

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
Executive Board February 24, 2021

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our COVID-19 response protocol

**HUGHES:** [RECORDER MALFUNCTION] o'clock, so we will begin. Welcome to the Executive Board Committee. I'm Senator Dan Hughes. I am from Venango, Nebraska, and I represent the 44th Legislative District and I serve as Chair of this committee. The committee will take up the bills in the order posted. Our hearing today is your public part of the legislative process and this is your opportunity to express your position on the proposed legislation before us today. Due to social distancing requirements, seating in the hearing room is limited. We ask that only enter the hearing room when it is necessary for you to attend the bill hearing in process. The list-- the bills will be taken up in the order posted outside the hearing room. The list will be updated after each hearing to identify which bill is currently being heard. Please utilize the identified entrance and exit doors to the hearing room. We request that you wear a face covering while in the hearing room. Testifiers may remove their face covering during testimony to assist committee members and transcribers in clearly hearing and understanding the testimony. Pages will sanitize the front table and chairs between testifiers. Public hearings for which attendance requires seating capacity-- reaches seating capacity or near capacity, the entrance door will be monitored by the Sergeant at Arms. We're not going to go there. I ask that you abide by the following procedures to better facilitate today's proceedings. Please silence or turn off your cell phones. Move to the front row when you are ready to testify. The order of testimony is introducer followed by proponents, opponents, neutral, and then closing by the introducing senator. If you are testifying, please fill out a green form found at the back of the room. Hand in your green sign-in sheet to a page or committee clerk when you testify-- when you come up to testify. Spell your first and last name for the record as you begin testifying, speak clearly into the microphone and be concise. Since we do have a shortened time frame for this committee and we only have 90 minutes, I will be limiting testimony to 3 minutes today. When you see the yellow light come on, that means you have 1 minute remaining and the red light indicates your time has ended and please wrap up quickly. Your questions may-- from the committee may follow. We ask that you please limit or eliminate handouts. If you do have handouts, the material may be distributed to the committee members as exhibits only while testimony is being offered. Please make sure you have 13 copies and give them to the page when you come up to testify and they will be

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distributed to the committee and staff. The committee members with us  
today will introduce themselves beginning on my left.

**SLAMA:** Julie Slama, District 1, Otoe, Nemaha, Johnson, Pawnee and  
Richardson Counties.

**McCOLLISTER:** John McCollister, District 20, central Omaha.

**HUGHES:** Then members to my right.

**LOWE:** John Lowe, District 37, Kearney, Gibbon and Shelton.

**LATHROP:** Steve Lathrop, District 12, which is Ralston and parts of  
southwest Omaha.

**HUGHES:** Senator Patty Pansing Brooks, from LD28 here in Lincoln, is  
currently quarantining at home due to a COVID exposure. She will be  
watching on NET and asking questions through me as they may arise. To  
my right is committee counsel-- legal counsel, Janice Satra, and to  
the far left is our committee clerk, Mandy Mizerski. And we have pages  
today, two young ladies off to my left. Thank you, ladies, for joining  
us. With that, we will open our first hearing on LB605. Senator  
Wishart, welcome to the Executive Board Committee.

**WISHART:** Well, thank you, Chairman Hughes, and members of the  
committee. I think this is one of my first times in front of you, so  
feel free to eat lunch. My name is Anna Wishart, A-n-n-a  
W-i-s-h-a-r-t, and I represent the 27th Legislative District in west  
Lincoln, and I'm here today to introduce LB605. First, I want to thank  
Senator Slama and Geist for cosponsoring this legislation. I  
approached both of them because they are avid outdoors women, and like  
myself, and thought this is something we could collaborate on. As a  
long distance runner myself, a hiker, somebody who camps a lot, a  
horseback rider, I know firsthand the benefits of having outdoor space  
for recreation. I utilize most of our state parks across the state and  
it's pretty incredible the natural resources we have here, especially  
in places like Senator Lowe's district, where you see one of the  
wonders of the world, in my experience, and it's really incredible and  
something that more than just Nebraskans should know about, and they  
do. All of these activities that I have participated in, I learned  
when I was young and got involved in when I was young. So I also know  
firsthand the benefits of early education for kids in getting to

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experience outdoor recreation activities such as hunting, fishing, running, horseback riding, kayaking, mountain biking, and the list goes on. And the importance, because some of these skills like hunting, archery, fishing, are things where they can be intimidating to learn when you're an adult, but it becomes second nature if you're exposed to them when you're young. We have so much going on in this state, yet I think there are gaps where few people in our state understand that we have the most waterways than any other state in our country. And so my goal is that as a Legislature, we come together, different members from different committees and really start to look at what are we doing well in our state when it comes to outdoor recreation, exposing kids to recreational activities at a young age, ensuring kids spend a lot of time outdoors. We know that through research that kids learn better when they're outside. So what are we doing also to help mitigate some of the challenges that some of the entities that you'll probably hear from today experience in some of the hurdles? So that's why I brought this bill. That's-- that's why I brought it. I won't go into the details of what this legislative study committee would be. It's kind of spelled out pretty clearly in the bill, and I know you have two other bills after me, but I will give you a couple of examples of how I think we could be helpful. For example, I have friends who are-- I would call extreme kayakers. For example, I have a friend who has kayaked from Seward all the way to Kansas. And some of the things that they talked to me about is, we would get in terms of kayaking tourism in our state, many more people coming in if we just had a few more public access points to our rivers across the state, because if you don't have access as a kayaker to points where you can get in or get out, it's prohibitive for long distance kayaking. So that's something we could look at as a committee. Another example is in talking with Ducks Unlimited. Pheasants Forever, we have incredible programs for youth when it comes to learning, hunting at an early age, learning archery. And there are kids that enroll in that, but there isn't a diversity of kids that get to enroll in that. You know, there are opportunities for kids who live in the urban areas of our communities who would like to experience these things that kids who grow up in other parts of the state, they just get to do with their parents. That's something we should look at focusing on. How can we make sure we have equal access to some of these programs for kids regardless of their geographic location. So there is no fiscal note. This is something we do in-house. If this passes, I would plan on taking on a significant portion of the burden

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and work on this and also hope that we would utilize the legislative  
research to help us with this as well. So with that, I would be happy  
to answer any questions.

**HUGHES:** Thank you, Senator Wishart. Are there questions from the  
committee? I've got a couple. So, where do you anticipate gifts or  
donations or grants coming from?

**WISHART:** Well, we will--

**HUGHES:** To this committee and where-- where does that money then go?

**WISHART:** I believe we create a separate cash fund where that could  
happen.

**HUGHES:** So that would be under the Appropriations Committee's control?

**WISHART:** That would be-- I'll have to remind myself here. Yeah.  
Obviously, like every cash fund, it's under the Appropriation  
Committee's control.

**HUGHES:** Just checking.

**WISHART:** Yes.

**HUGHES:** Then I guess the-- where you specifically authorize them to  
convene virtually, what-- I guess, what you're thinking there?

**WISHART:** Well, my thinking is that, you know, if this passes, we're  
going to be hopefully jumping right into it. And there are a lot of,  
you know, people who are living in different parts of the state and  
making the ease of meeting during what will probably still be pandemic  
experiences. So, yeah, that's why I included it.

**HUGHES:** OK. Very good. Any other questions from the committee? Will  
you stay for closing?

**WISHART:** I can't stay for closing. I got to go back to the  
Appropriations.

**HUGHES:** Very good. Very good. OK, we will begin-- yes?

**WISHART:** Senator, I did have one amendment. We mistakenly left out  
Game and Parks, and so I have that for the committee.

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**HUGHES:** We will open up testimony to the proponents of LB605. Welcome.

**DUSTIN ALLEMANN:** Good afternoon. Dustin Allemann, D-u-s-t-i-n  
A-l-l-e-m-a-n-n, currently representing the Nebraska Sportsmen's  
Foundation. I'm the chairman at the organization and wanted to take an  
opportunity to come down here and express our excitement and support  
for this new legislation. You know, when we look at what a great job  
Senator Wishart did on explaining, you know, what-- what this is for,  
our perspective is increasing, you know, a lot of the same goals that  
she talked about. When we look at Nebraska public lands versus private  
lands and the states around us, Nebraska, according to the research  
that I looked at which was a little bit old, Nebraska is 1.6 percent  
public lands, Iowa is 1.04, Kansas, .92, South Dakota, 7.53, and  
Colorado at 39.86 percent of their land in the state being open to  
public access. And so what that tells us is that a few of our  
neighbors and ourselves need to work with each other to figure out how  
access and-- and how these lands can be used for the-- for sportsmen's  
activities, for economic activities, educational and recreational  
activities. And so when we see legislation like this, we definitely  
want to be involved and we obviously want to-- want to support it the  
best that we can. The importance of a collaboration between both the  
Legislature and local groups and organizations are very important  
because each one of these organizations and each one of you as  
legislators bring something different to the table in a different  
perspective, a little bit of a different knowledge-base and-- and  
really think that-- that taking a look at this as an important issue  
is-- is great for understanding what's going in our state and for  
educating each other. So with that, I will take any questions that you  
have for me.

**HUGHES:** OK, thank you, Mr. Allaman?

**DUSTIN ALLEMANN:** Allemann.

**HUGHES:** Allemann.

**DUSTIN ALLEMANN:** Uh-huh.

**HUGHES:** Very good, my apologies. Any questions for Mr. Allemann?  
Senator Lowe.

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**LOWE:** Thank you, Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Allemann, for being here. As our society becomes more urbanized and our pieces of property are growing larger by the-- by the landowners because of necessity, how is that affecting the sportsmanship?

**DUSTIN ALLEMANN:** Well, it's a big-- it's a big issue, right? Because years ago there was a great relationship between landowners and sportsmen. You would-- you would talk to pretty much any sportsmen out there and they had a public piece of property that they would utilize. right? Now, we see less and less of that happening. And some of that has to do with legal struggles, like if something was to happen while that individual was on the property, you know what happens then? And then we have also in an urban environment, people that have lost that connection. And there's maybe no one that is willing to be a mentor to get these people out and experience those things. This is why the RG3 or the R3 initiative by Game and Parks and a lot of different states around the country is so big right now.

**LOWE:** How do we accomplish this and still respect the landowners?

**DUSTIN ALLEMANN:** Well, I think understanding both the restrictions that these-- or the reservations that these landowners have about letting individuals come onto their property, they don't know these people, they're strangers on both sides of the fence, correct? So are there ways that we can create a group of a network of landowners that are working with mentors in certain organizations that will allow those people on the property, I think is a great place to start. But understanding what a lot of these partners are dealing and-- dealing with and what issues they truly have, by coming to the table as a group, I think will help us understand that a little better.

**LOWE:** Thank you.

**DUSTIN ALLEMANN:** Yeah.

**HUGHES:** Additional questions? I guess I have one. So in your-- you said you're president of the Nebraska Sportsmen's Foundation.

**DUSTIN ALLEMANN:** Chairman, of the--

**HUGHES:** You're chairman of that.

**DUSTIN ALLEMANN:** Yeah.

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**HUGHES:** Does your group do any kind of education of your membership  
about personal property rights?

**DUSTIN ALLEMANN:** At this point our-- what we do is, you have a great  
point on education and that's what we do. We're more in educating our  
membership and the public on, you know, what's going on in the  
lawmaking areas and legislation and so on and so forth. But as we get  
information from other organizations or through a tool like this, we  
definitely would be a proponent of spreading that information to the  
entire Sportsmen's community.

**HUGHES:** OK. Very good.

**DUSTIN ALLEMANN:** Does that-- hopefully that answers your question.

**HUGHES:** Well, I've had experience with your organization and it hasn't  
been positive. So, some of your membership does need to understand a  
little better, I believe, the importance of private property rights.

**DUSTIN ALLEMANN:** Right. Well, that-- that goes with-- with every  
organization out there. Obviously, we do our best to try to do that,  
but I would encourage any of you to reach out directly if you do have  
those types of situations arise, because we always want to educate  
on both sides of this.

**HUGHES:** Very good. Thank you for coming today. Any questions? Seeing  
none, thank you for your testimony.

**DUSTIN ALLEMANN:** Thanks for having me.

**HUGHES:** Next proponent of LB605. Welcome.

**DEAN EDSON:** Thank you. Senator Hughes, and members of the Executive  
Committee, my name is Dean Edson, spelled D-e-a-n E-d-s-o-n, and I'm  
the executive director for the Nebraska Association of Resources  
Districts, NARD, presenting testimony today in support of LB605.  
Handed out my testimony to you, I'm just going to highlight a few  
things on here. All 23 of our districts are involved with some type of  
outdoor education and providing recreational opportunities for  
residents of their district. Many districts sponsor and participate in  
natural resource festival's, teacher-- teacher workshops, classroom  
presentations and more. We've got more than 80 recreational sites  
across the state. I think I might add, on our website we have an

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interactive map that the public can go to on our website, and it highlights all the recreational sites and they can click on that, and it shows them all the amenities for each one of those sites. We incorporate recreation into our multipurpose flood control structures. We also have over 200 miles of recreational trails. Our environmental education programs include but are not limited to outdoor education days, coordinated with local schools, range and land judging competitions, and FFA environmental sciences programs. We've got several districts that have incorporated outdoor education facilities at or adjacent to their local NRD offices. This includes Lower Loup, Lower Platte South, Lower Platte North, Lower Republican, Middle Niobrara, and North Platte and Papio. These are all open to the public and used by the local schools, civic groups and the general public. We also work with communities to improve outdoor recreation and education opportunities for the residents. This helps retain and recruit work forces for those communities. Recent examples, the Lower Elkhorn NRD partnering with the City of Norfolk to redevelop the downtown area and incorporate outdoor recreation and education components into that projects. We're willing to work with the Legislature on this to identify both short-term and long-term statewide goals and improve outdoor recreation education in the state. With that, I will close and take any questions you may have.

**HUGHES:** Thank you, Mr. Edson. Are there questions from the committee? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony today.

**DEAN EDSON:** OK.

**HUGHES:** Next proponent. Welcome.

**BILL HAWKINS:** Chairman Hughes, members of the Executive Committee, it's an honor to be in front of this committee. I come in support of this bill. My name is Bill Hawkins, B-i-l-l H-a-w-k-i-n-s. I'm a lifelong Nebraska resident. I grew up hunting with my dad, fishing. I've had the privilege of being in rural Nebraska my whole life. I've also worked with kids my whole life. So I really appreciate Senator Wishart bringing this bill to the Legislature because it is a good piece of legislation. It gives Nebraska an opportunity to coordinate and make even better the good life of Nebraska. So, because my mother took me to the library and taught me to read, I read Early Mountain Men books and I became that person, and I've worn out four teepees in my life doing living history to schools, really living in them all



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winter, all the time. And I would go to schools and set up at 6:00 in the morning and tear down, and at Prescott School I did 20 sessions. I am so privileged to do that. They came to me to-- for the last six years of the State Fair here in Lincoln, in the Heritage Village, and I don't know how many people would turn over every 30 seconds showing that interaction of the early explorer to the native people in that adaptation. It's that history of Nebraska that makes this place the best place to live. I've chosen to stay here. We have our NRDs, we have our Game and Parks Commission. We have the best parks. I don't have time to go to every part of this state that I want to go to. And so giving that education to the students, showing them. I would have underprivileged kids come out to my farm. I have a kite party for the last 10 years at my farm. I have 50 acres a mile south of Branched Oak and I've been out there for 40 years working with kids, showing them when they come out and-- just find nature, they just go nuts. In that respect, with Senator Lowe, in how do we do that rural to urban, I worked that my whole life. It's teaching these kids not just hunting, but coming out and respecting the land. And if you have a group of kids out there for a day or extended times, they become respectful for opening a gate, closing a gate. If you-- you don't go on to a piece of property unless you go meet the farmer and understand where he's coming from and you get to know each other. And so that-- this gives you an opportunity to coordinate all that and make this good life even better, so I just encourage this. And I thank Senator Slama and Senator Geist for cosponsoring this because it is important. It's the future of Nebraska. So that's it, and I'll take-- gladly take any questions.

**HUGHES:** Thank you, Mr. Hawkins. Are there questions from the committee members? Seeing none, thank you for coming in.

**BILL HAWKINS:** Thank you, and thank you very much for your time.

**\*JOSEPH KOHOUT:** Good afternoon, Chairman Hughes and Members of the Executive Board. My name is Joseph D. Kohout and I am the registered lobbyist for the Nebraska Golf Alliance. I appear before you today in support of LB605 on their behalf. I ask that this testimony be made part of the record on this bill. The Nebraska Golf Alliance is a coalition of golf related industries from throughout Nebraska including the Nebraska Section of the Professional Golfers Association, the Nebraska Club Managers Association and the Nebraska Golf Course Superintendents Association. Together, we work to ensure

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that legislation and executive actions within the state of Nebraska enhance the player experience. We speak with one voice on issues affecting the golf industry. To quote from the Nebraska Tourism webpage on golf in Nebraska, "Turns out, when you've got wide-open spaces, epic natural scenery and a whole lot of quiet, it makes for some pretty great golfing ...Nebraska golf courses take sense of place to a whole new level. Imagine natural contours courtesy of our Sandhills. Water features carved by scenic rivers. Prairie-grass roughs. And you never know how that wind whistling over the open plains is going to play with your game. It all makes Nebraska a stunning place to challenge yourself, that's for sure." It cannot be said any better than this why our alliance appears before this committee in support of LB605. In recent times, players have challenged themselves by playing more and more golf. Our industry has seen a golf renaissance in this state in the last 25 years. More Nebraskans are playing our sport per capita than any other time in our history. According to Golf Datatech, LLC, the golf industry's leading independent market research company, reported that rounds soared 13.9% in the U.S. in 2020 with the north central region of Nebraska and Kansas reporting a 20-4% increase. Our courses saw record setting rounds during the pandemic due to the need for individuals to stay and play sports outside. For these reasons, we support this special committee and offer to be of assistance we can in this process. In sum, we would ask to advance LB605 to General File. I would be happy to stand for any questions.

**HUGHES:** Additional proponents to LB605. No more proponents. Are there any opponents to LB605? Seeing none, anybody wishing to testify in the neutral capacity to LB605? We do have letters-- written testimony from Joe Kohout, as a proponent from the Nebraska Golf Alliance. We also have position letters from Lynn Johnson, Lincoln Parks and Recreation Department, proponents; Al Davis, proponent from Sierra Club; and proponent, Jarrod McCartney from Nebraska Travel Association. With that, we will close our hearing on LB605 and we will open up on LB123, and I don't see Senator Cavanaugh. There she is. Snuck in. Did you come in the wrong door?

**M. CAVANAUGH:** No, entrance only.

**HUGHES:** OK, just checking.

**M. CAVANAUGH:** I follow the rules to the T.

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**HUGHES:** Just checking.

**M. CAVANAUGH:** Right up to the T.

**HUGHES:** Welcome back, Senator Cavanaugh. Good to see you.

**M. CAVANAUGH:** Thank you. I just realized my bill is LB123, so I will take about 3 seconds. This is for the Leg. Council. The intention of this bill is to make it so that we are not statutorily required to have that meeting every single year. It needs an amendment. Senator, or Speaker Hilgers and I are working on an amendment. I have no-- I have no supporters as far as I know, and I'll take any questions you have.

**HUGHES:** OK, thank you, Senator Cavanaugh. Are there questions? Um, kind of what is the-- can you share with us what the gist of the amendment is at this point, or do you want to wait?

**M. CAVANAUGH:** Whatever Speaker Hilgers says it is. [LAUGHTER]

**HUGHES:** OK. Very good.

**M. CAVANAUGH:** How do you like that?

**HUGHES:** I-- I like the sound of that.

**M. CAVANAUGH:** OK.

**HUGHES:** OK, very good. Will you stay for closing?

**M. CAVANAUGH:** Oh, yes.

**HUGHES:** OK, very good. We will open up with proponents to LB123. Any proponents to LB123? Go ahead and wipe down. Proponents to LB123? Seeing none, opponents to LB123? Seeing none, anybody in the neutral capacity? Seeing none, we do have one letter of-- position letter as an opponent from Shirley Niemeyer, who is representing herself. With that, Senator Cavanaugh, you're welcome to close. She waives closing. That will end our hearing on LB123, and we will open up on LB247. And Chris, thank you for filling in for Senator Pansing Brooks today.

**CHRIS TRIEBSCHE:** Hello, and good afternoon, Chair Hughes, and members of the Exec Board. I am Chris Triebisch, C-h-r-i-s T-r-i-e-b-s-c-h, and

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I am here today to introduce LB247 on behalf of Senator Pansing Brooks, who is in quarantine and watching this hearing via NET. I can tell you she's really disappointed that she wasn't able to be here today for this important bill. LB247 creates the Mental Health Crisis Hotline Task Force. Under LB247, this task force shall develop an implementation plan for Nebraska to integrate and utilize the 988 Mental Health Crisis Hotline, which was established pursuant to the Federal National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2020 and signed into law by former President Trump. The task force established under LB247 shall identify a method to integrate local mental health crisis hotlines to help ensure people get connected to a qualified mental or behavioral health professional regardless of the time, date or number of individuals trying to simultaneously access a local mental health crisis hotline. Senator Pansing Brooks decided to bring this bill after attending a National Conference of State Legislatures virtual event on the topic of law enforcement, where she learned how other states led by Utah, were responding to the new opportunities created by the passage of this federal legislation. Utah is moving forward with legislation to take advantage of the federal law's new authorization to impose a fee on most wireless and wire line services to provide funding in a manner similar to the funding of 911 services. However, Senator Pansing Brooks decided it would be more prudent to start with the legislative task force to engage all the relevant stakeholders in a statewide plan. Senator Pansing Brooks is happy to have the support of stakeholders who would be included in the task force, including mental and behavioral health professionals, law enforcement, and others. Moving forward is of the utmost importance. According to the Center for Disease Control, on average, one person died by suicide every 32 hours in Nebraska in 2018. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for people between the ages of 10 and 34. Currently, many mental health crisis calls go through the 911 line, often taking up law enforcement's time when what is actually needed is mental health assistance. The 988 line will provide an approach to crisis response that channels mental health calls to trained mental health professionals, while allowing law enforcement to devote more of their time to law enforcement issues. But-- the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services received a grant earlier this month from Vibrant Emotional Health, the nonprofit administrator of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. This grant will help the agency with plans to address projected infrastructure needs and access to the 988 number in Nebraska. Senator Pansing Brooks

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wants to thank DHHS for its leadership in securing this grant. She has invited Sheri Dawson, director of Behavioral Health at DHHS, to testify today and discuss how this task force would complement the work that has already begun. LB247 includes an E-clause to allow the work to begin immediately. Senator Pansing Brooks also wants to thank the Public Service Commission for being an important part of this process. Thanks also to the many supporters of this bill, including the Nebraska Medical Association, the Police Chiefs Association, the Nebraska Association of Behavioral Health Organizations, and others, and Senator Pansing Brooks would just ask this committee to advance LB247.

**HUGHES:** Thank you, Mr. Triebisch. We will now open it up for proponents to LB247. Welcome back, Senator.

**ANNETTE DUBAS:** Thank you, Senator Hughes, and members of the Executive Board. My name is Annette Dubas, A-n-n-e-t-t-e D-u-b-a-s, and I'm the executive director for the Nebraska Association of Behavioral Health Organizations, otherwise known as NABHO. We are a statewide organization advocating for behavioral health providers, hospitals, regional behavioral health authorities and consumers. Our association would like to sincerely thank Senator Pansing Brooks for the introduction of LB247 to create this 988 task force. The establishment of a three-digit mental health crisis number has the potential to launch a paradigm shift in the way we view and respond to people in a mental health crisis. Our current 911 number is not designed with behavioral health providers and consumers in mind. And all too often, though certainly not the intention, when a law enforcement officer responds to a call, it can add to the crisis and increase the anxiety of the individual. A direct three-digit line that will connect with trained counselors will help address an individual's immediate needs, reduce the use of law enforcement, and high-cost emergency room care. The current National Suicide Prevention Helpline is proven effective in reducing a caller's distress and we see this 988 just building on that success. Nationally, we are finally recognizing the need for a strong mental health and substance use disorder system of care. One in five people will experience a mental health condition at some point in their life. And now, with COVID, projections indicate that will rise to one in three. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among young people, and the inability to afford care, especially behavioral health care, is the most common barrier to treatment, which only leads to more emergency situations. As Mr. Triebisch mentioned, Vibrant

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Emotional Health, which is the current administrator for the National Suicide Prevention Helpline, make planning grants available to any state that already has an established helpline, and for Nebraska, that's the Boys Town hotline. These grants are to help states plan for the implementation of 988 and the creation of a state specific system. For our association and our national association as well, it's very exciting to think that we can now create an appropriate needs-based, accessible, effective and collaborative helpline. Our division of Behavioral Health was awarded such a grant and I believe they'll be speaking to you in a little bit about the process of moving that grant-- those goals from that grant forward. Establishing this task force is imperative as the Legislature can implement the necessary policies and funding mechanisms necessary. The task force will be able to include and build upon the work done through the 988 planning grant. Our association does not see the grant and the task force as mutually exclusive, but rather a way to complement and come together to help Nebraskans create this evidence-based crisis intervention, easy to use, a hotline that will save lives and offer hope. And I know my light is on, but I just wanted to say that I had a conversation with Senator Pansing Brooks's office about the makeup of the task force. And I know it's-- it's fairly broad in who she's looking to bring into, but we would want to make sure that there's consumer voices. And I think that can come through the advocacy component of her task force, as well as bringing in the expertize of some of our existing hotlines that we have in the state, like the Boys Town how-- helpline--

**HUGHES:** Thank you, Senator Dubas.

**ANNETTE DUBAS:** --in the family, so.

**HUGHES:** We appreciate it.

**ANNETTE DUBAS:** Encourage you to advance this bill and would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

**HUGHES:** Questions for the former Senator? Senator Lowe.

**LOWE:** Thank you, and thank you for being here. Funding initially comes from a grant. Will funding in the future still be grant funded, or--

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**ANNETTE DUBAS:** No, the grant is just for the planning, so what's this going to look like for the state of Nebraska. So that's the planning grant to actually fund and sustain a 988 helpline. That's basically what the federal government put in place and said, OK, now states, if you're going to put this in place, you have the ability to create a funding mechanism. You know, I would envision something similar to what we have with 911. We do-- we use telephone surcharges and things like that to support 911. So, I mean, certainly as the Legislature that would be in your purview as to how and if you're willing to-- to fund the helpline.

**LOWE:** OK. And when the calls come into 911 now and they're for-- mostly for mental health that you would see coming to this-- this new number. Are they just a call for help or somebody in the house might be having something-- a problem and so we would go to a call center and those people would be able to deal with that. Would they send somebody out at that time like-- like the 911?

**ANNETTE DUBAS:** Certainly. And again, going back to that planning grant, you would look at what are the kinds of services that would then support those calls into the 988. So, you know, we do have and I-- Director Dawson can speak to this more. You know, we have crisis intervention services set up pretty much statewide, at least through the regions. So, you know, how do we connect that call in to the 988 to those specific mental health services that could instead of sending a law enforcement officer, and again, I don't want this to be taken as a knock against our law enforcement officers, but to be able to connect these individuals so that they don't end up in our criminal system and rather in a system that is meant to serve the mental health needs.

**LOWE:** All right. Thank you.

**HUGHES:** Senator Geist.

**GEIST:** Thank you, and thank you for your testimony and this is so needed, I think just a broad overview of what we have available. Do you see this also maybe illuminating some services that we have gaps?

**ANNETTE DUBAS:** Absolutely.

**GEIST:** And is that part of the intention of this task force?

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**ANNETTE DUBAS:** Yeah, I believe, and again, I think, you know, what can happen through the planning grant and looking at possibly where those gaps are and then having the task force and having the legislative component looking at, you know, how can we expand on the crisis services that are already there? How do we adapt them to the rural versus urban? You know, certainly identifying those gaps are huge. After this bill was signed into law, our National Association, we had a call and it was like we've been working on this at the national level for a long time. And it's like we've been working, working, working, we've got it. OK, now, what do we do? [LAUGHTER] You know, now how do we identify those services that are needed? What's it going to look like? And it's going to look different in every state.

**GEIST:** Which was exactly my next question. So, thank you. I appreciate that.

**HUGHES:** Additional questions? Seeing none, thank you for coming in today.

**ANNETTE DUBAS:** Thank you.

**HUGHES:** Next proponent. Welcome.

**TORI MIYASHIRO:** Thank you. Good afternoon, Chairperson Dan Hughes. My name is Tori Miyashiro, spelled T-o-r-i, last name, M-i-y-a-s-h-i-r-o, and I'm here on behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, also known as NASW, in support of LB247 to create a mental health hotline task force. I would like to begin by thanking Senator Pansing Brooks for introducing this imperative bill. LB247 aligns with NASW's value to prevent mental health crises. As a social work student, friend and family member of individuals who experience mental health crises, I've seen how important it is for these individuals to have access to a present, educated and nonprejudiced year. Individuals with accesses help receive an outlet for their struggles, which provides a coping mechanism that others without this help do not have to aid their recovery. The availability and accessibility of a mental health hotline can dramatically influence the future of those impacted. The Nebraska Legislature has recognized the present mental health crisis as a real and tragic issue in the state of Nebraska. NASW acknowledges that severe mental health illnesses such as clinical depression can ultimately result in suicide. According to the CDC, in 2019, suicide ranked as the 10th leading cause of death in the state of Nebraska. By



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enacting LB247, Nebraska will take a colossal step towards the prevention of suicide, as well as other harmful outcomes of leaving this crisis unattended. NASW believes that early intervention is critical to treating mental health illnesses and can be done by providing this hotline to the public to destigmatize the identification and treatment of mental illness and foster resilience in people experiencing mental illness and in those who care for them. These services should be fully integrated and available to all who experience mental health illnesses. This bill would also create a mental health task force that would make the process of connecting to a mental health professional more accessible and efficient. By organizing and integrating local mental health hotlines, this bill will ensure that everyone in need can access a qualified mental or behavioral health professional, regardless of the time of day, day or number of individuals trying to simultaneously access the hotline. Callers should be given choices for service options that meet their needs. The implementation of LB247 would greatly improve the use of already existing services offered to Nebraskans. LB247 would work very similarly to the Federal Communications Commission 211 network. The purpose of the 211 code was to connect individuals to appropriate community-based organizations and government agencies. As of February, 2015, 211 had served over 291 million Americans, which is 93 percent of the entire population. The 211 hotline offers access to many different types of services, which includes basic human needs resources, disaster response and recovery, mental health employment supports, older adults and persons with disabilities. Finding the most relevant phone number can be a daunting task for callers. That is why 211 is so beneficial. It creates a shortcut through the maze of agency phone numbers and connects callers to the most applicable resources. This is also crucial when working with clients who come from diverse backgrounds by providing culturally competent care for those who do not speak English, those who are new to their communities, the elderly, the disabled, and those with limited reading skills. By passing LB247, more Nebraskans will have greater access to the support they need and will better utilize Nebraska's already existing crisis hotlines. Thank you for your consideration. Please advance LB247 to the full Legislature.

**HUGHES:** Thank you very much, Ms. Macheryo [PHONETIC]?

**TORI MIYASHIRO:** Miyashiro, yeah.

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**HUGHES:** Very good. Any questions? Seeing none, thank you for coming in today.

**TORI MIYASHIRO:** Thank you.

**\*PAIGE GADE:** Dear Members of the Executive Board, My name is Paige Gade. I am testifying on behalf of the Lincoln Young Professionals Group in support of LB247. Lincoln Young Professionals Group (YPG) is the largest young professional group in the state and one of the largest in the country with over 2,000 members. Lincoln YPG is dedicated to empowering young professionals with educational, leadership, and networking opportunities. We believe that a diverse and balanced living environment is important to retaining young professionals. The creation of a Mental Health Crisis Hotline is a part of that balanced living environment. Nationally, young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 are more than twice as likely to experience mental illness than people older than 50. However, the reality is that people of all ages, races, genders, careers, and socioeconomic backgrounds experience mental illness. We firmly believe that access to mental health resources is imperative for the health and well-being of every Nebraskan. The purpose of the Mental Health Crisis Hotline Task Force is to determine how to integrate local mental health crisis hotlines. This is an important step to provide access to mental health services. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 1 in 5 Americans struggle with their mental health and about 5 percent of Americans have suffered from such severe mental illness that it has interfered with day-to-day activities, work, school, and family. Nationally, we lose one life to suicide every 15.8 minutes. Suicide is the third-leading cause of death among youth and young adults (ages 15 to 24) and is the 11th leading cause of death overall. Published reports state that nearly half of all adults in the United States will develop at least one mental illness during their lifetime. Mental illnesses disrupt a person's thinking, feelings, mood, ability to relate to others, and daily functions. They cannot be overcome through "will power" and are not related to a person's character or intelligence, as they are biological in nature and need to be treated as such. Negative attitudes about mental illness often underlie a stigma surrounding mental illness. This can cause the affected individuals to deny symptoms, delay or deny treatment, be excluded from employment, housing, or relationships, and hinder recovery. Adopting the Mental Health Crisis Hotline Task Force is an important step in erasing the

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stigma around mental illness and creating a place for Nebraskans to turn for help. Providing a reliable service that can give our citizens a place to turn when there are no other options can save lives. This hotline could provide all Nebraskans with access to resources to help them lead healthy productive lives, contributing to the strength and vitality of the entire state. Lincoln Young Professionals Group supports LB247 because we strongly believe that the creation of a Mental Health Crisis Hotline Task Force is important to all young professionals who call Nebraska home. We ask for your support in advancing LB247 to general file. Thank you!

**\*JON CANNON:** Good afternoon members of the Executive Board Committee. My name is Jon Cannon. I am the Executive Director of the Nebraska Association of County Officials. I appear today in a support of LB247 which would create the Mental Health Crisis Hotline. In addition to the creation of a hotline, LB247 would create a task force that would include the membership of county officials, including county law enforcement and other representatives from county government. County board members serve on six regional governing boards addressing behavioral health issues throughout the state. These individuals represent their county and participate in the decision making of the board. Each regional behavioral health authority encourages and facilitates the involvement of consumers in all aspects of service planning and delivery within the region and coordinates such activities with the office of consumer affairs within the Division of Behavioral Health of the Department of Health and Human Services, including such tasks as organizing and supervising comprehensive mental health, drug abuse and alcoholism programs, services, and facilities under its jurisdiction. The backgrounds of county representatives who serve on regional governing boards and law enforcement who are faced with many individuals who are encountering mental health issues would be valuable in assisting with the creation of a plan to integrate local mental health crisis hotlines. Such integration would be designed to ensure each individual who accesses a local mental health crisis hotline is connected to a qualified mental or behavioral health professional regardless of the time, date, or number of individuals trying to simultaneously access a local mental health crisis hotline. Additionally, the task force would conduct a cost analysis to determine how a fee structure similar to the one imposed for 911 services could be designed to cover the costs of the 911 mental health crisis hotline. We ask you to please study our

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thoughts prior to taking action on LB247 and encourage you to advance the legislation to General File for further consideration. Thank you for your willingness to consider our comments. If you have any questions, please feel free to discuss them with me.

**\*JOSEPH KOHOUT:** Good afternoon, Chairman Hughes and Members of the Executive Board. My name is Joseph D. Kohout and I am the registered lobbyist for the Nebraska Association of Regional Administrators and I appear before you today in support of LB247 on behalf of the same. We ask that this testimony be made part of the official testimony of the committee on this issue. We do not normally appear before this committee, so please allow a moment to explain: Nebraska is split into six "regions" for the delivery of behavioral and mental health services. These are local units of governments that the state Department of Health and Human Service - Division of Behavioral Health partners with to engage in planning and service implementation. Each county is part of a region and as a result appoints one county commissioner to sit on a regional governing board. They will represent that county and participate in the decision making of the board. The regions purchase services from providers in their area. If necessary, services are purchased from other service providers across the state. The region is staffed by an administrator who in turn hires additional personnel to manage and oversee those contracts and services. The Nebraska Association of Regional Administrators is comprised of the six administrators. LB247 would create the Mental Health Crisis Hotline Task Force. It would develop an implementation plan for Nebraska to integrate and utilize the 988 mental health crisis hotline established pursuant to the federal National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2020, Public Law 116-172. The task force would identify a method to integrate local mental health crisis hotlines to ensure each individual who accesses a local mental health crisis hotline is connected to a qualified mental or behavioral health professional regardless of the time, date, or number of individuals trying to simultaneously access a local mental health crisis hotline. The federal National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2020 authorizes states to impose fees on wireless device services to provide funding in a manner similar to the funding of 911 services. The makeup of the task force is provided in detail. The task force would terminate on December 31, 2022. We applaud Senator Pansing Brooks for bringing forth LB247. The need to seamlessly integrate the national 988 number with the local resources is absolutely critical -

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particularly in state with as diverse as Nebraska and as large as the state is. As noted above, the regions are tasked with the important role of identifying services needed within their geographic area of the state and working with providers to ensure the delivery of those services. As the behavioral health authorities throughout the state, we are committed to ensuring this program works. We greatly appreciate the time that you have committed to hear this important bill and urge its advancement.

**\*CORA SCHRADER:** Good afternoon, Chairman Hughes and members of the Executive Board: My name is Cora Schrader and I would like to provide the following testimony on behalf of Children's Hospital & Medical Center (Children's). We want to thank Senator Pansing Brooks for proposing LB247, a bill that creates the Mental Health Crisis Hotline Task Force of the Nebraska Legislature. Children's mission- to improve the life of every child- prioritizes both physical health and behavioral and mental health needs for the over 150,000 unique patients we serve each year. Based on the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, it is estimated that 13-20% of children living in the United States (up to 1 out of 5 children) experienced a mental disorder in a given year. Mental health is important to overall health. Mental disorders are chronic health conditions-conditions that can last a lifetime. Without early diagnosis and treatment, children with mental disorders can have problems at home, in school, in forming friendships and are at risk for self-harm. In fact, suicide is the second leading cause of death for young people between 10 to 24, according to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. As we continue to adapt to meet the needs of our patients, Children's has implemented a depression screen (PHQ9) for patients age 12 and older in each of our clinic settings, including urgent care and the emergency department. Avoiding a mental health crisis and focusing on early treatment will offer the greatest benefit to our patients, but the reality is that many children and adults are suffering in silence. To be successful in fulfilling our mission, Children's thrives on partnerships and stakeholder relationships across the state ensuring every child has access to care at the right time. By implementing the \*988 mental health crisis hotline, established by way of the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2020, we are one step closer to achieving uniformity across the state. The task force established by the Legislature shall identify a method to integrate local mental health crisis hotlines to ensure each individual who accesses a local

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mental health crisis hotline is connected to a qualified mental or behavioral health professional regardless of the time, date, or number of individuals trying to simultaneously access a local mental health crisis hotline and will require partnership across the state to ensure every child has the resources they need to live a safe and healthy life. Further, we would encourage the Legislature to consider Senator Williams' LB322, the Safe2Help hotline, to make sure all reporting streams are in sync together. With that in mind, we urge the committee to please advance LB247.

**\*DAVID SLATTERY:** Chairman Hughes and members of the Executive Committee. I am David Slattery, Director of Advocacy at the Nebraska Hospital Association (NHA), and I thank you for this opportunity to present this testimony on their behalf. I am expressing (for the public record) the NHA's SUPPORT for LB247 introduced by Senator Patty Pansing Brooks. LB247 creates the Mental Health Crisis Hotline Task Force to develop a plan for NE to integrate and utilize the 988 mental health hotline established under federal law. It requires the task force to identify a method to integrate local hotline, to develop a plan for staffing a statewide mental health crisis hotline and coordinate with local mental health authorities, and to conduct a cost analysis to determine how fees on wireless device service could be designed to cover the costs of the hotline. Access to mental health continues to be a growing concern for the NHA. There is a lack of access to psychiatric and mental health services in Nebraska and the problem is even more prevalent in rural parts of the state. - Nearly 1 in 5 Nebraskans have a mental illness. - 88 of Nebraska's 93 counties are designated as federal mental health professional shortage areas. - 78 counties have no practicing psychiatrists. - 32 counties lack a behavioral health provider of any kind. 25 miles outside of Lincoln and Omaha, there is a 10,000/1 ratio for population and practicing psychiatrists. Additionally, a high percentage of the behavioral health work force is able or expected to retire in the coming years. The COVID-19 pandemic has created and will continue to create long term mental health disorders. Statistics show that the pandemic has increased suicides, drug use, alcohol use, and other harmful behavior. The legislature needs to increase all levels of support for citizens with mental health disorders, and LB247 helps achieve that mission. We thank Senator Pansing Brooks for introducing this important legislation and encourage the Committee to advance LB247. Thank you for consideration.

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**\*TAMI SOPER:** Dear Chairman Hughes and Executive Board Members: Boys Town would like to formally register its support for LB247, introduced by Senator Pansing Brooks. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for young people age 10-34. The National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2020 designated 9-8-8 as the new three-digit Mental Health and National Suicide Prevention Hotline number across the country. This change would make it easier for millions of Americans to access timely and effective crisis intervention services and receive lifesaving help provided through the Hotline. The Boys Town National Hotline (BTNHL) has had a long-standing relationship with National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and has served as one of nine National Backup Center since 2005. Boys Town also offers "specialty" services to the Lifeline network that include responding on behalf of Lifeline to crisis emails and responding to several hundred White House Letters each year. BTNHL assists callers nationwide, 24/7, 365 days a year. Since opening in 1989, the BTNHL has responded to 10,000,000 contacts and has helped prevent thousands of suicides. The BTNHL is nationally accredited by American Association of Suicidology (AAS), CONTACT-USA, and the Council on Accreditation (COA). Last year the Boys Town National Hotline received and responded to approximately 135,000 calls, texts and emails for The Boys Town National Hotline, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline Network, the Nebraska Family Helpline (the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Behavioral Health helpline, a direct result of Safe Haven), and several local Safe Schools Hotlines. Of those contacts, nearly 12,000 calls came from fellow Nebraskans. The 988 Planning Grant would allow the design of a process to openly discuss, with Nebraska Department of Health and Human Service (DHHS) and other agencies, what NE residents need to ensure an effective crisis continuum of care. Preliminary discussion indicates that the proposed Task Force could provide feedback about what additional information might be offered through the Hotline (e.g., available mental health services and consumer connections consumers with resources such as mobile crisis response teams, mental health assessment providers, etc.). Boys Town has advocated at the national level to make this a reality for the millions who need it. We have also been working closely with Of-If-IS, Division of Behavioral Health on the creation of the task force. We thank Senator Pansing Brooks for introducing this important piece of legislation and respectfully ask the Executive Board to advance LB247.

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**HUGHES:** Next proponent? No more proponents, then we will move to opponents to LB247. No opponents, we will move to neutral testimony. Welcome.

**SHERI DAWSON:** Good afternoon, Chairperson Hughes, and members of the Executive Board. My name is Sheri Dawson, S-h-e-r-i D-a-w-s-o-n and I serve as the director of the Division of Behavioral Health at the Department of Health and Human Services. And I'm here to testify neutral regarding LB247. LB247 proposes to create a Mental Health Crisis Hotline Task Force to develop a plan for Nebraska to implement 988 as the universal dialing code for a suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline system. The Federal Communications Commission established July 16 of 2022 as the deadline for implementing the 988 system. To meet this deadline, DHHS, through the division's Behavioral Health and Public Health, requested and was awarded a planning grant through September 30, 2021, to work with system partners on implementing the hotline in Nebraska. The grants core project activities provide the structure around which an implementation plan and recommendations will be created. A number of system partners with different perspectives and expertise will serve on the planning and implementation groups. The DHHS planning grant will also address the crisis services continuum, referral protocols and referral processes for postcrisis follow up. So we believe the bill is unnecessary and people have talked about it being complimentary, so why not join together? So I would welcome the opportunity to include interested state senators in our stakeholder working group and also plan to keep Chairman Arch in the HHS Committee updated on the progress of the 988 system. So thanks for the opportunity to testify and I'm happy to answer any questions.

**HUGHES:** Thank you, Ms. Dawson. We appreciate your testimony. Are there questions from the committee? Senator Lowe.

**LOWE:** Thank you, Chairman, and thank you, Ms. Dawson, for being here. I'd asked this question earlier about funding and it was brought up that it may come in the form of a tax on phones or communications somehow. Do you anticipate what that would be, how much that would be on--

**SHERI DAWSON:** I don't know at this time. Certainly, other states have levied fees through phone systems, through a tax. I think what we have the opportunity to do here in Nebraska, Boys Town has-- is our only



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center for the national suicide prevention line right now. They receive about 81,000 calls because they're the backup to the national online as well. Eight thousand of those are from Nebraska. So, in addition, you may know that they do the family helpline, which is a service that we purchase in addition to this national prevention line. So I don't know the fee. I think that's the opportunity we have is to really look at all the different options. Certainly, other states are levying that tax and that's what the federal legislation allows. But if we think about Nebraskans coming together to partner and helping fund some of the infrastructure together, we'll figure out and that's the purpose of the planning grant is to make those recommendations.

**LOWE:** All right. Thank you.

**HUGHES:** Any additional questions? Seeing none, thank you, Ms. Dawson, for coming in today.

**SHERI DAWSON:** Thank you.

**HUGHES:** Additional neutral testimony? No additional neutral testimony. We do have letters of support in lieu of personal testimony from David Slattery, Nebraska Hospital Association; Tami Soper, Boys Town; Joe Kohout, Nebraska Association of Regional Administration; Cora Schrader, Children's Hospital and Medical Center; Jon Cannon from NACO; Paige Gade, Lincoln Young Professionals Group; and Brad Meurrens, Disability Rights Nebraska. We also have letters of support-- position letters of support from Amber Bogle, Children and Family Coalition of Nebraska; Marley Doyle, Behavioral Health Education Center of Nebraska; Michelle Walsh, Nebraska Medical Association; Brian Jackson, City of Lincoln Police; Aubri Faustman, Nebraska Children-- Child Health and Education Alliance; Chief Bruce Farrell, Police Chiefs Association of Nebraska. With that, Senator Pansing Brooks has indicated to legal counsel and myself, thank you for your question, Senator Lowe. In her closing, Congress has established a fee. A fee may be added to most wireless and wired line services to help pay for the same way-- pay in the same way that a fee is added to those systems to help pay for 911 emergency systems. This would be a 988 mental health emergency system. With that, as you know since Senator Pansing Brooks is not here, she is allowed to provide us written closing-- a written closing statement for this hearing. So with that, we will close our hearing on LB247 and the hearing for today.