan repayment program for teachers. CINC represents all 13 of Nebraska's private colleges and universities. Our campuses are located from Omaha to Hastings and encompass the state's largest metropolitan area into our rural communities. Just as Nebraska is diverse, so too are the independent campuses across Nebraska. A little background about CINC-member schools. Collectively, Nebraska independent colleges and universities educate nearly 35,000 students per year. These same higher education institutions award 30 percent of the state's bachelor's degrees, 45 percent of the business degrees, 30 percent of education degrees, and over 50 percent in health sciences. As you are aware, in the past 24 months, our K-12 teachers have had a very difficult task across Nebraska and in our country. We have lost many excellent K-12 educators due to retirements and overall general fatigue of a difficult job made even more complex by the nine-- by the COVID-19 pandemic. CINC takes pride in educating and graduating 30

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percent of the education degrees in Nebraska. Upon graduation, students are ready to step into the classroom and begin helping our young Nebraskans navigate through their academic career. The graduates from our member institutions are critical to growing not just our economy, but the young minds in Nebraska that depend on them to step into the classroom each day. Thus, the need is great to create incentives to keep our graduates in Nebraska. The ability to provide incentives for recent graduates to stay in the state will create a positive impact on our K-12 classrooms and create an overall brain gain effect that is needed in Nebraska today. LB1128, LB945, and LB1169 provides an incentive for school districts and graduates. U.S. World News and Report reported in September of 2020 that loan debt has been on the rise in the last decade and we've heard more of that today and that currently-- that average loan debt slightly exceeds \$30,000. While students are eligible for a number of scholarships, not all students are eligible for free grants and loans to achieve their academic goals. These bills propose that Nebraska teachers could potentially receive payment up to \$5,000 to \$6,000 per year for a number of years. This type of loan repayment incentive will allow recent graduates to have the hope that they will not continue to be in debt for the following ten years and that they will be able to infuse more financial means into the economy sooner rather than later. LB1128, LB945, and LB1169 will help grow and retain Nebraska's educational workforce talent well into the future, as well as improve Nebraska's economy in the long run. For these reasons, the Council of Independent Nebraska Colleges strongly support LB1128, LB945, and LB1169 and ask that you please advance the bill to provide student loan forgiveness to teachers this year.

WALZ: Thank you. Questions from the committee? Thank you so much. Next proponent.

TIM FREY: Good afternoon, members of the Education Committee, distinguished too. My name is Dr. Tim Frey, which is spelled T-i-m F-r-e-y. I'm the dean of the college of education at Doane University. I am a proud graduate of Nebraska Teacher Education Program and I taught middle school special education before becoming a teacher educator, which probably tells you a little bit about me. I'm here to offer testimony as a proponent of all three bills, LB1128 being the first one, on behalf of Doane University. I appreciate both Senator DeBoer and Senator Linehan's efforts to address the educator workforce shortage. Doane University holds memberships in both the Council of Independent Nebraska Colleges, or CINC who you heard from, and the Nebraska Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, or NACTE. And Doane University echoes both CINC and NACTE's appreciation of the

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efforts these bills make to address the teacher education workforce shortage. In particular, LB1128, LB945, and LB1169 will help grow and retain Nebraska's educational workforce talent well into the future. Doane University prepares more teachers and administrators each year than any other private institution in Nebraska. We believe the provisions in these bills would significantly, positively impact early career teachers. The loan forgiveness and remittance provisions within the bills will enable students to enter the profession with an established way to make a meaningful progress at paying off student debt incurred while completing a teacher education program, while balancing the cost of day-to-day living on a teacher's salary. At Doane-- some real-life examples-- education majors who graduated in the last three classes, '19-- 2019, 2020, and '21, from our undergraduate degree programs finished on average with an outstanding loan balance of \$18,408. That amount is well below the Nebraska state average of \$26,026 for obtaining a bachelor's degree, but it's still a significant amount of debt. Doane also prepares teachers for initial certification as graduate students. Our initial program at the advanced level that we call IPAL allows students who have a bachelor's degree to obtain teaching certification in 15 to 18 months while taking classes at night and during the summer. The outstanding average loan balance from the 2019-20 cohort of that group was \$19,877. Doane believes all three bills would help ease the financial challenges faced by early career teachers from our initial certification programs as they transition to teaching positions. The significant repayment options in these bills can also be used as an educator recruitment strategy to attract people to the education profession. Doane works collaboratively with our local K-12 partners, Educators Rising chapters to encourage high school students and adults changing careers to pursue teaching. For many individuals considering postsecondary education, financial many-- sorry-- for many individuals considering postsecondary education, financial assistance is a significant motivator in selecting a college major or career path. These bills would be potentially able to validate the choice to become a professional educator for some who need that financial assistance. And finally-- and we haven't talked much about this yet today-- Doane believes that the provisions within these bills would also help support retention of early career teachers. In addition to attracting new candidates to education careers, relieving some of the financial challenges associated with the first four years of a teaching career is likely to encourage new teachers to remain in the profession. Doane University supports the steps taken by these bills and LB1128 to begin to address the educator shortage while reinforcing the value of professional educators in the teaching profession in Nebraska. I thank

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you for your time and consideration and will be glad to answer questions.

WALZ: Thank you. Questions from the committee? Thank you so much. Next proponent.

JOHN SKRETTA: Good afternoon, Chair Walz, senators, erudite, and articulate members of the Education Committee. I'm John Skretta. That's J-o-h-n S-k-r-e-t-t-a. I am here representing the Educational Service Unit Coordinating Council, which is the umbrella organization of Nebraska's 17 ESUs, providing support to our school districts across the state and also representing STANCE, Schools Taking Action for Nebraska Children's Education. That's a coalition of 19 mid-size public school districts across the state. Just as in yesterday's hearings, the two organizations I'm privileged to be representing before you today are conceptually supportive of each of the bills in front of the committee, which I would caution is not to imply that we understand at a nuanced level or grasp all of the mechanisms by which these bills might function or be administered should they become law. We are a proponent simply on this fundamental basis. We believe these are all signifying an important gesture of support from our Unicameral's Education Committee and the sponsoring senators. In this case, our gratitude to Senator DeBoer and we want to be sure organizationally as ESUCC and STANCE both that we affirm that in order to address the very real pain point of teacher shortage in Nebraska. Of the bills before the committee today, we want to note that LB1128 provides the most robust commitment of resources for the loan forgiveness programs under consideration at \$30K over five years. Senator DeBoer alluded to that and how she arrived at that number, given the very expensive costs of an undergraduate education. We also note that of the bills before the committee today, LB1128 appears to provide the strongest intent language regarding an intent to fund for future years going forward at \$5 million annually. Now that said, we also wanted to offer just upfront here some general comments to add for your consideration and later deliberation on each bill. I want to point out that there's a couple Nebraska Department of Education-administered educator loan forgiveness programs that are under the Excellence in Teaching Act, including AETP and EETP, both of which have demonstrated some measurable success in terms of utilization. I believe the status of the Attracting Excellence to Teaching Program at the end of 2020, its 15th year in existence, was \$5.25 million had been awarded to just over 1,350 eligible students. So there's, there's good news about some precedent that's already in place. One of the things to contemplate is how maybe existing student loan assistance programs haven't succeeded at the robust level that

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we'd all like to see in education and that clearly folks are interested in from a policymaking standpoint. And one of the things we really like about the bills in front of the committee today are that they each simply state they are focused on educators and identify a wide group of eligible Nebraska educators, very inclusive attempt to serve and support everyone going into the profession. We think that's very important because historically one of the challenges in ed loan forgiveness programs is an unwieldy set of criteria that might be difficult to meet all of the eligibility criteria for people to take advantage of that loan forgiveness. And sometimes that the loans are forgiven only incrementally over a long period of time. As alluded to in earlier testimony, this-- we believe the money upfront over the first five years will really help with retention of early educators as well. Thank you.

WALZ: Thank you. Questions from the committee? I don't see any.

JOHN SKRETTA: Thank you.

WALZ: Thank you so much for coming today. Next proponent. Any opponents? Anybody who would like to speak in the neutral capacity? Senator DeBoer.

DeBOER: Thank you, Senator Walz. Thank you to everyone for this conversation. I think it's really great to see so much support for these kinds of programs. And of course, I'm happy to work. I know you've got some, some decisions to make about exactly what the final bill looks like, so I'm happy to work with you all and give any input that I can into how we should shape the final bill.

WALZ: Thank you, Senator DeBoer. Any other questions? Senator Day.

DAY: Thank you, Chairwoman Walz, and thank you for introducing this bill. I think it's wonderful and excellent and something we desperately need. So I know that obviously this is targeted at recruiting new teachers, but would this be available to those who have been in the profession for some time or people who have been teaching already for ten years, could they access this?

DeBOER: So my intent was to do that, but I'm not sure--

DAY: OK.

DeBOER: --if that's what we actually ended up with, so--

DAY: Yeah, OK.

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DeBOER: --the intent would be to do that or to try and think of a way to do that, at least partially, but I think that because of the-- I mean, as a retention move, right--

DAY: Right.

DeBOER: --but I think right now, you hear 30 to 40-- 35 to 40 percent or whatever fewer people coming up through the ranks.

DAY: Sure.

DeBOER: I think we got to really focus on kind of--

DAY: Yeah.

DeBOER: --turning that number around as well.

DAY: OK. And then I have one more question. So it also says you have to be a resident of Nebraska. Would this be accessible to teachers who are educated out of state?

DeBOER: Yes. We specifically wanted to make sure-- we thought about putting in, you know, educated at a Nebraska institution and then I thought, that's just--

DAY: Yeah.

DeBOER: --that's just too-- hamstringing it. So it really doesn't matter where you're coming from. And in fact, that's great if you're in, if you're somewhere else. We'd love to have you move here. We'd love to-- welcome. I will tell that to everyone. If you want to move here from another state to teach in our state, I think that's amazing.

DAY: Wonderful. Thank you.

WALZ: All right. Thank you, Senator DeBoer. Any other questions? I don't see any. Thank you.

DeBOER: All right. Thank you.

WALZ: We also had two proponents position comments for public hearing from Rose Godinez and Daniel Russell. And one opponent from Doug Kagan. All right, that ends our hearing on LB1128 and we will open on LB945. Senator Linehan.

LINEHAN: First, I'll admit that I was so excited about this idea I had two different staff members draft bills and got introduced. So I've

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been really focused. Good afternoon, Chairman Walz and members of the Education Committee. My name is Lou Ann Linehan, L-o-u A-n-n L-i-n-e-h-a-n. I represent the 39th Legislative District and I'm here to introduce LB945. We've all seen the news reports about teacher burnout. Whether it's due to COVID or workloads or student loans or a combination of them all, teachers are leaving the profession. And these same issues are perhaps preventing young people from considering a career in teaching. There is definitely a teacher shortage and we need to address it. I don't pretend that this bill is the whole answer, but it's a step in the right direction. The Teach in Nebraska Today Act is intended to retain our teachers here in Nebraska and hopefully attract a few new ones as well. Qualified applicants will receive \$5,000 a year towards student loan repayment. A teacher may receive up to \$25,000 total under the program, which is capped at \$5 million per year. I think that most teachers with student loans will be resettled-- thrilled to receive this type of assistance. I've looked at some, looked at some other state programs. Most are limited to new teachers. This one is not. Even Texas has a program. They don't even have an income tax. Iowa will make a down payment on a home if you sign a contract to stay for five years. There are plenty of these types of programs across the nation. I want to make this one simple and easy to understand. I do not want to place any restrictions, requirements on teachers other than being a full-time teacher. It's clear that we have a teacher shortage in Nebraska and it is only going to become worse if we do not do something to help people who want to teach. So I'm going to expand a little bit. I, I think this crisis has been coming for a number of years. When I went to college in 19-- so long ago-- it was '78. I went into business and in my accounting class, first-year accounting class, there were three women in the class. You walk into any accounting class now at a university, you're going to find half of the people in class are women. There was a time when women had a choice, basically nursing or teaching. And we have been moving away from that for 35 years and we are now at a crisis point. It's-- teachers-- I have a sister who's a teacher. We are clearly-- it's not a profession for the young, young teachers that looks inviting. Young people who can get out of college and go make \$80,000 or \$90,000 a year in some careers are going to have parents and friends and maybe even teachers tell them that it will take you a very long time to get that in education. So I think we've got to figure out a way to help the new teachers, the young teachers because they can't get a mortgage. They can't, they can't get a mortgage, can't start a family. So-- and there's going to be-- it's going to get worse before it gets better of all the other people that will come to them, asking maybe as much as double their take-home pay. So I do

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think we're in a crisis and I, as I said, this is one. It's not all we need to do, but this is one answer. Thank you.

WALZ: Thank you, Senator Linehan. Questions from the committee?

SANDERS: I do.

WALZ: Senator Sanders.

SANDERS: Thank you, Senator Walz. Thank you, Senator Linehan. What are other states doing for--

LINEHAN: Well, the only two I have here-- if my staff was here, they would have much more because Mary Jane researched this. But Iowa makes-- gives you your down payment for your house. Now that's smart because you buy a house, that kind of permits you to stay in the area for a while. And then Texas has a loan forgiveness program. I think several have a loan forgiveness program. One of the things I did in this bill, which we-- obviously when we go to Exec on these things, we can talk about it. I didn't want to say you have to teach for the next 20 years or the next 10 years because I don't want a-- if somebody doesn't like teaching, then they shouldn't be forced to keep teaching. So I just think-- and also I didn't want to discourage somebody who thought, well, maybe I'll like teaching. So it's-- this is very simple. You teach, you get \$5,000 loan forgiveness for every year you teach, up to four years. And maybe it should be five years, I don't know. The reason I capped it-- this is a simple math I was thinking: \$5,000 times 1,000 students or teachers is \$5 million. It seems to me that when we go to the floor to get things appropriated, that people are happy with a \$5 million cap. People don't look at that like it's going to break the bank. After being here for six years, the number-- if you go above \$5 million, it's all the sudden, oh, we might go broke.

SANDERS: So, so one of my, my other questions, if I may, is what are the triggers that say we're in a crisis mode and then what will the trigger, trigger be when we're no longer in the crisis mode? We can say this payment-- might be able to do this for five years, but what if the crisis ends in two years or continues for ten?

LINEHAN: Well, I don't think there's any way-- I mean, I, I anticipate that this crisis is-- like I said, it's been coming for 30 years so I think you're looking at least half that to get out of it. So I think you're looking at 15 years. I, I don't know. I mean, I think if we have too many teachers, the Legislature that's here at the time will

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figure out that they don't need this. I think if we have too many teachers, the teachers will decide we don't need it, but I think we're a long ways from that being a problem.

SANDERS: Thank you. Thank you, Senator Walz.

WALZ: Any other questions? I don't see any. Thank you, Senator Linehan.

LINEHAN: Thank you.

WALZ: Proponents.

BRIAN HALSTEAD: Good afternoon, Senator Walz, members of the Education Committee. For the record, my name is Brian Halstead, B-r-i-a-n H-a-l-s-t-e-a-d, with the Nebraska Department of Education. We're here as a proponent on LB945. We want to acknowledge and support the Legislature's efforts to deal with the educator workforce shortage and we believe LB945 is one of the ideas that you should consider. Senator Walz and members, I think Senator Linehan gave you a very long historical perspective on the teacher shortage and it has been coming for years in the sense of you'll decide in the future if this is not needed anymore at some point. I don't know that I can define when it's going to end or when it isn't going to end, so with that, I-- we would agree with Senator Linehan's comments about the workforce shortage. I'll answer any questions you might have.

WALZ: Thank you. Questions? Thank you so much. Next proponent.

KYLE MCGOWAN: Good afternoon, Chairperson Walz and distinguished members of the Education Committee. My name is Kyle McGowan, K-y-l-e M-c-G-o-w-a-n. It's impossible to keep up with the Skrettas, OK? Today, I'm representing Nebraska Council of School Administrators, the Nebraska State Education Association, and the Nebraska Association of School Boards, all three. I've already spoken about the shortage, would also be in full agreement with Senator Linehan's introduction that she gave. We appreciate her work and, and really, the committee's work on trying to address this shortage. Spoke a little bit before, so just a quick review. The recipients must be certified and have a current contract with any school, private or public, must have completed teacher education program at approved university anywhere. It's the \$5,000 per calendar year, up to \$25,000 and appropriately, there is a priority given to people with financial need. So we certainly support this bill and, and appreciate what we've heard in

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terms of trying to put something together that we think is best for Nebraska and, and helping the kids in our state.

WALZ: Thank you so much. Questions from the committee? I do have a question. Just as you were up here talking about that, I was starting to think about all the stresses that this teacher shortage has caused. You know, there's a lot of stress on teachers themselves because they're--

KYLE McGOWAN: Sure.

WALZ: --picking up other duties, a lot of stress on administrators and schools in general. And I started thinking, what kind of impact does this have, this teacher shortage have on, on the school's budget?

KYLE McGOWAN: Right. So generally speaking, most school budgets spend about 80 percent of their annual expenditures on staff. And this is one group I don't need to explain how complicated school finances are, but there's kind of two things working with paying staff or paying teachers, certified people, and the one is the Court of Industrial Relations and there is a negotiated agreement. So you might say, well, what if a school board would just say, we're going to give everybody a 25 percent increase? That's really not feasible also in terms of budget lids and levy limits that you have in your district as well. So to make a big jump-- so for instance, I think the Penitentiary-- what did I see they got? You know, their, their staff was given like a 55 percent increase in all-- those things can't happen in a school budget because of the lids that we currently have. Now what could happen more quickly is how you pay support staff. And next year, I fully anticipate, you know, budgets going up quite a bit in schools. You know, schools have been held-- held themselves to 3 percent or less for the past ten years, but can't get bus drivers, can't get paras. A substitute teacher in the school district that I'm living now pays \$170 a day for a substitute and they can't get substitutes. So this really is very helpful, I think, of really encouraging more people to get into the profession. And I do think it will have an impact because of how expensive college is and depth of people coming into a job that doesn't make a lot of money.

WALZ: Yeah.

KYLE McGOWAN: But in terms of getting teachers up to a competitive salary, that's going to be a longer process, in my opinion.

WALZ: Yeah. Any other questions? I don't see any. Thanks so much.

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RACHEL GIBSON: Hello again. I am Rachel Gibson, R-a-c-h-e-l G-i-b-s-o-n, with the League of Women Voters of Nebraska. I will not repeat all of the data from the previous testimony, but for those who are looking in the notes later, that's on LB1128 that Senator DeBoer introduced. I would like to take this opportunity to thank, of course, the committee, and thank you, Senator Linehan, for bringing LB945. I'd like to elaborate on two points from the previous testimony about the elements of the bill and something that we're kind of keeping an eye on. The first is, as I mentioned before, the-- how a teaching role is defined and who is eligible for this program. And I mentioned the bachelor of education piece because especially as we think creatively about bringing more folks into the education field, that potentially could hamstring us about who would be able to access those funds. So I know Kansas had a program at one time. If you had a bachelor's in anything, you can take, you know, some special courses and you'd be eligible to teach. If we narrow this too much, those folks would not be able to. Additionally, in many of the private schools, there is a little flexibility about what your certification is. So again, if it's written to, to define you have to have a bachelor of education, that might not be available to all of our teachers. The other piece I wanted to touch on that I didn't get a chance to before was in these different bills, we've seen different ways that funds are dispersed, whether that's directly to the students or that is to the loan-granting entity, the lender. And, you know, we kind of talked through this and again, I asked our, our, our educator on our team and she said, you know, as long as there's guardrails, sometimes you need it to be able to go directly to the student because of timeline. But there needs to be some sort of element written to make sure that that's actually getting used for loan repayment. So that's the other piece as, as, you know, we get into the nuances of the bill, something that we're keeping an eye on. So I'll stop there, happy to answer any questions. Thank you for your time.

WALZ: Thank you. Questions from my two committee members? Do you have any suggestions on guardrails?

RACHEL GIBSON: On which, on which piece?

WALZ: I think the last piece that you were talking about.

RACHEL GIBSON: Yes, I, I think that would be a really interesting area to look at how some other states manage that or even some-- like, the medical school loan repayment programs and things like that. I don't know if that is a, a follow-up of you have to submit the-- you know, that you've paid this or you work with the lender or that type of

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thing, but there needs to be some sort of-- not just a check written to, to a teacher to say, you know, this is for your loans. And again, I don't think people would use that incorrectly, but we would like to see that kind of requirement.

WALZ: Got it. All right. Thank you.

JACK MOLES: Good afternoon again. My name is Jack Moles. That's J-a-c-k M-o-l-e-s and I am the executive director of NRCSA. We support LB945. We appreciate Senator Linehan's attempt to help young teachers. My testimony that you're receiving is the same as I gave for the other bill. But one thing Senator Linehan did say that I, I picked up on, she said this doesn't address all the issues. It doesn't at all, but it's a great start. There are other things we need to be doing to make things more attractive for people to go into education, especially our young people. I'd like to see more of that. So again, just wanted to say that NRCSA does support this bill as well as the earlier bill and I wish you would move one of them out of committee or a combination thereof.

WALZ: Thank you. Any questions?

JACK MOLES: And my first teacher salary was only \$11,000 so I can't help that.

SARA SKRETTA: I can't-- I'm not going to be able to say this without smiling now, but that's what it's on my paper. So good afternoon, Chairman Walz and distinguished members of the Education Committee. I'm Sara Skretta, S-a-r-a S-k-r-e-t-t-a, and I'm the certification officer at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, but I'm here today on behalf of the Nebraska Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, or NACTE. And as the past president, I'm here today to provide proponent testimony for LB945 and we'd like to sincerely thank Senator Linehan for her leadership and work on this issue. Just want to-- the testimony you had on the previous bill is very similar to what we've got here so I just want to hit a few highlights because again, on behalf of all your educator preparation programs, we are very grateful that you are taking this stance and trying to assist new teachers with some of that debt load that they take into a profession, again, as it's been previously stated with a lower threshold of salary earning at least initially. When a teacher carries such a debt into a job where you're going to start at, say, \$35,000 to \$40,000, the repayment terms and length of that said repayment can be really overwhelming. That often forces teachers to find a second job or leave the profession to find a job that will provide them with an adequate

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salary so they can maybe go on vacation as well as pay their daily living expenses. So we really appreciate the efforts today. We also really like the \$5,000 and \$25,000. You'll hear our group like every dollar amount that you're going to toss out there, again because we really believe that that will make a significant impact on teachers wanting to come into the profession as well as retaining them at least initially as they get started because that debt load will be decreased. NACTE supports-- one of the things we want to make sure -- just in any of the bill, we would support making sure that there's a method that's user-friendly and doesn't inadvertently create a barrier so it makes it difficult for these teachers to access funds. That sometimes is an issue when there's funds available. The process to apply, receive, and document becomes so prohibitive on top of an already busy life that it's not, it's not worth it. So that's one of the things that, that we would support most definitely. With that, again, we really appreciate Senator Linehan for introducing the bill and Senator DeBoer earlier and I'm happy to answer any questions you might have.

WALZ: Thank you. Questions?

SARA SKRETTA: I love that you keep looking at the side of the room.

WALZ: Like that's going to change. Next proponent.

CARRI COLLINS: Good afternoon again, Chair Walz, members of the Education Committee. My name is Carri Collins, C-a-r-r-i C-o-l-l-i-n-s. I am an elementary principal supervisor at the Omaha Public Schools and on behalf of the board of education and Omaha Public Schools, I am here in support of LB945. I will not repeat my previous testimony on LB1128, but again, I would like to thank Senator Linehan for introducing this bill and ask if there's any questions at this time.

WALZ: Thank you so much for coming today.

TREVA HAUGAARD: Chair Walz and distinguished members of the Education Committee, my name is Treva Haugaard, executive director with the Council of Independent Nebraska Colleges. We are supportive of LB945.

WALZ: Spell your name.

TREVA HAUGAARD: Oh, I'm sorry. T-r-e-v-a H-a-u-g-a-a-r-d. The CINC found-- the CINC organization is supportive of LB945 and we appreciate Senator Linehan for introducing this. As everyone else has said before, we're supportive of this, as it helps students that are

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graduating in the education area hopefully obtain and lower their debt and make them able to produce more into our Nebraska economy, perhaps retain and gain in our workforce. I'm not going to repeat all of my testimony, but you have that in front of you. So thank you very much for your time today and again, Senator Linehan, for introducing this, so.

WALZ: Thank you.

TREVA HAUGAARD: Thanks.

WALZ: Any questions?

TREVA HAUGAARD: Thank you.

WALZ: Thank you so much.

TIM FREY: We'll try and go in the same order so everything is standardized. Good afternoon again, members of the Education Committee. My name is Tim Frey. It's T-i-m F-r-e-y. I'm the dean of the college of education at Doane University, former teacher and proud teacher educator, and I am here again in support of all of these bills, LB945, and particularly want to thank Senator Linehan for her efforts in regarding addressing the teacher workforce shortage. I will also not reread my testimony, but in previous bills under LB1128, specific average amounts of loans that you can expect, at least from Doane education program graduates. And one of the things I would point out that's been mentioned a couple of times is that this isn't just-- early career educators can also be in their 40s and 50s. The Doane program that I mentioned, the IPAL program. So 15 to 18 month, lots of times paraprofessionals complete that program and become teachers, but they still take out loans because they're working on paraprofessional salaries while they're completing and paying tuition. So it's not just 20- to 24-year olds that we're talking about helping provide support for and I appreciate that part of this bill in particular. And again, I'm glad to answer any questions. Thanks for all of your efforts.

WALZ: Any questions? I just have a question. I was-- I had circled the 15 to 8 or--

TIM FREY: Yep.

WALZ: What was it?

TIM FREY: 15 to 18 months.

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WALZ: Months, yeah, and you just said that you could, you could still be a paraprofessional and complete that. So it's just a matter of evening classes and summer classes and you'd be able-- OK.

TIM FREY: Yeah because we allow them to do their practicum while they're in their classroom--

WALZ: Ah, OK.

TIM FREY: --as a paraprofessional. So as long as you have a bachelor's degree in the area and it's not an alternative program, it's a traditional initial certification program, it's pretty intense--

WALZ: Oh.

TIM FREY: --for about a year and a half.

WALZ: Yeah. All right. Thank you so much.

TIM FREY: Yep.

WALZ: Next proponent.

JOHN SKRETTA: Good afternoon, Chair Walz, senators, distinguished members of the Education Committee. My name is John Skretta. That's Jo-h-n S-k-r-e-t-t-a. I am the administrator at Educational Service Unit 6, headquartered in Milford. I am here today representing STANCE, Schools Taking Action for Nebraska Children's Education, a coalition of 19 mid-sized Nebraska public school districts and ESUCC. That is the umbrella organization, the coordinating council, in official parlance, of Nebraska's 17 educational service units. We are submitting this testimony today in support of LB945 proposed by Senator Linehan. We're very grateful to Senator Linehan for her leadership in bringing this forward. Just want to share a couple key points about LB945 specifically. It provides a very robust commitment of resources for the loan forgiveness programs under consideration. Through LB945, qualified individuals would receive up to \$5K annually with the maximum amount of \$25K over five years. And obviously, as heretofore mentioned, there's something magical about the \$5 million amount. Great. We hope you can get that across the finish line. We commend the significant commitment of resources to those entering the profession to reduce their debt load. Some research from the Institute for College Access and Success found that the average debt load for a Nebraska college grad class of '18, which was the most recent cohort for which data was available, was over \$26K, so that \$25K number looks pretty appealing. LB945 provides a very strong initial funding

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commitment for which we are grateful. Related to provisions of and the rationale for this bill, which Senator Linehan referenced in her introductory comments, I wanted to reinforce a couple of things. This crisis has been brewing for a while. It well preceded the pandemic. However, what we have seen in education at the practitioner level is that the COVID pandemic has really accelerated it in terms of educator workforce shortage across areas, which Kyle McGowan referenced in his testimony. It's not even just limited to teachers. The other thing that we really like about Senator DeBoer's bill as well as Senator Linehan's bill, you don't have to teach for the next 10 or 20 years, I believe is kind of how Senator Linehan put it in introduction. There are a number of federal educator loan forgiveness programs that incrementally forgive those dollars over a period of up to ten years. Look, the reality of the workplace today, as alluded to, is that we should not expect young professionals entering any vocation to make that kind of a commitment. Millennials are the most likely generation to switch jobs and have fluidly defined careers. Gallup defines millennials as the job-hopping generation so we think putting that money up front makes all that much more sense because of reasons like that. Thank you.

WALZ: Thank you. Any questions? John, I-- you hosted a summit a couple of months ago. I can't remember what--

JOHN SKRETTA: NACTE sponsored it actually.

WALZ: OK. What was it called?

JOHN SKRETTA: That was Nebraska Educator Shortage Summit, I believe. Yeah.

WALZ: OK. While you were there-- because we're going to be discussing all three bills, while you were there, you know, having those conversations, were there any other ideas that you think should be considered that came out of that summit? Any other ideas that should be considered--

JOHN SKRETTA: Yeah so and I, I referenced some of this yesterday in some of the testimony and I believe the other Dr. Skretta can comment more articulately on, on this because of her direct--

WALZ: The distinguished one?

JOHN SKRETTA: --involvement in facilitating that.

WALZ: The distinguished one?

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JOHN SKRETTA: Yeah, the distinguished one. Yeah, yeah. But there were multiple task forces that came out of that collaborative day and though-- I think maybe five and those task forces each have a topical area of focus that we believe as-- it was a very broad educational stakeholder group that included basically PK-16 level folks. So it-- and it included policymakers. Like, a number of members of the State Board of Education were there, but, like, one of the other groups-- and I'll mention this one because I'm a member of this task force-- is focused on basically marketing and rebranding the profession, meaning just being really conscientious, purposeful, and deliberate in the ways in which we talk about how appealing and profoundly rewarding a career in education can be and what an important vocation it is because not everything we see in the media currently-- in fact, unfortunately, a lot of that might not portray education and a career in education in a way that makes it seem very appealing to young people who encounter that.

WALZ: All right. Thank you.

JOHN SKRETTA: Thanks.

WALZ: Questions? Next proponent. Any opponents? Anybody that would like to speak in a neutral capacity? Senator Linehan, you're welcome to close.

LINEHAN: Oops, excuse me. Thank you very much. So just want to reiterate what I think I've said and then what others have said and especially who brought up the CIR. There's no-- I mean, because of the way teachers are paid and they're paid for length of time and service and for more degrees, if you can't-- to raise all of their salaries, it's astronomically expensive.

WALZ: Right.

LINEHAN: Especially in the short term. But if we can reach those new teachers-- and you think about that 35 to 40 and they're lucky if they take \$35,000 home after they pay their dues and after they pay their retirement and after Social Security, that becomes a huge amount of money, \$5,000 or \$6,000. I'm not married. I told you how I got to \$5,000. And it's-- and people who are also at a time in their lives where they probably want to hopefully put down roots, which will help them stay in the profession, start a family. They can't-- literally cannot do that with that kind of a student-- they can't get a loan for a house, for one thing, because of their student loans. So-- and it helps pay it off quickly so they're not-- as some of the testifiers I

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think for Senator DeBoer's bill said, they're at 61 and they still have student loans. That's crazy. So it helps them get through-- past this, not hanging over their heads. I think that's all I had. Oh, and I agree wholeheartedly, I've got children in the 30 to 40, two of them say they're not millennials, but everything they do tells me they are millennials. And they, they don't-- not one of the four thinks they're going to be in the job they're in now five years from now. It's just not the way they think because they want new experiences, live in new places. Now, I think some of them will end up-- I don't know about my own, but we're going to have people that stay in careers they love, but we've got to have a way for them to get to that career--

WALZ: Yeah.

LINEHAN: --so.

WALZ: OK. I was going to ask-- I understand the \$5 million conversation-- and if you would be willing to increase that amount, it sounds like you are willing to have those conversations. If--

LINEHAN: Right. Here's what-- so this is probably inappropriate, but since we're kind of swinging around bills today, I'm going to go to my next bill, which when I come up here to introduce it, I'm going to say we don't even need to talk about it. It was not thought out. I mean, I understand what happened was probably me driving down here from Omaha, talking to my staff, saying this is what I want--

MORFELD: Then they're done up.

WALZ: My next question was going to be--

LINEHAN: But--

WALZ: --who I'll have to talk to about this bill.

LINEHAN: But, but why I want to do that, so if we address every, every-- according to the fiscal note on the next bill, there's 5,960 public and nonpublic school teachers in their first four years. And if we gave them \$5,000, it would cost \$29,800,000. So we've got to come up with a number that the Chairman of Appropriations Committee will live with and the other appropriators and other people on the floor and depending on how much money we have the floor, it's got to be-- it just seems to me to be sweet spot that people don't have a panic over \$5 million.

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WALZ: Any other questions before I-- was there a, was there a, like, a sunset on this program?

LINEHAN: No, there isn't. One-- another trick. When you don't have the out-years then your fiscal note doesn't look so bad, but there's not a sun-- I don't have a sunset--

WALZ: OK.

LINEHAN: --on the program.

WALZ: All right. I was just curious. I didn't see it, so I just wanted to ask.

LINEHAN: At least I don't intend for there to be a sunset.

WALZ: OK. All right, that ends our hearing on LB945. We did have one proponent position comment for the hearing record and that was from Jeremy Ekeler and we can go ahead and open on LB1169. Senator Linehan.

LINEHAN: So I appreciate the committee's time and all the proponents and opponents of this bill and I would assume that if Nebraska Department of Ed is here, they are going to come in as an opponent so I would ask that the committee IPP this bill.

WALZ: OK. I guess that ends the hearing on LB1169 then. All right. Thank you, Senator Linehan, and that ends our hearings for today. Thank you, everybody, for coming and testifying.