

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
Appropriations Committee February 15, 2024

**CLEMENTS:** Thank you. Good afternoon and welcome to the Appropriations Committee. My name is Rob Clements. I'm from Elmwood and represent Legislative District 2. I serve as Chair of this committee. We will start off by having the members do self-introductions, starting with my far right.

**LIPPINCOTT:** Loren Lippincott, District 34.

**WISHART:** Anna Wishart, District 27.

**McDONNELL:** Mike McDonnell, LD 5, south Omaha.

**DORN:** Myron Dorn, District 30.

**CLEMENTS:** There are other senators who may be coming in or may have bills in other committees and will come in later. Assisting the committee today is Cori Bierbaum, our committee clerk, to my right. To my left is our fiscal analyst, Mikayla Findlay. Our page today is Ella Schmidt from Lincoln, a UNL student in criminal justice and political science. If you're planning on testifying today, please fill out a green testifier sheet located on the side of the room and hand it to the page when you come up to testify. If you will not be testifying but want to go on record as having a position on a bill being heard today, there are yellow sign-in sheets on the side of the room where you may leave your name and other pertinent information. These yellow sign-in sheets will become exhibits in the permanent record after today's hearing. To better facilitate today's hearing, I ask that you abide by the following procedures. Please silence your cell phones. When hearing bills, the order of testimony will be introducer, proponents, opponents, neutral and closing. When you come to testify, please spell your first and last name for the record before you testify. Be concise. We request that you limit your testimony to 5 minutes or less. Written material may be distributed to the committee members as exhibits only while testimony is being offered. Hand them to the page for distribution when you come up to testify. If you have written testimony but do not have 12 copies, please raise your hand now so the page can make copies for you. With that, we begin today's hearing with LB1209. Senator Bosn, you may open.

**BOSN:** Thank you, Chairman Clements, and good afternoon to members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Carolyn Bosn, C-a-r-o-l-y-n B-o-s-n. I represent District 25, which is southeast Lincoln/Lancaster County, Nebraska, including Bennet and including Cedars. I am very

excited to be here today to present to you LB1209. This bill would appropriate \$2.5 million to enhance emergency shelter facilities to ensure access to services for child welfare and juvenile justice involved youth served by a licensed and accredited child-caring agency. These funds are needed to support trauma-informed services and support for children and youth in southeast Nebraska. The current shelter serves youth from across the state of Nebraska, taking referrals from 40 different counties just this last year. It also provides emergency response and juvenile justice diversion services. Service provided-- services provided have increased by 15% in just the last year, with demand for much more. Youth in shelter are provided designated case managers, an educational support team and a trauma-informed support-- care support team. The shelter has no exclusionary criteria, meaning that it can serve children with significant needs such as experience with sexual trauma. As a former deputy county attorney, I have direct experience working for the interest of children that experienced child abuse and neglect. I can assure you that trauma-informed emergency services and facilities are necessary to provide safety to prevent children from experiencing further injury or trauma and give them the support that they need to recover. By way of an example, one of the many cases that I had with a youth specifically placed at Cedars, this was a child who had been removed from her parents at a very young age. Her parental rights were terminated. She was placed with a permanent-- a permanent adoptive family and ultimately adopted. Subsequently, the biological child of those adoptive parents had perpetrated on her. She was the victim of sexual abuse at that point. And rather than try to resolve that issue, those adoptive parents gave her up for adoption. So she's now gone through yet another trauma experience. As a result of that trauma, she decided, I'm going to leave every single placement you put me in before they can leave me. She blew through placement after placement after placement, and at 16 years of age, we had nowhere to put her. And we decided to essentially beg Cedars to take a chance on her. She was not a good fit for their criteria, because she was a run risk and she had other risky behaviors. And they said, OK, we will work with this child. We will see what we can do. We will see how we can get there. They poured wraparound services around this youth. We worked with her. She ultimately aged out of the system and into independent living, and that is 100% due to the hard work that Cedars put into that child. I tried to get her to come today, but I was unable to connect with her, but I certainly wish her well. As a mother, I can also say that children need a variety of ways to cope with stress.

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Every child is different. And a safe, stable place to learn, move, grow, and heal can make a world of difference to that child. I urge you to fully incorporate this \$2.5 million request into your budget recommendations. I thank you for your time and attention. I will be happy to answer any questions. I will also indicate there are a number of individuals testifying from different agencies to try and explain things from different perspectives, if they can answer a question that I'm not able to

**CLEMENTS:** Are there questions? Seeing none, thank you, Senator.

**BOSN:** Thank you.

**CLEMENTS:** We'll invite proponents for LB1209. Please come forward. Welcome.

**SARA HOYLE:** Good afternoon, Senator Clements and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Sara Hoyle, S-a-r-a H-o-y-e. I am here to testify in support of LB1209 on behalf of Lancaster County. I serve as the director of human services for both the city of Lincoln and Lancaster County. Juvenile justice and funding for nonprofit entities to carry out this important work are some of the primary functions of the Human Services Department. In Lancaster County, the Human Services Department provides case management for preadjudicated youth. However, the service provisions for these youth are delivered through our community-based nonprofit organizations. These services encompass detention and-- detention alternatives which include shelter services. Lancaster County's detention facility was designed based on a study in the early 2000s by Karen Chinn. The premise of this study stressed the importance of a robust network of detention alternatives. For over 2 decades, our community has been able to operate our detention facility under capacity and even repurposed a portion of the facility. This would not have been possible without our community-based detention alternatives. In Lancaster County, Cedars Youth Services provides a majority of these detention alternatives to include shelter services. Lancaster County provides funding for these programs through county general funds and also through community-based aids. For decades, Cedars has been a pillar in the community where youth and families knew they could go if they were homeless, needed a safe place to stay, or as a short-term-- term detention alternative while waiting for a detention hearing. Over the last decade, there has been a significant increase in the number of adjudicated youth needing a placement at Cedars. As a result, Cedars shelter beds are often full

with the waitlist. At this same time, youth and families in need-- youth and families in need in our community at behavioral health and shelter services have significantly increased. During the pandemic, there was a 74% increase in the number of calls into the Nebraska Children Helpline. Of these calls, over 1,800 of them were new families who had never reached out for support before. During a year's time frame, over 647 calls were placed into the Lincoln Police Department that were coded as behavioral health for youth ages 18 and under. Cedars alone has experienced an uptick in the number of referrals for shelter, increasing by almost 200 from fiscal year '18 to fiscal year 2021. LB1209 appropriates \$2.5 million to enhance emerg-- emergency shelter facilities to ensure access to services for child welfare and juvenile justice involved youth served by a licensed and accredited child-caring agency. This funding has the potential to increase the services available to youth in our community. The requirement-- the requirement that this funding be appropriated to an accredited child-caring agency ensures our youth have a place to go that is trauma informed, noninstitutionalized and safe. Lancaster County has a history of providing robust service delivery system for our youth and families. However, our community is at a breaking point. We need additional shelter services to adequately serve our youth and our family. We are in strong support of LB-- we are in strong support of the \$2.5 million to expand shelter services for our most vulnerable youth. Thank you again for your consideration and your efforts to help families through LB1209. I'd be happy to answer any questions.

**CLEMENTS:** Are there questions? Senator Dorn.

**DORN:** Thank you, Senator Clements. That next to last paragraph there, it says we need additional shelter service to adequately serve our youth and family. What-- does that mean you as a county need this? Or does-- we need more statewide or explain that.

**SARA HOYLE:** Us as a county. But I think actually this is a statewide problem that people are seeing. There's waitlists for services. If we're able to front-load these services, if we're able to get wraparound services into the places like Cedars to help families when they are in crisis, to help them as they transition back into the community, that's what we need to be doing.

**DORN:** Thank you.

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**CLEMENTS:** Other questions? I had a question. How do you define enhanced facilities? What do you think that means?

**SARA HOYLE:** Enhanced facilities. I guess the terminology for that one when I was reading that, I thought that it was talking to enhanced educational services, enhanced case management services, just enhanced types of different-- an array of services that they could offer to help build these families up. And just as Senator Bosn had talked about when she introduced this bill, these are families that are experiencing tremendous trauma, and they are in need of just a vast array of services. So I guess when I heard of enhanced services, I thought we were talking about more of the wraparound type of services that are available.

**CLEMENTS:** When I see facilities, I see buildings.

**SARA HOYLE:** It may be that's the difference between, I don't know, a human services background.

**CLEMENTS:** We'll have to find out whether this is people or buildings. We'll ask other people. Thank you for your testimony.

**SARA HOYLE:** Yes.

**CLEMENTS:** Next proponent, please. Welcome.

**MICHON MORROW:** OK. Thank you. Good afternoon, Chair Clements and members of the Appropriations Committee. It is my honor to be here in front of you testifying today. My name is Michon Morrow, M-i-c-h-o-n M-o-r-r-o-w. I'm currently the acting chief of the Lincoln Police Department, and I'm here today in support of LB1209. The Lincoln Police Department is proud to be of service to our community. An essential part of our work is on behalf and in support of crime victims, including the youngest and most vulnerable. Responding to circumstances where children and youth are involved requires skill, training, patience and strong community partnerships. We certainly don't do it alone. Providing services to youth who have been victims of crime is important to our officers and to our community. We have been a part of this conversation for over 75 years. It started with Hulda Roper, one of the first female officers and investigators at the Lincoln Police Department. She was instrumental in securing property just on the outskirts of Lincoln, despite resistance, to create a dormitory for youth in the Lincoln community who had nowhere else to turn. The emergency shelter is still serving southeast Nebraska and is

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run by Cedars Youth Services now. They continue to assist young people today who are survivors of abuse, human trafficking, and violence. Their trauma-informed approach and professionalism are important to helping crime victims heal and for seeking justice. This is why LB1209 matters to the Lincoln Police Department. The shelter also provides options and alternatives for youth involved with law enforcement. In southeast Nebraska, members of the law enforcement community can count on Cedars to provide a safe place for youth counseling, risk assessments and other services through their emergency shelter. This placement-- this is an alternative placement to detention and promotes public safety, helps deter youth from further involvement in the criminal justice system, and is more cost effective and can prevent time in jail for our young people. From a public safety perspective, we need more of the services like those provided at our emergency shelter, which not only help keep our community safe, but also helps to ensure that youth get the help and support that they need to avoid future interactions with law enforcement. Certainly, our preference is that youth don't commit crimes in our community. But if they do, it's paramount that we have this option. Cedars helps youth to connect with their education, get access to healthcare and medications when appropriate, and provides counseling and training to teach young youth better coping skills and rebuild family relationships. As a representative of the Lincoln Police Department, I encourage you to incorporate the provisions of LB1209 into your final budget recommendation as a noteworthy investment into the future of our community. Thank you.

**CLEMENTS:** Are there questions? Senator Dorn.

**DORN:** Thank you, Senator Clements. Thank you for being here. I got a question. I know somebody said they, they kind of age out of this. Or is there a maximum age they can be in this program?

**MICHON MORROW:** I don't want to speak on behalf of Cedars.

**DORN:** OK. [INAUDIBLE]

**MICHON MORROW:** But our involvement is, is typically the 18- to 19-year-old and younger. And 19 would, would be the older side so certainly 19 and younger youth that we engage in partnership with Cedars.

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**DORN:** So when you have a call for service or go somewhere, just have a situation and you make the determination whether or not to bring them to Cedars?

**MICHON MORROW:** At times. At times, that's a conversation that we have. We encounter a youth in our community who is struggling at home and is in need of additional services and some respite care, or perhaps one that has some criminal justice system involvement, and that there is placement there, that oftentimes we are how they engage those services at Cedars, whether that be through the partnership and communications or sometimes transportation.

**DORN:** Thank you.

**MICHON MORROW:** Of course.

**CLEMENTS:** Seeing no other questions, thank you, Officer Morrow, for your testimony.

**MICHON MORROW:** Thank you.

**CLEMENTS:** Next proponent.

**QUIOTIS CROSS:** I'm Quiotis Cross, Q-u-i-o-t-i-s C-r-o-s-s. I'm here-- I attend Omaha Westside High School. I play football, I run track, and I train heavy. I'm here today to express my support for the bill, LB1209 as a past client. This bill is very beneficial in many ways for kids and felonies-- families at Cedars. I was placed at Cedars in February of 2023 and stayed there until mid August of 2023. There was a lot of good things that came with the Cedars program. They provide a very good support system at any way you would need one. They give lots of help from academics to sports or even life skills. Cedars has taught me to have compassion and integrity through all ups and downs in life. But there has been some things I've seen at Cedars that could have been better. Cedars has minimum space for what their programs do and could provide. This is why I think the bill LB1209 is very necessary. Cedars with an extension of shelter, Cedars could provide even more efficient activities and needs for kids and families.

**CLEMENTS:** Are there questions?

**DORN:** I [INAUDIBLE]

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**CLEMENTS:** Senator Dorn.

**DORN:** Thank you, Senator Clements. When you were at Cedars, were you able to continue, I call it, your high school education or was that part of the program?

**QUIOTIS CROSS:** Yes. They enrolled me into Lincoln Public Schools.

**DORN:** OK. Thank you.

**CLEMENTS:** Any other questions? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony.

**QUIOTIS CROSS:** Thank you.

**CLEMENTS:** Next proponent, please. Welcome.

**PAMELA MOCK:** Hello. My name is Pamela Mock, P-a-m-e-l-a M-o-c-k, and I support LB1209. And I'm asking each of you to support this bill as well. For the past 20 years, I've dedicated my efforts to working with families and youth in Omaha and Lincoln. My experience spans from over 15 years at Boys Town to my current position at I've Got A Name, a nonprofit dedicated to end sex trafficking in Nebraska by generating awareness of the problem and taking action against it. We do this through street outreach, building personal and trusting relationships with women and girls who have experienced or are at risk of sex trafficking. There are many factors that can lead a youth to be vulnerable to sex trafficking, such as runaway; homelessness; drug and alcohol use; physical, emotional and sexual abuse; and poverty, just to name a few. I've Got A Name has worked to build partnerships with other nonprofits whose missions align with ours, and Cedars has proven to be an important connection. Cedars fills a deep need in our community that would otherwise leave many families and youth feeling hopeless and unsure of where to turn. Each month in 2023, I've Got A Name visited both Cedars Emergency Shelter and the Youth Opportunity Center to present on the risks of sex trafficking and the importance of healthy relationships. During our visits, we witnessed firsthand the impact of our presentations among the youth. We've seen their curiosity and willingness to learn, which emphasizes the importance of our collaboration with Cedars to prevent and protect. There have even been instances where I've Got A Name received referrals from Cedars, which have led to significant breakthroughs. After one presentation, a 16-year-old revealed that she had been sex trafficked by her foster parents and began sharing details. Having this space to share openly



allowed us to encourage her to process the traumatic experience with her therapist and begin her healing journey. These experiences reaffirm the critical role of organizations like Cedars in our community, offering hope and support to those who need it most. By demonstrating love and care, we can disrupt the cycles of abuse and trauma among vulnerable youth. On behalf of I've Got A Name, I can confidently say we love the partnership we share with Cedars and know that when we come together like this in our community, we have the power to positively shape the future of our city and state. Moving forward, I've Got A Name plans to continue meeting with the youth at Cedars, with the belief that proper knowledge will protect them from this injustice. As the demand for our services continues to rise, it is evident that the need for emergency shelter and youth support is more pressing than ever. Therefore, I urge all of you to consider the gravity of this matter and to pass this bill, which will undoubtedly bolster our efforts to support youth and families in our community. Your support will make a tangible difference in the lives of those who are counting on us. Thank you so much for your time and consideration. Any questions?

**CLEMENTS:** Thank you. Any questions? Senator Lippincott.

**LIPPINCOTT:** Most of us have probably seen the movie the Sound of Freedom, came out about a year ago. Jim Caviezel was the movie star on it. And the sex trafficking is so reprehensible we want to think that it doesn't happen here. We're Nebraskans. [INAUDIBLE] But it does happen here. Tell us-- give us an insight into your world, what you see. Are they mostly foreign people that are being trafficked? Is it domestic, age range? Are there any prosecutions that come out of this?

**PAMELA MOCK:** Yes.

**LIPPINCOTT:** Give us a snapshot of it all.

**PAMELA MOCK:** OK. All right. So I have some statistics that I brought with me. 900 individuals are sold in Nebraska every month, and often--

**LIPPINCOTT:** How many?

**PAMELA MOCK:** --several times. 900 at least is what they found.

**LIPPINCOTT:** A month.

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**PAMELA MOCK:** A month in Nebraska. Yes. One out of-- 1 out of 250 female high school students in Nebraska enter the commercial sex trade every year. So that's in Nebraska. Yes. So I, I appreciate Sound of Freedom, but that was based out of the country so this is happening in Nebraska, definitely. One out of every 10 individuals sold for Nebraska-- or sold for sex in Nebraska is under the age of 21. The younger the age, the, the higher-- the, the higher the price that the buyer has to pay for them. 13 is the average age of a-- of a child entering into sex trafficking. The average number of individuals sold for sex per month is 675. 200 are sold in Lincoln every month, and often several times. And the average number of individuals sold for sex per month is at 200. Grand Island also it's about 65. So the Omaha was 675. Yeah.

**LIPPINCOTT:** Can we get a copy of that?

**PAMELA MOCK:** Yes, you can. Definitely. Yeah. In regards to our clients as well, that's increased just like they would mention about Cedars, we've had a large increase as well. And we have several youth that are in middle school and high school that we've been working with.

**LIPPINCOTT:** How about the prosecutions? Do people get arrested for this?

**PAMELA MOCK:** So that one's-- that one's a little bit tougher for me to answer. So they are-- there are prosecutions but they don't always-- they're not always charged. Yeah.

**LIPPINCOTT:** [INAUDIBLE].

**CLEMENTS:** Would your website be I'vegotaname.org?

**PAMELA MOCK:** Yes, that is our website.

**CLEMENTS:** Thank you, thought so.

**PAMELA MOCK:** Yes.

**CLEMENTS:** Any other questions? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony.

**PAMELA MOCK:** Thank you.

**CLEMENTS:** Next proponent, please. Good afternoon.

**JOHN GOLDRICH:** Good afternoon, Senators. Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you this afternoon. My name is John Goldrich, J-o-h-n G-o-l-d-r-i-c-h. I serve many functions here within the community of Lincoln. I am the assistant director of counseling/psychological services at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I have a private practice, Smooth Sailing, LLC, and I'm the minister of Newman United Methodist Church here as well. Resources are needed to take what exists at Cedars and enhance their emergency shelter facilities. As a therapist that operates in the community, I feel like the enhancement will ensure the access to the services that are needed by both the child welfare and juvenile-involved needs. To me, the word "access" is very important as the demands of service and for services for shelter continue to increase in the community and with Cedars being the only emergency shelter in southeast Nebraska to provide this service to address this. Now, keep in mind that with the notion of accessibility, you need enhancements to meet the needs of those who are accessing the services. When you are an entity such as Cedars, you do not exclude, you will not exclude and you've never excluded. But you are challenged to serve the youth with the demands that are going to test the resources that you do have. You're going to be stretched from time to time to meet the needs of the youth, youth with sexual traumas. Now, Cedars has operated from a trauma-informed perspective for several years. And through the eyes of this therapist, they've done a great job in terms of providing the services. But with the enhancements that funds would provide, there will be more space for physical activities in which individuals would be allowed to exercise and the opportunity to teach them healthy lifestyles, as well as to provide an outlet for energy. I will tell you, young people need that outlet when they're in settings such as that. A space like this can also help in building skills in the area of emotional regulation, coordination, balance, just to name a few. It will allow for further strengthening of our robust educational endeavors that already exist. And the existing therapeutic programming will be amplified with these funds, allowing the therapy to address the needs of these child welfare and juvenile justice youth, helping them to recover and overcome the challenges that they're facing in their lives. It also allows for programming to address health and hygiene concerns, because some of these individuals are not equipped to be able to manage this in their lives. As a therapist, I want to say to you this. This is something I want in our community. As a member of our community, this is something I want in our community. Added value all-- also comes to mind. Children and youth involved in Nebraska child welfare and juvenile justice system

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require additional care and support for safety and stability. If funded, a program such as this will accomplish just that. And finally, a facility such as this can house community activities such as social events and sports leagues. This would allow for the partnering and collaboration with other entities and organizations in the community, and allow the young people an opportunity to participate in childhood activities typical of individuals their age. I ask you to move forth in the funding on LB1209. Thank you for your time. Do you have any questions of me?

**CLEMENTS:** Seeing none, thank you for your testimony.

**JOHN GOLDRICH:** You're welcome.

**CLEMENTS:** Next proponent. Welcome.

**JIM BLUE:** Senators, my name's Jim Blue, J-i-m B-l-e-u [SIC], and I've had the honor and the pleasure to serve as the president and CEO of Cedars organization for now over 32 years. I want to thank everyone who has testified today with your busy schedules. Thank you so much. And I do want to note, in addition to all of other Mr. Goldrich's activities in the community, he's been a wonderful volunteer member of our board of directors for many years. So as one of my bosses, thank you, John. Cedars organization was founded in 1947. The mission at that time is the same precise mission as today: to help kids achieve safety, stability, and enduring family relations. We offer a deep and wide continuum of services for kids, including emergency shelter, mental health services, foster care, housing, support for transitions to adulthood, early childhood education services, and so much more. Cedars Pioneer Center Emergency Shelter is the only emergency shelter in southeast Nebraska for the local community, for the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, for the Nebraska Juvenile Probation System. We are nationally accredited and have been since the mid 1990s and fully licensed by the Department of Health and Human Services. There is no one else in southeast Nebraska that provides the kind of care-- and I say this with all humilitil-- humility but it is factual-- no other entity in southeast Nebraska that provides the type of care that we do. Please know that the impact of our essential services is not just a matter for southeast Nebraska. We serve kids from throughout our great state: Columbus, Omaha, Howells, Scottsbluff, and so much more. If we had a map with a marker of every community where we have served kids, it would be like a map of a blizzard hitting our state. And speaking of blizzards, it was in

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January as this recent storm was bearing down on us that I rolled over a shelter and those 20 kids coming from really sometimes horrific situations had nothing to do for the next week. It was going to snow and if you remember, keep snowing and 15 degrees below zero. How wonderful it would have been if those kids had a place to go to, to run around, to go to do some cardio, to go to the yoga meditation area, to just find some quiet to recover from the situations that they are escaping from. Last month, the Cedars organization provided 11,000 nights of care for kids who could not safely stay at home. Whether it's human trafficking or abuse and neglect, or just kids who are involved in some really complex bad situations, 11,000 nights of care for nearly 400 kids just last month. By the way, on the tracking sheet I looked at, that's the highest it's been for at least the past year; and I haven't had time to look historically. But for the last year, that's the highest we've had. This generational investment will provide the support, the enhanced care these kids need to holistically heal and move on with their young lives. I cannot put it into words how much I would appreciate your support for LB1209, but I will try to. We would appreciate it very, very, very much. It would be great for the kids for years and years to come. I'd be happy to try to answer any questions you may have.

**CLEMENTS:** Questions? Senator Wishart.

**WISHART:** Jim, thanks for being here.

**JIM BLUE:** Of course.

**WISHART:** And thanks for everything you do for Nebraska's kids. Can you tell us-- two questions. Can you tell us a little bit about the-- this facility that you envision, a little more details about that? And then can you also talk about-- my understanding is that Cedars has done a significant amount of fundraising around this. So you can talk a little bit about the private sector investment that this is what your request is coming in is for a portion of what it would cost. You've done a significant amount of private sector raising as well to support this project.

**JIM BLUE:** Right. Thank you. I'm anxious someday to stop using the word COVID, but it ain't today. Back in about 2018, before that was even a thing in any of our lives or the universe's perspective, we had this facilities plan to update our 70-year-old kitchen/dining room and build a indoor rec center for the kids. And we were going to raise all

the money and then we were going to go do this. COVID hit. The emergen-- the immediate life safety issue was the kitchen and dining room because that was a traffic way for the entire building. So we raised \$3 million in a year to do that. Last year, we raised nearly \$3 million to build the Carriage House, which is a innovative support services for homeless, pregnant and parenting teens. That was on the original plan. We have a waiting line for that. We went and did that. This rec center will serve not only the emergency shelter, but these kids who are living in the Carriage House, give them a place to go to walk around, be kids, work on the recovery of the trauma they're all experiencing. We are raising money also for, per your question, for the rec center. But, you know, we have had such generosity from the supporters of Nebraska for these other initiatives that while we are going to folks trying to raise about \$1 million from those runs, we really need the Legislature's help to serve the kids who are involved with the Department of Health and Human Services, probation and the local community. So it is very much of a partnership. That's a long answer, Senator, but that's how I kind of approach things.

**CLEMENTS:** Other questions? Senator Lippincott.

**LIPPINCOTT:** Just very plainly, the big old pie chart.

**JIM BLUE:** Yeah.

**LIPPINCOTT:** What percent is contributions, what percent is money from the state?

**JIM BLUE:** For the Cedars organization?

**LIPPINCOTT:** Yes, sir.

**JIM BLUE:** About 65% of Cedars' revenue comes from the state of Nebraska, one way or another. We con-- we have for decades contracted with Health and Human Services to provide emergency shelter services. That amount pays for about 50% of our actual cost of care. So we are fundraising to pay staff to do their great work with these kids. Probation, childcare for the kids of very low-income working mothers, so that 65% comes from a variety of other sources. Then about 25%-- I may not get my percentages precisely right right now, but I hope you'll excuse me-- about 25% is grants, whether they're from the United Way or the federal government, and about 10% is fundraising for operations.

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**LIPPINCOTT:** Thank you, sir.

**JIM BLUE:** Yeah.

**CLEMENTS:** All right. Yeah, I was surprised this just said enhanced facilities.

**JIM BLUE:** Yes, sir.

**CLEMENTS:** And can you define better what that term means?

**JIM BLUE:** I will to the very best of my ability, sir. I, at about noon today, before we came here to visit with you, I walked over to the shelter. That's one of the great things about my job is being only walking distance away from kids who we're responsible for taking care of. I spoke to one young lady who's 17. Our friends with the Lincoln Police Department escorted her to us 2 days ago. She told me how desperately she wants to be back with her mom by her 18th birthday in 3 weeks. We're going to do everything we can to help that. I asked her what I might tell our friends in the Legislature about the prospect of building this trauma recovery activity center, which would have a place for them to walk around, run around, play volleyball, learn how to play pickleball in separate rooms to get some exercise. And her--

**CLEMENTS:** We have quite a few people here. Could we get to it?

**JIM BLUE:** She-- yeah. What, what she told me to tell you, Senator, was that this would be awesome. Because right now she's with 20 other kids. And the opportunity to have this would be terrific. It would be enhanced care. Because right now when the weather is not good in Nebraska, they are in the shelter. And this would be such an enhanced valued service.

**CLEMENTS:** What would be the cost of that facility?

**JIM BLUE:** We're somewhere between \$3 million and \$3.5 million. We're going to see how much we can secure for the kids but we're at about that amount.

**CLEMENTS:** So if you received 2.5 from the state, you would want-- you would be looking for how much private?

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**JIM BLUE:** We're trying to raise about \$1 million still. Yeah, but we've been real busy with that the last 6 years but we will do it. We will make this real for the kids.

**CLEMENTS:** We've heard about an increase in needs. Do you have a feel for what the cause of the increased need is?

**JIM BLUE:** I would like to see-- and I'll try to keep it brief for you, but this is a complex answer also.

**CLEMENTS:** What's the-- you know, you're getting more people.

**JIM BLUE:** Yeah.

**CLEMENTS:** What is their situation?

**JIM BLUE:** Well, the state's-- it's really important the state continues to develop early intervention services with families, and that's really important. We are trying to do that also. But kids coming to us have-- every child that we have has a different story. And whether it's abuse or neglect, certainly access to more dangerous drugs and more addictive drugs. But, you know, it's-- every-- I can't say it more simply than for the 400 kids we provided out-of-home care for last month, there's a different story for every kid.

**CLEMENTS:** OK. Let's see. What-- so this is-- this would be a one-time ask?

**JIM BLUE:** Yes, sir. Yes.

**CLEMENTS:** It's not an ongoing--

**JIM BLUE:** No.

**CLEMENTS:** --funding request.

**JIM BLUE:** One-time investment needs and services with these kids, many of which are involved with the Department of Health and Human Services or probation.

**CLEMENTS:** I see. Any other questions? Thank you, Mr. Blue.

**JIM BLUE:** You bet. Thank you. Appreciate it. Thank you all.



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**CLEMENTS:** Is there another proponent?

**JIM BLUE:** I think that's it.

**CLEMENTS:** Seeing none, is anyone here in opposition? Seeing none, anyone in neutral testimony? Seeing none, Senator Bosn.

**BOSN:** Thank you, Senator Clements and members of the Appropriations Committee. I'll try not to recap things other than to answer some of the questions that I saw being asked and, and hope to explain them and then open my-- anything up for questions. Essentially, this is space to serve more kids with more services. That's what this comes down to: educational, group counseling, family interaction activities, you name it, that's it. I've had the opportunity to visit Cedars on a number of different occasions in different capacities, including this summer as a senator, seeing what they've got. Every facility you visit anywhere has a what they would call a multipurpose room, right? I can tell you, every single room that's not occupied by a youth is a multipurpose room there. They are packed. I went into one room to meet with them, and I'm totally flexible so this isn't a complaint against Jim and his team, but oh, we need this room for this meeting. So we had to move and that's fine. But they are using every square inch of space that they have for multipurposes. The reality is they're out of space. And if we want-- when a youth is detained because they've either committed a law violation, they're a risk to themselves or others, and they're facing detention, we can pay to put them at the youth detention facility, which is the most restrictive placement, or we can try to put our money where our mouth is and use the least restrictive alternatives of Cedars and other facilities like Cedars. But we can't do that if they don't have the space to be successful there. This is an ask to help us become as successful as we can with those alternatives to detention. It's, it's less restrictive, and I want to highlight that as well. This is an opportunity to increase services at existing facilities, but is an ask for new buildings, not staff. So one of your questions was, is this for personnel or for a building. So it's increasing services we're providing but on a new-- in a new building that would be built on their current property, not somewhere else.

**CLEMENTS:** So to clarify that, this would go for brick and mortar.

**BOSN:** Yes. Yes.

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**CLEMENTS:** If they need more staff to serve people in that space, they'll do that separately.

**BOSN:** Well, they won't do that through this bill. I don't know how they or what they would do, but yeah.

**CLEMENTS:** I mean, this bill doesn't include more staffing. Thank you.

**BOSN:** Correct. To answer some of the questions that Senator Lippincott asked, Chief Morrow was kind enough to pull some numbers. So in 2023, they investigated 73 human trafficking cases, 28 of which were cleared. They have a full-time Special Victims Unit police officer dedicated full time to investigating human trafficking cases. In 2024 alone, and today's date is the 15th of February, they have already done 4 investigations and made 2 arrests on human trafficking cases in Nebraska. So the ask here is to put an investment in our community and it's not just for Lincoln. We are serving youth from all over the state of Nebraska with youth services. And so I've tried to have a variety of individuals here to testify from different perspectives as to the need here. I also think it might be helpful if I provided a one-page breakdown of the costs and what those are and where they're coming from. And I'm certainly happy if the-- if the Chair is willing, I'll provide that to you. And then you can disseminate it to the rest of the board-- of the committee for hopefully answering some of those questions. But I'm certainly hopeful that you'll include this in, in whatever package you pass out.

**CLEMENTS:** Senator Wishart.

**WISHART:** My understanding is you're asking for General Funds here, but that this is ARPA eligible. Is that something that Cedars would be interested in entertaining this ARPA funding?

**BOSN:** Yes.

**CLEMENTS:** And if you provide things to the committee, send it to our clerk.

**BOSN:** Yes.

**CLEMENTS:** And the clerk will distribute it to the members. It just would-- I was confused for 5 straight testifiers that this was going to

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be providing more services and staff. And it would have been helpful in your opening to say this is a building we're building.

**BOSN:** I apologize. Yes. So enhanced services in a new building, yes, but on the same existing property.

**CLEMENTS:** So when I saw the word facility, I was right.

**BOSN:** You were right.

**CLEMENTS:** It was a building.

**BOSN:** The other thing I will tell you is in the fiscal notes, I did have my staff reach out to see what they were-- what-- where this .25 full-time employee program specialist came from. We've cleared that up. There is no request for that from Health and Human Services, and it's been corrected. If you look at the front, it is just the ask for the amount, the one-time ask. So I-- since you brought up ongoing expenses.

**CLEMENTS:** All right. Are there questions? Thank you, Senator Bosn.

**BOSN:** Thank you all.

**CLEMENTS:** We have position comments for the record. Proponents. 3; opponents, none; neutral, none. That concludes the hearing for LB1209. We now open the hearing for LB1117.

**Speaker 2:** If you don't.

**Speaker 1:** Sorry. There. Tell me what it is up front.

**Unidentified:** You were right in the beginning. Yeah.

**Speaker 6:** It's just.

**Speaker 2:** Yeah. This is.

**Unidentified:** Awesome. Would you. Say.

**Speaker 2:** Hundred. Asking.

**CLEMENTS:** OK. Welcome, Senator Dungan. You may begin.

**DUNGAN:** Thank you. Good afternoon, Chair Clements and members of the Appropriations Committee. I'm Senator George Dungan, G-e-o-r-g-e

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D-u-n-g-a-n. I represent the people of northeast Lincoln in Legislative District 26, here today introducing LB1117. LB1117 would provide an 11% increase to reimbursement rates paid to providers of developmental disability services. DD, developmental disabilities, service providers are experiencing massive staff shortages. Unlike other industries, DD service providers cannot adjust their prices or hourly rates. They are dependent upon rates set by the Legislature. The average wage for a DD service provider is currently sitting below \$15 an hour. This forces many of them to seek state assistance to support themselves and their families. These staffing shortages have resulted in thousands of Nebraskans waiting for-- waiting months for services. There are currently 2,000 Nebraskans on the waitlist for services. This results in many parents or guardians taking significant time off work or even leaving the workforce entirely to make up for gaps in service. This has a rippling impact on Nebraska workforce already struggling to fill available jobs. When I came to you all last year, I talked about DD services and the importance of them and the importance of them to me personally. I, you know, it's not a personal issue for everybody, but, I do interact quite a bit with the DD community. I know a lot of folks in the DD community, and I've spent a lot of time working with them, both socially and in some professional settings. I know how difficult the job is for these service providers, and I know how necessary these services are. And so I also think a little bit about a time last year when I was-- or 2 years ago at this point when I was campaigning. I was knocking doors--

**CLEMENTS:** Excuse me just a second. We're going to ask the people in the hallway to move down the hallway.

**DUNGAN:** OK.

**CLEMENTS:** Disruptive here.

**DUNGAN:** Thank you. I'll wait. It's quite a few people out there.

**CLEMENTS:** He's going to get the door. OK. Thank you, Senator. Go ahead.

**DUNGAN:** Thank you, Chair Clements. I appreciate that. I was just going to say, I think about a time that I was knocking doors during the campaign, and I knocked on a door of a constituent of mine. And she talked to me about her daughter, who is in the DD community, and she talked to me about her daughter's life. And her daughter is nonverbal

and spends the vast majority of her time in a hospital bed in home. They benefit from service providers, but the mom still has to do a lot of that work herself. She said that essentially her entire full-time job was taking care of her daughter, and they also had service providers there to help her. She invited me inside to meet her daughter, and I went in and I spoke with her and met her and talked a little bit about their life. And mom talked about just how expensive this entire industry is. I think she spent \$5,000 out of pocket per month on this. But in addition to that, her service providers that were helping her were not making enough money either. And so it really drove it home. And I don't want to make this too much of an anecdotal situation. I know we're here today to talk about numbers, but I think it's important to highlight that, to really make sure we know we're talking about people who need these services. I also know we find ourselves in a situation where we have to balance a lot of things to get this appropriations budget out. But I do think it is worthwhile to have a conversation about the necessary increases that we need for our DD service providers. And that's why I brought this bill here today. There's people behind me who are professionals who can tell you a little bit more about the necessity for an increase in provider rates. I think there's also people who can talk to you about what service providers do and how they operate. And they're going to be able to answer your questions probably better than me. But I would just encourage you to consider LB1117. It's a necessary service and they need to get paid more for it. So thank you.

**CLEMENTS:** Thank you. Are there questions? I'm looking at the fiscal note. And in the text of the fiscal note, it shows \$19.3 million would be 11% increase. But up on the chart it shows 24.5 General Fund increase. And why are those 2 numbers different?

**MIKAYLA FINDLAY:** So that's for the Developmental Disabilities program and it's also cost to child welfare and the courts.

**CLEMENTS:** I've been told that the developmental disability portion is \$19.3 million. There's child welfare-- child welfare and court expenses that would relate to that and increase it to 24.5.

**DUNGAN:** That's my understanding as well. I think the number that we're seeing in the box is an aggregate. And then down in the text, they kind of split it out a little bit more--

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**CLEMENTS:** [INAUDIBLE]

**DUNGAN:** --to explain the different services. So that-- that's my understanding as well.

**CLEMENTS:** 25.6, all right. Any other questions? Seeing none, first proponent, please. Good afternoon.

**JUSTIN SOLOMON:** Good afternoon, Chairman Clements and members of the committee. Thank you for having us today. I'm Justin Solomon, J-u-s-t-i-n S-o-l-o-m-o-n, and I am the chief operating officer for Integrated Life Choices. Integrated Life Choices is a develop-- is a developmental disability services provider across the state of Nebraska, and we support people from Scottsbluff to Omaha. Before we begin any conversation about state appropriations for DD services, I think it's important to set the table and remind the committee what makes DD services and DD providers unique, especially compared to other Medicaid providers and other Medicaid-funded services. First and foremost, DD providers are responsible for the health, safety, and personal growth of children and adults with developmental disabilities in the state. DD providers are completely state funded, no robust private pay system, no private insurance payers, no money from MCOs. We are completely state funded. You will not see giant crane towers outside of our buildings like you see at some hospitals. DD providers are small businesses and nonprofits, almost all of whom are headquartered or domiciled in Nebraska. DD providers are-- and services are essential to the vibrancy and sustainability of small towns and communities across the state. DD providers recruit and retain and hire and train their own employees and employ them directly. We do not use staffing agencies or expensive middlemen to find our direct support professionals. DD providers are the most transparent providers in Nebraska. Each provider annually must submit an audited-- audit done by a CPA and must submit detailed annual cost reports to the state of Nebraska, outlining things like frontline compensation, administrative overhead, the real costs of providing these services. I don't know a single industry in Nebraska that does the same. And lastly, investment in DD agencies is a good investment for the state. It leverages federal dollars and creates a high return on investment for the state of Nebraska that benefits Nebraskans. The details of this ROI are better or in a letter that will be submitted in later testimony and will be covered by Alana Schriver later on. I think it's also worthwhile to remind the Appropriations Committee of the history of Program 424, which would benefit from this bill. This

is the bucket of state resources for the-- for DD services. LB1117 addresses a critical need, but it must be understood in the context of DD funding over a number of years. All these facts are cited in my testimony, and state budget documents are also attached to your packets. So let's start. Last fiscal year alone, between federal and state resources, \$94.2 million was left unspent in this program that could have been used to help providers with the issues they face. Of that \$94.2 million, 64.7 was state General Funds that was unspent by the state of Nebraska's government and was appropriated by this body. So if we zoom out a little bit and go back 8 fiscal years to year-- fiscal year 2016-17 and compare that with this most recent fiscal year that ended June 30, through FY '22-23, state spending on DD services in the General Fund 424 actually decreased from 2016-17. In '16-17, 424 spent \$167.3 million in General and Cash Funds. Last year, Program 424 spent \$157.9 million in Cash Funds. That's a reduction over that 7 years of 5.6% in state spending. All of this was during an unpair-- unparalleled macroeconomic conditions and staffing crisis, and we're still spending less on these services or at least we were. So let's examine, like in the context of that, what has other spending done? Well, the state budget, if we indexed that off the state budget, state budget growth over that same period was about 22.6%, 14.3 billion to 5.3 billion. Again, Program 424 is down 5.6. Lastly, during that same time period, if we look at the admin-- the overhead costs of DD services so DD services administration and DD services coordination, that increased 66%. DD administration went up about 100 or more than double, about 160, 160%. And service coordination increased by about 50%. I hope the breakdown of the numbers helps inform the decision-making process of this committee, as well as provides a context as to why you will hear that providers simply cannot continue with the current funding rates. Today, you're also going to hear from providers about dire situations that providers face due to critical staffing shortages. The short story is it's never been harder to recruit and maintain staff at current funding levels. If the state doesn't act immediately, programs will close. And speaking as a statewide provider, the communities that will be most adversely impacted, will be small ones in rural areas. Our hardest areas to recruit are communities like Norfolk, Kearney, Hastings, Grand Island, Scottsbluff, not Omaha or Lincoln. Providers have been cut to the bone. There are no levers left for providers to pull to make the economics of this service work, and look no further than the spending in this program to, to make the case for itself. To add insult to injury, it's clear the state has had a separate set of expectations

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for itself in its budgets, which are allowed to grow. But the resources made available to those providing the services day in and day out are not allowed to be deployed. The Appropriations Committee must act, and I implore you all to act on LB1117. I thank Senator Dungan for bringing the bill. And I encourage the committee to make these biennial adjustments to help sustain providers in the future. I'm happy to answer any questions.

**CLEMENTS:** Are there questions? Senator Dorn.

**DORN:** Thank you, Senator Clements. Thank you for being here.

**JUSTIN SOLOMON:** Yeah.

**DORN:** You know, you've talked about the, I call it, the money that hasn't been spent--

**JUSTIN SOLOMON:** Um-hum.

**DORN:** --\$94 million or whatever.

**JUSTIN SOLOMON:** Um-hum.

**DORN:** Why, why? Give us your perspective from your aspect of it.

**JUSTIN SOLOMON:** Yeah. So that's a very loaded question. I don't know if I know exactly why. I think it's an amalgamation of things, which we can take hours to talk about. Some of it's service driven. Different services cost different rates. A COVID pandemic that led to some people exiting. But here's the brass tacks. I think we're, we're, we're supporting a higher number of people than we were in 2016 on this waiver and through these services. But we're spending-- the state is spending less of General Funds. So there's a little bit of federal dollars in there at play that help increase the overall. But I think and we can point back to like rate rebases and things of that that have actually not achieved the desired goal. But I honestly think that's a question for the state to answer. Why haven't rates gone up in the same level that you guys have appropriated funds?

**DORN:** Thank you.

**JUSTIN SOLOMON:** Yeah.

**CLEMENTS:** Thank you for your testimony.



**JUSTIN SOLOMON:** Thank you.

**CLEMENTS:** Next proponent. Welcome.

**NATE PIERCE-PANOWICZ:** Good afternoon, Chairman Clements and members of the Appropriations Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to share my testimony regarding LB1117. My name is Nate Pierce-Panowicz, N-a-t-e P-i-e-r-c-e-P-a-n-o-w-i-c-z, and I am an executive director for Mosaic in Nebraska. Mosaic is a nonprofit healthcare organization serving nearly 4,600 people across 13 states in more than 700 communities. Mosaic relentlessly pursues opportunities that empower people with disabilities, behavioral health and autism, and primarily serving people in home and community-based services. Mosaic focuses on supporting the whole person from health and well-being, spiritual needs, to ensuring people live a meaningful life. I am here today asking for your support with LB1117, which will provide an 11% increase to Medicaid reimbursement rates for services which thousands of Nebraskans use. Two weeks ago, Mosaic's Nebraska leadership team was here at the Capitol meeting with you to share the importance of the services we provide and the lack of funding we receive and how LB1117 will help providers attract and retain employees to support their fellow Nebraskans. As an organization that was founded in Axtell, Nebraska, in 1913, we are deeply rooted here. We are celebrating 111 years of service this week. And as we reflect on our history, we had to evolve our services to meet the needs of those we support. Today, we are asking for your help to ensure sustainability and the future of our organization for many years to come through increasing Medicaid reimbursement rates. Over the past couple of years, we have received additional funding from the state through ARPA funding, which we are incredibly grateful for. Alas, it is still not enough, nor is it guaranteed or permanent, which causes concern for the future. We invested these funds in our direct line, excuse me, in our direct support professionals to increase wages while also building and maintain a positive workplace culture, enhancing relationships, developing our workforce and benefits, and yet our turnover is still high, at approximately 50% for all service providers across the state. Our direct support professionals bring their heart and soul every day, even though some of them are also relying on government funding to support their families. As an organization that is 98% funded by Medicaid, we rely heavily on these rates. We are not able to adjust our rates as other healthcare organizations are able to, which is another reason why the additional 11% in Medicaid reimbursement is vital to our services. By providing more personalized services with an

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elevated reimbursement rate, it will help alleviate the DSP workforce crisis, increase continuity and consistency of care, and decrease safety concerns. Thank you for the opportunity to share alternative solutions that support LB1117, which directly impacts people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Nebraska. I'm available for any questions you may have.

**CLEMENTS:** Questions? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony. Next proponent. Welcome.

**NATASHA SCHOLZ:** Good afternoon, Chairman Clements and members of the committee. My name is Natasha Scholz, N-a-t-a-s-h-a S-c-h-o-l-z, and I'm a proponent of LB1117. I have worked in the disability field for over 20 years, and I helped open Live Yes Studios here in Lincoln in 2011 and now operate as the assistant director. Live Yes supports disabled adults through creative expression, representation and community partnerships. We offer professional studio and gallery spaces to create and present their work, an innovative approach to address isolation, mental health and economic struggles for disabled Nebraskans. There is no other program truly like Live Yes in Nebraska. Stating LB1117 addresses an emergency is not an exaggeration. I have weekly meetings to discuss our budget and our fate with constant threats of closure. When I started at Live Yes, our direct support professionals' starting wages were half of what they are now, but our funding has not doubled in the last 13 years. This has created the reality many providers are facing: evaluating which programs we have no choice but to close. I have already witnessed 2 program closures within my own provider agency in the last 7 years. And over the last 13 years, I have experienced 5 yearlong pay freezes while already being severely underpaid. Even after becoming a manager, I had \$7 left a week to spend on food. Many of our DSPs have second jobs on top of their full-time hours with us just to survive. This is reality for too many support workers in this field, which creates an overstressed, overworked, and underpaid workforce and puts Nebraska's most vulnerable population at risk. Even though providers currently are operating in a deficit, they have increased starting wages due to the staffing shortages. This is not sustainable with our current rates. However, when making these changes, we also prioritize the people we support by helping their staff get out of survival mode, eliminate the need for multiple jobs, and assist with burnout, which all leads to better care and a stronger workforce. While we are grateful for the one-time stabilization payment last year, it's risky to raise wages with one-time payments. Rates need to be increased to keep provider

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agencies open. Sufficient funding has been allocated to DD from the Legislature already, but the rate structure does not get that money out of the door where it's desperately needed. Opposition to LB1117 directly hurts the livelihood and future of all disabled Nebraskans, and I implore you to vote yes to LB1117 to show your support to the disability community. I leave you with one question: What happens to the state's most vulnerable population when provider agencies start closing due to inadequate funding rates? Thank you for your time. I'm happy to answer any questions.

**CLEMENTS:** Are there questions? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony.

**NATASHA SCHOLZ:** Thank you.

**CLEMENTS:** Next proponent. Good afternoon.

**ALANA SCHRIVER:** I'll pass these around since the page has left the room. Sorry.

**CORI BIERBAUM:** Thank you.

**ALANA SCHRIVER:** Hi. Good afternoon. My name is Alana Schriver, A-l-a-n-a S-c-h-r-i-v-e-r. I'm the executive director of the Nebraska Association of Service Providers, which is the statewide association for home and community-based service providers who support people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Supporting this population is the responsibility of the state. Home and community-based service providers partner with the state to provide these services at a fraction of the cost of state-run institutions, while simultaneously enabling families to remain in their home towns and communities of their choice. The targeted rate increase requested in LB1117 is what it will take to get the wage of our direct support professionals, those frontline direct care workers, up to 150% of the minimum wage, which is the national standard. I think we can all agree that this is not minimum wage work. It is a skilled and essential profession. The challenging nature of the work, as well as the 24/7/365 schedule makes it extremely difficult to compete against easier jobs that pay higher wages. As Nebraska's minimum wage rises, so must the direct support professional wages as well. Providers are also facing the potential loss of temporary ARPA funding. The division has graciously self-funded a temporary ARPA infusion for services that require staff over the past 3 years, and they've kept it

at that 9%. But that's scheduled to end this coming year. And if that boost is not absorbed into General Funds, that loss effectively makes this 11% rate increase only 2%. Our average profit margin for NASP members this year was 0.27%, 0.27%, meaning many providers submitted a loss for the year. How is growth and innovation possible with margins of less than 1%? And to answer Senator Dorn's earlier question of why we're asking for new money when millions of dollars was left on the table, we're not necessarily asking for new money. But if that money could be reappropriated with a rate adjustment, that's really what we need to happen, because the issue is underutilization of the system. Because we don't have the staff, we can't provide the service. When the service isn't provided, the state isn't billed so that money sits at the table. So if the rates were adjusted for us to be able to hire people at an attractive wage and keep them, then we could actually provide the services that are needed. Right now, in addition to the waitlist, which the average is about 6 years wait-- my own son has been on it for 3 years-- there's what we call the hidden waitlist. And so even when you're offered DD waiver services, if no one is able to accept you, that creates this hidden waitlist. Or maybe you get one of the services you need, but you don't get the full range of services that you need. I tried out something new with the QR code. I don't know if I'm allowed to do that or not, but I also emailed copies of an economic impact study we did with Goss and Associates that shows that this is a positive return on investment for state tax dollars. For every dollar the state invests in HCBS services, there's \$1.14 return in state funds, and that raises to \$1.40 when the federal match is added in. There's also a boost to the-- the direct care workforce would support 4,245 jobs annually, which adds \$13.8 million in state and local tax collections and an estimated 1,724 parents and caregivers currently out of the workforce would be able to enter or reenter the Nebraska workforce if they weren't home with their children who can't get into services. The starting wage for our sector is 30% lower than the wage for the direct care staff at Beatrice State Development Center, which is the state-run facility for individuals with disabilities. The pay differential between home and community-based services and the state-run facility direct care staff could be perceived as undermining the Olmstead Act if the higher salary for state-run facilities is viewed as incentivizing institutional care. The state understood that the most effective way to address the staff shortages at BSDC was to significantly increase wages without supplying us a similar lifeline. The Governor has expressed interest in eliminating the 6-year waitlist for services,

which sounds awesome to a parent like me, but who exactly will be providing these services if agencies are cutting programs across the state due to staff shortages? It doesn't matter how rewarding your job is if it doesn't pay the bills. And the fact is, at the current rate, the state is propping many of these full-time employees up via SNAP, Medicaid and Title XX anyway. Habilitative services are also proven to save the state money by preventing unnecessary use of state-funded resources like CPS, APS, law enforcement, emergency room visits. When staff are available to help an individual with IDD find their own employment, not only is that person plugging a hole in the workforce, but it also lowers the cost of supporting that person by the state. Nebraska can't really afford not to invest in a robust home and community-based IDD service delivery system. I'm happy to answer any questions.

**CLEMENTS:** Questions? Senator Dorn.

**DORN:** Thank you, Senator Clements. Thank you for being here. And maybe, maybe I didn't ask the question the right way. Thank you for answering what you did answer of it.

**ALANA SCHRIVER:** Sure.

**DORN:** The 11% rate increase.

**ALANA SCHRIVER:** Yes.

**DORN:** And maybe I'm misunderstanding the way you're phrasing it. There's funds left out there. But because we-- are you saying because we, the state, are in our budget haven't increased the rate high enough, we can't access those?

**ALANA SCHRIVER:** It's--

**DORN:** Or is it because the rate's not high enough now you can't hire people and then you can't access that?

**ALANA SCHRIVER:** It's the rate methodology. So the rate methodology has to be rebased every 5 years. CMS requires a rate rebase every 5 years. So luckily that's this year. So the current rate methodology used assumed numbers because it was created prior to the cost reports Justin Solomon mentioned. Those cost reports have only been required for the past 2 going on 3 years now. So if during the rate rebase this year we use actual numbers, then once we get those rates correct, we

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can pay the people what we need. Right now, the rate methodology, for example, assumes a 3% overtime. The reality is because of staff shortages, we're doing 30% overtime. The rate methodology assumes a 9% admin. With all the new mandates from Liberty Health in the QA-- everybody loves QA oversight; we fully support more QA oversight-- but it does come with a lot of additional admin salaried staff hours. One targeted analysis, for example, can take 30 hours of an admin salaried person's time. And so those levers in the rate methodology don't actually reflect the cost of doing business. So when you have to spend money doing a targeted analysis, you can't pay your direct support worker what they deserve. And therefore we can't keep-- we have one of the highest turnover rates in the country in Nebraska. So people love their job. But like I said, you can love your job all you want; and if it doesn't pay your bills, you can't stay there.

**DORN:** Thank you.

**CLEMENTS:** Any other questions? You mentioned ARPA funding.

**ALANA SCHRIVER:** Um-hum.

**CLEMENTS:** How long do you assume ARPA funding will be available?

**ALANA SCHRIVER:** Through June of 2025. This is the last year. So it was originally set to start out at 9%, then drop down to 6% the next year and I think like 5% this year. But because of the unexpended funds, the division was able to self-fund all 3 years at 9% for services that require staff. But that's set to go away at the end of 2025 fiscal year.

**CLEMENTS:** At the end of 2025?

**MIKAYLA FINDLAY:** [INAUDIBLE]

**CLEMENTS:** OK.

**ALANA SCHRIVER:** We have been told it might get wrapped into General Funds, but we don't have anything in writing, so we are operating under the assumption that it is going away just to be on the safe side.

**CLEMENTS:** All right. We'll, we'll deal with that--

**ALANA SCHRIVER:** OK.

**CLEMENTS:** --in further discussions. Thank you for your testimony.

**ALANA SCHRIVER:** Thank you.

**CLEMENTS:** Next proponent.

**EDISON McDONALD:** Hello. My name is Edison McDonald. I'm the executive director for the Arc of Nebraska. And we are Nebraska's largest membership organization representing people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families. We support this legislation to help provide long-term sustainable provider rates. We must pay people who do this vital work an adequate pay. Every year, we have to deal with provider rates as they keep up with inflation. This is going to be increased with the new minimum wage increase requirements. It's time to make sure that we have a permanent dynamic option and that we really think this through. For the Arc of Nebraska, our top priority is making sure that we address the waitlist. But I've realized that ultimately we have to make sure that provider rates and the waitlist march forward hand in hand. And as I've looked through and really done both local and national research, talking with folks, what I've figured out is that ultimately we need to make sure that we have a quality standard that is significantly enough above the minimum wage, and that 150% number that Ms. Schriver mentioned is that number. We also expect-- I think one of the things that comes up in these conversations is conversations about, well, can we go and get a little bit more out of overhead? I think in particular with the minimum wage increase and a new federal requirement that we expect to come out looking at requiring 80% of funds to go to direct care staff, I don't think that that is a concern that we need to be looking at. I want to talk a little bit about what this looks like on the ground. So I got a call from a family the other week. And they said they had an \$80,000 budget. Sounds great. Really exciting. But then in terms of the services that they could actually use and find staff for, they're like, well, we can't use this. Last year they only used about \$8,000. So to go and say, oh, here's this big budget, but then not actually be able to utilize it to get those dollars where they need to be, that's what's happening with our system and that's what's getting backed up. If you increase those rates so that they can actually pay staff, hire staff, it'll get out the door and we'll be able to address not only the issue of ensuring quality services for those we currently intend to serve, but also as we look to go and move forward and ensure that

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all people with disabilities can be fully included in the community. With that, any questions?

**CLEMENTS:** Questions? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony. Oh, excuse. Oh, she's-- the clerk is saying you didn't spell your name.

**EDISON McDONALD:** Oh, sorry. Edison McDonald, E-d-i-s-o-n M-c-D-o-n-a-l-d.

**CLEMENTS:** Thank you. Next proponent. Seeing none, anyone in opposition? Seeing none, anyone in a neutral capacity? Senator Dungan.

**DUNGAN:** Thank you, Chair Clements and members of the Appropriations Committee. I appreciate you taking the time to consider this very important issue. I really want to thank the folks who came in here today. All of them, I think, give you a very different perspective on why this is important. They're all fantastic folks. Look no further than Live Yes Studios here in Lincoln if you want to see some of the amazing work happening. I, I know that we talk a lot about the numbers, and I do appreciate the numbers here. But I want to make sure we don't forget the population that we're talking about here. This-- these are real people, right? We're talking about people. I had the incredible opportunity this year and last year to spend my New Year's Eve at a New Year's Eve party with an organization called Got to Be Me, which is an organization out of Omaha that provides social programming for special needs adults. It's not reimbursed by the state. It's all grant funded. But the folks that I hung out with all night, people that I'm friends with, people that I know who are in the special needs community, they're amazing people. They're smart, they're funny. They work, they have jobs. I mean, they're just people in the world, but they need a little extra help. And I talk with them and I talk with their families about the assistance they need and it varies. You know, we're talking about all different kinds of abilities here, but people are struggling and they're struggling to get the services they need. There's waitlists that people are on for years, and that is a huge detriment to those families. And it's a huge detriment to those folks who are just asking for a little bit of assistance so they can kind of go about their every day. Our providers are similarly struggling right now. A very, very good friend of mine was a DSP, a direct service provider, for a few years, and she had to quit. And now she does something else, not because she didn't like it, she loved her job, but she wasn't able to get paid adequately. And the kind of things that she was doing on a daily basis took enough of a



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toll on her, without proper compensation, that she had to go somewhere else. And she, I think, you know, really regrets that sometimes. It was very, very difficult for her to leave because she got really attached to those guys that she worked with in the group home. So I say that not to try to pull at your heartstrings unnecessarily. I know we're talking about budgets and numbers. But I think sometimes those things get lost in the wash. And I certainly know when I'm in the Revenue Committee it helps me to hear sometimes the personal side of what we're talking about when it comes to taxes. So I say that to remind us who we're talking about and what we're talking about. And I very much would appreciate your consideration of LB1117. I'm happy to answer any final questions you might have.

**CLEMENTS:** Any questions? Seeing none, thank you, Senator.

**DUNGAN:** Thank you.

**CLEMENTS:** We have position comments for LB1117: proponents, 78; opponents, 1; neutral, 1. That concludes the hearing for LB1117. We'll now open up for LB1264, which is in another book. And then the next one will be back again and the next one will be back again. Excuse me. Senator Wishart, you may open.

**WISHART:** Great. Well, good afternoon, Chairman Clements and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Anna Wishart, A-n-n-a W-i-s-h-a-r-t, and I represent the 27th Legislative District, including west Lincoln and southwestern Lancaster County. As a longtime supporter of the developmental disability community, I am here to introduce LB1264 to provide consistency in the Division of Developmental Disability budget by accounting for federal funds for home and community-based waiver services. All programs administered by the Division of Developmental Disabilities, except for Program 424, record state funds, along with matching federal funds within the same program. Currently, federal funds for-- federal funds for home and community-based waiver services are lumped together in Program 348, which is called medical assistance. I believe for clear accounting, these federal matching dollars should be identified in the DD program aid budget. LB1246 provides consistency for policymakers and stakeholders to get a complete picture of the funding. I thank you for your attention today to this matter. I have a former DHHS finance staff person, Joe, who is going to be following me to provide more detail on why this change is needed. Thank you for your consideration

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and I'd be happy to answer any questions, but will repeat that the expert is behind me.

**CLEMENTS:** Thank you, Senator. We'll ask for the first proponent, please. Welcome.

**JOE DONDLINGER:** Thank you. Good afternoon, Chairman Clements and members of the Appropriation Committee. My name is Joe Dondlinger, J-o-e D-o-n-d-l-i-n-g-e-r. And I stand before you today or actually I sit here today testifying on behalf of Apace for LB1264 introduced by Senator Wishart. Apace, formerly Region V Services, is the largest provider in the state of Nebraska of Medicaid home and community-based services provided through 1915(c) waivers, commonly referred to as DD waivers. This bill requires estimated federal funds be appropriated in Program 424, Developmental Disabilities Aid, rather than Program 348, Medical Assistance. This change makes appropriations of these funds more consistent with every other program administered by the Division of Developmental Disabilities. Most expenditures in Program 424 are related to services through DD waivers. These services are funded with state and federal funds at a percentage based on the Federal Medical Assistance Percentage, commonly referred to as FMAP. State funds are appropriated and expenditures are recorded in Program 424. Federal fund estimates are appropriated and expenditures are recorded in Program 348. This bookkeeping makes it difficult for stakeholders to determine how much is spent on the program. To illustrate this, I've included with my testimony notated pages from a recent Allotment Status Report published on the Department of Administrative Services website. My support for LB1264 is informed by my experience working as the chief financial officer for Apace and, prior to that, as the deputy director of finance for the Division of Developmental Disabilities. I've experienced both the frustration of not being able to access this information as a stakeholder, and the needless complexity in reporting this information when working for DHHS. In summary, LB1264 represents a small change in bookkeeping that will make it much easier for stakeholders to determine how much is spent on DD waiver services. Thank you, and I'd be happy to answer any questions.

**CLEMENTS:** Are there questions? Senator Dorn.

**DORN:** Thank you. Senator Clements. Thank you for being here. I guess how do you-- how do you access this data now? I mean, how do you come up with the criteria? Do you have to request it from them or do they

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give out some other report besides the pages you have here and it details it or?

**JOE DONDLINGER:** So you can access the General Fund and Cash Fund expenditures now on the DAS website. Typically I'd provide-- I would just do an estimate with some algebra to estimate the federal funds. To get the exact number, you'd have to request it from DHHS.

**DORN:** You do have.

**JOE DONDLINGER:** Yes.

**CLEMENTS:** So on the pages you've provided with us, on the first page, would you explain what we're looking at? Is Program 424 cash funds?

**JOE DONDLINGER:** Sure. So the first page in the attachment that's labeled page 68 of the report, if you go down to the fourth program, that is Program 424, which is the DD waiver program. And I have call-outs there for the year-to-date expenditures column that show that \$0 have been expended in federal funds and \$104.992 million in General Funds and \$3.1 million in Cash Funds. So this is, to me, this is misleading since for these services, there's approximately \$153 million in federal funds that have been spent on the program. But you have to go to the next page to find them in Program 348.

**CLEMENTS:** And so the \$153 million is part of the \$1,030,000,000--

**JOE DONDLINGER:** It is, yes.

**CLEMENTS:** --number of federal funds there. And this bill would then move the \$153 (million), subtract it from 348, and add it into 424 federal fund line.

**JOE DONDLINGER:** Correct. That's the intent.

**CLEMENTS:** Senator Dorn.

**DORN:** Do I understand and that number, that zero, that will show the \$153 (million) then?

**JOE DONDLINGER:** Yeah. If, if those expenses were booked there, that zero would be approximately \$153 million.

**DORN:** 100 and some.

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**JOE DONDLINGER:** Yeah.

**DORN:** Thank you.

**CLEMENTS:** The term estimated federal funds has been used. What's the difference between actual and estimated?

**JOE DONDLINGER:** Mikayla might answer this better than me, but my understanding of the term is the federal funds provided the state of Nebraska are based on actual expenditures. And since they aren't appropriated, an estimate must be used.

**CLEMENTS:** All right. I think I understand that. Any other questions? Thank you, sir.

**JOE DONDLINGER:** You're welcome.

**CLEMENTS:** Thank you for your testimony. Next proponent. Seeing none, anyone in opposition? Seeing none, anyone in the neutral capacity? Seeing none, Senator Wishart waives closing. We have 2 proponents, no opponents and none in the neutral for the hearing record. That, that concludes LB1264. We will now open the hearing for LB1154.

**McDONNELL:** Thank you, Chairman Clements and members of the Appropriations Committee. LB1154, a bill that I introduced to infuse 500,000 of state funding into a statewide nonprofit program providing healthcare screening, sports comp-- competitions, educational opportunities, and leadership training for persons with developmental or intellectual disabilities. Hopefully, many of you have already had a chance to connect with some of the people taking part in activities with one or such nonprofits, Special Olympics. I connected with a few of these individuals this fall, as I was able to join in a celebration of their accomplishments. While I was there, I learned more about the health screening and leadership opportunities of the-- these particular nonprofits is sponsoring in communities in Nebraska. I was impressed by their achievements. But what if-- what if we could grow these opportunities for even more people across our state? This funding will help Special Olympics Nebraska-- Special Olympian Nebraskans partner with healthcare providers to care for more people with intellectual and developmental disabilities through their health screening, which helps to identify unmet health needs before they become emergencies, and then make connections with the appropriate providers to follow up care. The funds could also be used to continue to expand the experiences and events the Special Olympic athletes can

compete in through volunteer-- voluntary recruitment. This funding would also allow the expansion of the Special Olympics Unified physician-- Physical Education curriculum in schools across Nebraska that is now endorsed by the Nebraska Department of Education. The research has shown that the Unified Champion school programming creates meaningful interactions and activities in schools for students with intellectual developmental disabilities. It also allows students to engage in leadership roles and creates more inclusive environments at their schools. Over 95% of schools reported a reduction in bullying and an increase in an opportunity for students to work together in a more inclusive environment at school. Providing expanded opportunities for these students to compete and engage in activities with their peers is directly correlated to better physical, mental, and emotional health. At least 29 other states provide some state support to their state's Special Olympic programs because of the public benefit associated with addressing health disparities, preventing more costly healthcare, and providing support that allows individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities to join the workforce and make even greater positive contributions to their communities. There are others who will follow me and talk about the benefits of these programs and why the state's investment will more than be returned so that they-- that I will try to and I will here to try to answer your questions. Back to the, the, the event I had a chance to attend. The, of course, the excitement of the people that were there and the families and the involvement and the volunteers, but also looking at it as such a small group, not based on the number of the people-- there was probably well over 150 people in the room-- but thinking about our state at 1.9 million people and thinking about having these events throughout the state and recognizing their accomplishment. But through the athletics, through the mentorship, through that-- those programs that Special Olympics and others offer, it's a great opportunity. And I really believe we need to try to-- try to grow it through our state. And I think if you hear the testimony behind-- the people that are going to testify behind me, it will be something that I think we should invest dollars in going forward. And if you look at the fiscal note, I think currently right now with the program that we're looking at, we could address some of this throughout actually the current funding that we've appropriated in the-- in the past.

**CLEMENTS:** Are there questions? I have one. In the bill here it says this is for fiscal year '23-24, and there's nothing in it for '24-25.

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**McDONNELL:** No. I wanted to talk to you about an amendment that I'd like to bring for going forward. But, but I definitely want to get it-- try to go-- get it going this year, '23-24 with current-- that we've currently budgeted in Program 514 with Agency 23. You can look it up on page 282.

**CLEMENTS:** All right. Thank you. First proponent, please. Good afternoon.

**MICHELLE JUD:** Good morning, or good afternoon. Good afternoon, members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Michelle Jud, M-i-c-h-e-l-l-e J-u-d. I am the parent of a Special Olympics athlete, and I'm here today in support of LB1154. I want to tell you the story about how Special Olympics has changed our lives. 19 years ago, I gave birth to twins, one of which was born with a life altering condition. Emma was born with an occipital encephalocele and damage to some of her brain tissue. No one wanted to speculate on what the condition would mean or how it would affect her life. Especially back then, no one gave you a handbook of resources when you have a child who is born with an intellectual disability. Besides the work of the amazing public school special education system, it was a struggle to know where to look for resources. When Emma was 8 years old, we discovered Special Olympics and Special Olympics Nebraska became our handbook of resources. At a young age, it was all about playing sports and learning how to be part of a team. Even though she was very shy, she loved trying out all new sports that she had access to, and she loved meeting friends with all different abilities. As she got a little older, we were pleased to be able to take advantage of the free health screenings through the Healthy Athletes Program that takes place at all the major competitions throughout the year. Athletes who have slipped through the cracks or don't have the best support systems in their homes have the chance to receive regular health screenings. Emma has received prescription glasses and athletic shoes through this program. By the time Emma reached middle school, her focus was on unified sports. Unified program pairs athletes with and without disabilities to play sports and compete together. The inclusion revolution is huge, especially for those students who may never have had a chance to interact with someone who is different from them. It builds amazing peer relations in a way that no other program can. When she entered high school, she learned what advocacy was, and she realized she could use her voice to effect change. She graduated from the Athlete Leadership Program and became a member of the Youth Activation Committee, working to promote inclusion in our schools. She

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began giving her leadership speech to large audiences, and traveled around the country as a Special Olympics Ambassador for various events. I watched my shy 8-year-old with separation anxiety turn into an independent, confident public speaker and advocate. Nebraska's Special Olympics gave her the tools to do that. Many people think of Special Olympics as just a sports organization. It's so much more than that. Emma still participates in up to 8 sports every year, but the teamwork, practice, and competition is what paved the way to other avenues available through Special Olympics for her: sports, education, healthcare, and leadership. Please advance LB1154 so Special Olympics Nebraska can continue to grow these amazing programs that have changed so many people's lives. Thank you. I'm happy to answer any questions you might have.

**CLEMENTS:** Thank you.

**MICHELLE JUD:** Thank you.

**CLEMENTS:** Next proponent. Welcome.

**EMMA JUD:** Good afternoon, members of the operat-- Appropriations Committee. My name is Emma Jud, E-m-m-a J-u-d. I am here in support of LB1154. I am a senior at Millard South High School in Omaha, and I have been a Special Olympic athlete for 10 years, since I was 8 years old. I was born with an intellectual disability and Special Olympics has, has changed my life and the lives of my friends and family. Before the Special Olympics, I had stage fright. I was scared of crowds and I wanted to be in the background all the time. I thought people would judge me for messing up or being confident. But building muscle is like building confidence. You have to keep trying to get stronger. I started at the bottom, then I worked my way up. I have learned discipline and to keep trying even when it is difficult. I currently participate in 8 different sports and my favorites are powerlifting and bowling. Over the years, Special Olympics has given me so many amazing opportunities besides playing sports. I graduated from the Gallup Athlete Leadership program and became a member of the Youth-- Special Olympics Youth Occupation Committee. In 2022, I got to travel to Orlando to be a unified ambassador at the Special Olympics USA games. I have given my leadership, leadership speech to the Omaha Police Union at the Police Officers Ball. Last February, I was honored to represent Special Olympics Nebraska in Washington, D.C., as I met with our representatives on Capitol Hill Day. All over Nebraska, there are athletes like me who-- whose lives have been made better by being

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a part of Special Olympics. Please support this bill so Special Olympics can continue to build these programs that help to-- help so many people. Thank you. And I am happy to answer any questions you have.

**CLEMENTS:** Thank you, Emma. Any questions? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony.

**EMMA JUD:** Thank you.

**CLEMENTS:** Next proponent. Welcome.

**CINDY HEMBERGER:** Good afternoon. My name is Cindy Hemberger, C-i-n-d-y H-e-m-b-e-r-g-e-r, and I have been in Special Olympics for 14 years with the Hastings Alumni Group in Hastings, Nebraska. Before I joined Special Olympics, I was a very quiet and lonely person. My parents thought I would have a better chance at a smaller school getting involved with sports and extracurricular activities. So they enrolled me in our school sponsored by our church. After I completed my second year of school, the principal told me and my parents and myself that she thought another school would be better for me as 90% of their kids there go on to college and I would never be college material. From then on, I went to public school. However, I always thought that I was always left out and looked down on other activities because of being challenged. It was by accident that I met up with this wonderful lady that made my entire life has changed. She encouraged me to get involved in Special Olympics. The very first year I found out that there were other challenged athletes many different ways were in the public and doing all kinds of work and really enjoying it. I really thought about it and decided I could do just as well or maybe even better than they were doing. The first year I was involved in a couple of sports, and now I am involved in 7 different sports, which is almost all of our unit offers. I have 58 medals and 70 ribbons decorating my bedroom. After thinking about what I would like to do, decided I was always had done a bit of babysitting and loved little kids. Yes, my mind was made up. I opened a small daycare in our house. Two years ago, the first kids that I took care of as babies graduated from college. What an honor it was to see them walk across the stage and get their diploma. My world really opened up when I started babysitting. Not only did I make friends with my children and their parents and their friends as well. I am so thankful that in 1968 Eunice Kennedy Shriver found a need to start this program. It truly gives those of us with intellectual disabilities the opportunity that



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we can do the same things as normal people take for granted. In conclusion, I want to thank you for giving me this opportunity to let you know how Special Olympics has changed my life. Will you be on my team and support Special Olympics? Thank you.

**CLEMENTS:** Thank you. Are there questions? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony. Thank you for coming. Next proponent. Welcome.

**RACHEL MULLIGAN:** Hello. My name is Rachel Mulligan, R-a-c-h-e-l M-u-l-l-i-g-a-n, and I am here today because Special Olympics has changed my life. I have always loved sports, but sadly I wasn't able to fully participate. I always wanted to be on my school teams, but my school had tryouts and I don't think I would be able to make them. Thanks to the Special Olympics, they now offer unified bowling and other unified activities that are completely changing the culture of the school. In April of 2017, I was able to proudly return to my high school, Papillion La Vista South, and in a gym full of students, present them with the Unified Champion school banner right alongside Special Olympics chairman, Tim Shriver. Through Special Olympics, I took the Gallup CliftonStrengths finder. I wasn't surprised to find my biggest strength is being a discoverer. I have represented Team USA at the Special Olympics World Winter Games in Austria. I won 2 silver medals and made new friends from different countries. I have 2 bronze medals in track as well as a gold medal, 2 silver medals and a bronze medal in powerlifting at the USA games level. Next year I will be a part of the Team USA Cross-country Ski Team in Turin, Italy. Special Olympics has given me many opportunities to speak about my experience. I have gone to Washington, D.C., for Capitol Hill Day to advocate for support ongoing funding. I have spoken at the I Can Swimming Conference. I work at the Munroe-Meyer Institute as a student peer mentor, helping all students in the UNO Think College Trailblazer program. Last year, I became the very first 4-year certificate graduate. In November, I moved into my first apartment at Sheltering Tree Shadow Lake, and I am now adjusting to life in an independent living environment. I'm so thankful I discovered Nebraska Special Olympics. It's given me so much confidence and I am now consistently challenge myself to grow and discover new things. Can I count on your support for LB1154? We deserve the same opportunities as everybody else, and this support will help to ensure that more athletes like me can live independent and fulfilling lives.

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**CLEMENTS:** Are there questions? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony. Next proponent. Good afternoon.

**MIKE MULLIGAN:** Good afternoon. My name is Mike Mulligan, M-i-k-e M-u-l-l-i-g-a-n. In the Special Olympics world, I'm better known as Rachel's dad. Thankfully, Rachel is a beneficiary of the Nebraska Special Olympics inclusion movement. I'll admit, I was afraid and disappointed when I first confronted Rachel's intellectual disability. You see, to me different, the politest term I've heard used, was just another way of saying defective. I was letting the unfamiliar create anxiety and discomfort within me. In the past, I've thought of in terms of a one-armed man instead of a person with one arm. I was choosing to let the disability define the person instead of seeing the person first. Pam and I first wrestled with the discomfort of letting our disabled daughter leave the nest on her own in December of 2016. Rachel was off to a Special Olympics USA cross-country ski camp in Killington, Vermont, in preparations for the World Winter Games the following year. Parents were not to attend. It was literally the first night she had spent apart from us. We fretted and worried, but she flourished both at the camp and in the spring of 2017, during the actual World Winter Games. In fact, she brought home 2 silver medals from Austria and, more importantly, taught her parents how to confront their fears so she could just realize her full potential. The many Special Olympic opportunities and experience Rachel-- has enabled Rachel to grow confident with new opportunities. She is the first person to complete the Trailblazer, 4-year Trailblazer Certificate at UNO. It's a college experience designed specifically for people with intellectual disabilities. I always dreamed that Rachel would have a college experience or journey, but always imagined it would require me to be her tutor for every class. She didn't need me at all. She's now employed at Munroe-Meyer Institute as a mentor for the new students in the Trailblazer Program. The truth is, 50%-- 52% of Special Olympic athletes are employed, as opposed to 10% of the disabled community writ large. With the exception of a stretch during the COVID pandemic, Rachel has always been able to hold on to a job. Unfortunately, many haven't been able to return to regular work since. The unsettled little girl Pam and I always expected Rachel to be has vanished. She-- we now focus on how she can vice what she can't. It is with the help of Nebraska Special Olympics that we no longer think in terms of defective or needing to be fixed. Rachel has found her voice through Special Olympics and has transformed into a confident, outgoing young woman with a social justice conscience. Around Thanksgiving, Rachel

moved into Shadow Lake's Sheltering Tree Apartments. It's an independent living facility. We always hoped for a noninstitutional residence option for her, but never really figured out how to make that happen. Special Olympics confidence is one of the big reasons she was able to make the transition. She is comfortable on her own, is now out of the shadow of the house she always knew. Pam and I are adjusting to our new roles as empty nesters. We are looking forward to next year and traveling to Italy, where she will once again compete in cross-country skiing in the Alps as a member of team USA, the sole athlete from Nebraska to go to the Winter Games. I would like to encourage support of LB1154 because I dream of a world more intellectually disabled people find their individual voices, grow more independent, and engage and contribute to society in their own unique way. I can personally speak to the impact being much broader than just the disabled person and the families. In fact, it is really the much broader communities that we all live in. I don't know exactly what the future holds for Rachel, but I have an unwavering faith that Special Olympics Nebraska will continue to be part of her life and independence. Happy to take any questions.

**CLEMENTS:** Are there questions? Senator Dorn.

**DORN:** Thank you, Senator Clements. Thank you for being here. And I noticed all the testifiers in front of you all have medals or around. Talk a little bit about them, including the one your daughter had.

**MIKE MULLIGAN:** Mostly at one of the key, key-- keys to success for Special Olympics is they do what's called division. What that does is it divides, divides athletes into groups to compete for a set of medals. Those athletes are-- there's a performance factor in that visioning process that keeps people within about 15% of a performance factor for everybody. So the medals statistically will come. Basically because it should be between about 3 and 8, 8 individuals competing for a set of medals. So all the athletes you see behind you have, have competed and they, they, they probably got drawers full of medals, to be honest with you. But there are-- there are-- and it's tiered so there are state level competitions, local competitions, and there's national level competitions and there's international level competitions. Divisioning happens at all of them. I, in fact, am Rachel's bocce partner and I have my own gold medals at home. But she told me not to wear them this time. [LAUGHTER]

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**DORN:** Thank you.

**CLEMENTS:** Other questions? Do you-- do you know why the funding is-- why there's a funding shortfall you're asking for the state to fund the programs?

**MIKE MULLIGAN:** I think the next speaker can probably address.

**CLEMENTS:** All right. Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. Next proponent.

**GREG HARRIS:** Last time I heard Mike speak, I ended up weeping so I had to put that together that I might be following him today. Good afternoon, Chair Clements, Vice Chair Wishart. My name is Greg Harris, G-r-e-g H-a-r-r-i-s. I've been on the board of directors with Special Olympics Nebraska for 9 years, almost 9 years. In my day work, I serve as the CEO of a company called Quantum Workplace out of Omaha. We're a human resource analytics and software firm. We're probably best known for the Best Places to Work list that we publish in Lincoln and Omaha, and then 45 other cities around the country. I got involved in Special Olympics at the board level because I had been volunteering at the nonboard level for decades. I have a brother, older brother, he's 57 years old, he's here in Lincoln and he has been a Special Olympics athlete for 40 years. And I have seen the impact that it has had on his growth, not just as a kid in school, but as an adult over time. I had two handouts. One is going to show the distribution of Special Olympics athletes across the state, and that's going to speak, I think, to your question, Chair, about why this new funding is important is we want to add athletes throughout the full state. We've had a hard time raising for western and central Nebraska. The second handout is going to show other states-- that's a national map showing what other states are getting in terms of their state support for their affiliate of Special Olympics. The impact of participation goes far beyond the field of play. Athletes grow in confidence and gain in strength to overcome obstacles. This leads to employment and independent living. We just heard that story with Rachel. Research shows that people with intellectual disabilities on average are employed by 1 out of 10. It turns out in Special Olympics Nebraska, our community, that number is about 52%. And that sounds like a statistic. My brother is part of that statistic. He loves his job. He's worked for several years at Good Life Fitness. He-- this is real work. He's there every single day. He threw decades of practice, track practice through Special Olympics. He pays attention to the clock. He

knows when he needs to be there. I also serve as my brother's guardian, and it gives me visibility a couple of times a year, do several reports to prove that that's real work that he does. In the last batch of reporting that I got, I saw his performance review at Good Life Fitness. It would-- it had real praise. It had a few developmental goals for him at work. One of them was that as eager as he was to do his work, he cleans the machine, the fitness machines at the gym. He said it turned out they were trying to coach him to make sure that the guests or the members were not actually using the machine while he was cleaning it. That's fair advice, but a real performance review for real work. Research shows that people who participate in Special Olympics have a decrease in depression and other mental health challenges. Our free health screenings are currently available several times per year. We've uncovered some serious health concerns through that process. It's vital because research shows that people with intellectual disabilities are at greater risk of preventable health conditions. In fact, people with intellectual disabilities live 16 to 20 years shorter lives than those without, and that's not due to their disability. It's due to access to healthcare. Special Olympics Nebraska currently serves 6,500 athletes. There are 35,000 people that are diagnosed right now with a intellectual disability in the state of Nebraska that are not yet active, and that's why this funding is, is critical. Our reach is greatest in the eastern part of the state. With support from LB1154, we'll be able to devote more effort to expanding that reach into the middle of the state and out west. This funding is going to reach at least 988 new athletes to provide life-changing programming and experiences that will affect their life that in many cases, as we heard from testimony today, they're not even aware of, before they get involved. We'll reach more health providers with training on how to prepare for treating people with intellectual disabilities. We'll provide support to more schools in those areas that create opportunities for all students to feel like they belong on a campus, that they can be part of clubs, part of sports, and part of classes. As for my family, I have 4 kids, neurotypical kids, all educated in the Millard Public Schools District. And I have seen this firsthand through this-- the unified sporting programming, where all of a sudden I go to a Friday night basketball game and there are kids with intellectual disabilities sitting, mucking it up with the-- with neurotypical kids in the student section. I never saw that in the '80s when I was seeing my brother-- the Special Olympics Nebraska Unified program in high schools has changed how interact-- students, both with

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disabilities and without, are interacting with one another. I've seen kids party. I've seen high school parties that involve kids with intellectual disabilities. As Senator McDonnell mentioned, many other states provide financial support. I've showed a, a, a map showing what those states are. This bill is about building a future of justice and joy for Nebraskans with intellectual disabilities. I encourage your support.

**CLEMENTS:** Are there questions? Well, I do. And again, what is the need for funding for Special Olympics and why is it occurring now?

**GREG HARRIS:** Yeah.

**CLEMENTS:** We haven't had this in the past?

**GREG HARRIS:** No, we haven't. The budget, since I've been on the board, has been really steady. I was through 2020, 2021, 2022, am proud that we maintained funding, the level of funding that we have. As we mentioned, the funding and the activities and raising money in the section of states where-- in the section of the state that we're, we're most active in right now has limited us to getting support in, in the rest of the state. So this is really a shot of steroids to build out the programming to get more statewide, a broader, broader support.

**CLEMENTS:** Are there chapters across the state I would call them? Or is it just the main organization in Omaha?

**GREG HARRIS:** It's the, the staff is in-- is in Omaha. The state is broken, I think. Carolyn, correct me, is it into 5 different-- 4, 4 different sections? So they're-- that's one of the things that, that COVID or that the pandemic actually did. It cut off some of the-- it shrunk some of the funding that we had in 2 of the furthest west regions. We had some cutbacks there.

**CLEMENTS:** The, the Nebraska chart is talking about students impacted through school partnerships, Douglas County over 20,000. Is, is that disabled and nondisabled or just the disabled students?

**GREG HARRIS:** That is both.

**CLEMENTS:** Both.

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**GREG HARRIS:** Yeah, that is both.

**CLEMENTS:** OK. I thought so with that large of a number. And the funds would be used how?

**GREG HARRIS:** Staffing, vehicle benefits for a central or western Nebraska representative to start building relationships and programming in those-- in those schools.

**CLEMENTS:** What kind of benefits? Staffing and what?

**GREG HARRIS:** A vehicle.

**CLEMENTS:** Vehicle?

**GREG HARRIS:** Yeah. So, so probably 20%, in fact, I think exactly 20% of that half million dollars is for that. And it is \$408 per athlete that's spent on programming. It's about \$400, \$408. So that's where we get the 988 athletes recruited effective involved in this-- in this programming. So it's 80% programming. It's 20% additional staff which is all in. It's less than a-- it's less than a 25% increase in the state's budget, 22%.

**CLEMENTS:** In the state's Special-- Nebraska Special Olympics budget?

**GREG HARRIS:** Yeah. Yeah.

**CLEMENTS:** All right. The \$500,000 re-- reflects 20%.

**GREG HARRIS:** Yeah. An increase of about 20%. To touch-- to access what would be about a 400% increase in exposure and the number of potential athletes.

**CLEMENTS:** All right. Any other questions? Thank you for your testimony.

**GREG HARRIS:** Indeed.

**CLEMENTS:** Additional proponents. Seeing none, is anyone in opposition? Anyone in a neutral capacity? Senator McDonnell, you're welcome to close.

**McDONNELL:** Thank you, Chairman Clements. Thank you to the athletes behind me that testified. Thank you to the commitment of the-- of the volunteers. I think you know now why I was so excited at the, the, the

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luncheon with the presentations and the testimony of the athletes and the people that have volunteered and what kind of difference it makes. But this isn't about Legislative District 5. Legislative District 5, if you look at this map right here, it's great. I mean, the kids in my district that are participating, it's fine. The money isn't for Omaha. Omaha now does have 30% of our population, Douglas County does. This is for rest of the state. This is because it works. This is because it makes a difference in their lives. And if you look at the rest of the state where they need help, this is going 20% above the current budget to go west and try to let these people out in the western part of the state, mid-state, mid part of Nebraska, have the same chance as these athletes have, again, to to participate, build their confidence, learn teamwork and move on and, and really do great things in their lives for our state. So this is an investment and it's an opportunity for us to invest in the people of the state of Nebraska, outside of, of the Omaha area where they're doing very well with the Special Olympics right now. But it's we would-- I believe we should have that opportunity for all of our citizens east, west, north and south. Any questions?

**CLEMENTS:** Any questions? Seeing none.

**McDONNELL:** And I'll get some more broke-- break-- the, the budget numbers. We'll get them in writing for you so you have them in front of you.

**CLEMENTS:** All right. Thank you.

**McDONNELL:** Thank you.

**CLEMENTS:** We have position comments for the record: proponents, 25; opponents, zero; neutral, zero. That concludes LB1154. We're now ready for LB1223. Senator Day.

**DAY:** OK. Last bill of the week. Let's make it short and sweet.

**CLEMENTS:** Welcome, Senator.

**DAY:** Thank you. Good afternoon, Chairman Clements and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Jen Day, that's J-e-n D-a-y, and I represent Legislative District 49 in Sarpy County. I'm here this afternoon to introduce 12-- LB1223, which would provide funding for the Department of Health and Human Services to contract for a statewide diaper distribution project. This is my second year working



on this bill. As many of you know, being a new parent is expensive and can be tough on anyone's budget. This is especially true for low-income families. In the past 2 years, diaper costs have risen roughly 20%, and it now costs around \$70 to \$80 per month to be in diapers. On an annual basis, this is about \$930 per year. If you're someone making at or near the state's minimum wage, this can begin to eat up a significant amount of your salary. Cloth diapers are marginally cheaper, but have a significantly higher upfront cost than disposable diapers, costing about \$150 per size, with a full year of sizes running over \$500, putting them out of reach for many families and may not be feasible for families that do not have in-residence washing machines. On top of this, many laundromats outlaw washing of cloth diapers for sanitary reasons. Additionally, diapers are not covered in any of our state's assistance programs like WIC or SNAP. And at the moment, diapers are still taxed in Nebraska although Senator John Cavanaugh brought a bill last year, LB58, which would change this. So this puts low-income families in a challenging position, often leaving them with no alternative but to extend the lifespan of diapers far beyond what is sanitary. Practices such as reusing diapers, keeping them on when soiled, and even forgoing their use can all lead to serious infections and health concerns for both the infant and the entire household, particularly increasing the risk of UTIs among infants. Moreover, this can create a ripple effect that extends well beyond the child's health. Virtually all childcare centers mandate that parents provide diapers for their children, and a shortage of diapers can quickly lead to missed days of work for parents who cannot reliably secure diapers for their child, exacerbating financial strain and potentially impacting their employment. Part of what makes diapers in particular so challenging for low-income families is the time of our lives that we have kids. Most people have children long before they've progressed through their careers and are making less than they'll make in 5 to 10 years. As Kathryn Edwards, an economist with the RAND Corporation, notes, most parents are the poorest they'll ever be in their kid's life on the day their kid is born. That's what makes something like the cost of diapers hit really hard, that you're hitting people who in 10 years probably will have absolutely no problem affording diapers. It's just really hard to afford it when they have their kid. With the elevated cost in recent years and the growing recognition that diapers are truly a basic good, nonprofit organizations have begun to fill the gap and help parents in need obtain diapers. You'll be hearing from one of them today, the Nebraska Diaper Bank, which provides around 3 million

diapers annually to babies in the Greater Omaha area, Lincoln, Kearney, Norfolk, Scottsbluff, Macy, and Walthill. However, the need is significantly greater than 3 million diapers. By passing LB1223, we can build a more robust infrastructure to help serve more families. Other states have already identified this need and established similar programs. Currently, California, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Nevada, and Arizona have appropriations or grant programs that supplement diaper banks. Furthermore, contracting with a diaper nonprofit through an appropriation offers several advantages over providing the service directly within HHS. Nonprofits in Nebraska specializing in diaper distribution already have established networks and partnerships within communities, allowing for more efficient and targeted distribution to families in need. Additionally, these nonprofits may have expertise in sourcing diapers that reduce costs through bulk purchasing or donations, stretching allocated funds further, and can rely on volunteers to stretch funds like the Diaper Bank does, where each week over 100 volunteers help process shipments. Even in the best of circumstances, being a new parent can be stressful and an overwhelming experience. LB1223 takes initial steps to help relieve one of the greatest pressures for low-income families. We often talk about what investments we want to make as a state. Certainly, we can see to it that one of these investments is that our youngest, most vulnerable Nebraskans have the most basic of their needs met. You'll, you'll hear from several testifiers this afternoon, including Tegan Reed from the Nebraska Diaper Bank, who can help explain the mechanics of how diaper distribution works. But with that, I'm happy to try to answer any of your questions.

**CLEMENTS:** Questions? Senator Dorn.

**DORN:** Thank you, Senator Clements. Thank you for bringing the bill. Thank you for being here. What-- you talked several times about low income. Do you happen to know that level of what that income level might be? And I might-- and, and--

**DAY:** That's a great--

**DORN:** --only the ones below that qualify for this program.

**DAY:** That's a great question. I don't have that answer in front of me.

**DORN:** Maybe somebody else can.

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**DAY:** Yeah. And if they don't answer, I'm happy to find the answer for you.

**DORN:** OK.

**DAY:** Yeah.

**DORN:** Because it is tied to Income--

**DAY:** Income.

**DORN:** --level at some point.

**DAY:** Right. Right.

**DORN:** OK. Thank you.

**CLEMENTS:** Seeing no other questions, thank you, Senator.

**DAY:** Thank you.

**CLEMENTS:** First proponent, please. Welcome.

**TEGAN REED:** Thank you. Good afternoon, Chairman Clements and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Tegan Reed, T-e-g-a-n R-e-e-d. I'm the executive director for Nebraska Diaper Bank. We are the only nationally recognized diaper bank in the state. And we are proud members of the National Diaper Bank network. We currently provide 290,000 diapers to 4,500 children each month, and this is through 35 collaborative partnerships with 70 distribution sites. Our service area includes Greater Omaha Area, Lincoln, Kearney, Norfolk, Scottsbluff, Macy, and Walthill. I'm here to testify in support of LB1223 and its effort to create a statewide diaper distribution project. 1 in 3 families in Nebraska struggles to-- struggles with diaper need, which is the lack of a sufficient supply of diapers to keep their baby healthy, clean, and dry. Nebraska Diaper Bank's mission is to provide diapers through collaborative partnerships, to change lives, and empower families in need. The diaper bank model limits unnecessary duplication of services for agencies, reduces administrative expenses, and works collaboratively to solve a basic human need at the community level for infants and young children. Our centralized warehouse procures diapers through community drives and large wholesale purchase of diapers ordered by the semi load, repackages those diapers into packs for each child, and distributes

requested quantities to partnering agencies who provide direct family support. When families don't have enough diapers, they have to make heart-wrenching decisions. We've heard from our partner agencies that families typically try to fashion diapers from something in their household to make ends meet. So this may include T-shirts, plastic grocery sacks, toilet paper, other kids' underwear, etcetera. If families have some diapers but not enough, oftentimes these families try to reuse disposable diapers. We know that reusing disposable diapers or leaving the diapers on children longer than recommended causes diaper rash, UTIs, and overall stress for the baby and parents. Lastly, in desperate measures, some families mentioned that they wouldn't give their children anything to drink between meals to keep their children from soiling a multitude of diapers. This is an example of how diaper insecurity turns into malnourishment. At Nebraska Diaper Bank, we believe that a diaper is so much more than just a diaper. It's peace, calm, cleanliness, a lighter mental load, and hope. In 2023, 98.8% of families reported earning less than 200% of the federal poverty level. 91% of families had at least one working adult in the household. These families are working hard to change their situation. 32% said that receiving diapers helped them to go to work. And 77% said that receiving diapers helped them pay a bill or save money. These incremental steps are necessary on the path to breaking the cycle of poverty. As the need has been identified, we have expanded services throughout the state. In 2022, Nebraska Diaper Bank distributed over 1.3 million diapers throughout the state to address diaper need. Diapers distributed increased by 111% in 2023 by providing 2.8 million diapers throughout the state to 8,801 families and 10,784 unique babies. That means nearly 9,000 families didn't have to make a hard choice, like withholding liquids from their infant. If we were truly to end diaper need in Nebraska, we would provide 23 million diapers each year to the 30,000 babies who are at risk for diaper need. On behalf of Nebraska Diaper Bank, I urge you to support LB1223. These additional funds available to nonprofits such as Nebraska Diaper Bank would be put towards reaching more families who struggle to afford enough diapers for their babies. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today, and I will do my best to answer any questions you might have.

**CLEMENTS:** Are there questions? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony.

**TEGAN REED:** Thank you.

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**CLEMENTS:** Next proponent. Good afternoon.

**MACALA CARTER:** Good afternoon. How are you?

**CLEMENTS:** OK.

**MACALA CARTER:** Good. My name is Macala Carter, and I am-- oh. Excuse me. M-a-c-a-l-a C-a-r-t-e-r. And I am the executive director for the Center for People, and I'm here as a partner agency with the Nebraska Diaper Bank. And I come before you today supporting LB1223 on behalf of the Center for People. At the Center for People is Lincoln's nonprofit organization and currently we're serving over 2,300 unduplicated households a week. That's oftentimes through our food and our diaper distribution. The Center for People is a vital community service hub for people experiencing economic difficulties in Lincoln. And economic difficulty, they have to attest to 180% at or below the federal poverty level. Our support mechanism meets people where they are. We address basic needs to include food and diaper insecurity. We offer upskilling and educational opportunities, and we provide workforce partnerships with employers of choice. In 2023, we averaged roughly 669 children receiving diapers. That totals 41,620 diapers distributed each month. And over the course of the year, it was roughly 500,000 diapers that we handed out in 2023. For our families, top stressors include financial problems and parenting. When parents don't have access to clean diapers, they can't take their children to day care. When parents can't access day care, they can't get to their jobs. And when they can't get to their jobs, they're at risk of loss of wages and/or job security. So the pipe-- the cycle of poverty continues to perpetuate itself. Again, no diapers, no day care, no work, no paycheck, no money for basic needs. I recently spoke to a mother that had been referenced or had been referred to us by another agency in Lincoln, and she had recently lost her job. And the reason why is because she wasn't able to, to take her kids to day care because she didn't have enough of the diapers. And therefore, her employer released her from employment because she had missed too many days as a result of not being able to get her kids into childcare not having the diapers. And so diapers are a fundamental and basic need all families should have access to, same as food and shelter. And the reality is that fundamental right isn't afforded to everyone. Being diaper insecure puts baby's health at risk and further adds to the stressors that our families, our low-income families are already experiencing. Today, I sit before you as an agency representative asking that you support LB1223. I also sit before you as a parent

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who's deeply aware of the seemingly unsurmountable barriers faced when even the most basic needs can't be met. Thank you for your time and I welcome any questions.

**CLEMENTS:** Questions? Senator Lippincott.

**MACALA CARTER:** Yes.

**LIPPINCOTT:** May I ask a question? How do people qualify for this? Do they have to fill out a form, show their income? And that's one question. And then number two, when they qualify, do they go to a distribution center to pick up the diapers physically or delivered to them or how's that work?

**MACALA CARTER:** Yeah, absolutely. So from my agency's standpoint, our families, when they come in and they need services, they complete 2 forms. They complete a form where they attest to being at or below the federal poverty level. And then they complete the TEFAP form, which is for their food insecurity. And so both forms are completed and attested. We don't confirm with any kind of verification processes, but our folks do complete both of those forms, and we archive those for 5 years and have those on file. So they can come and get food from us weekly and then they also come and get diapers from us on a monthly basis. And that is direct at the Center for People.

**LIPPINCOTT:** OK.

**MACALA CARTER:** Yeah.

**CLEMENTS:** Other questions? Seeing none, next proponent. Seeing none, any opponents? Anyone in the neutral capacity? Senator Day, you're welcome to close.

**DAY:** Thank you. I will be brief. I think we all are aware of the need for diapers for little ones. I remember when my oldest son was born, I think I remember counting, we would go through about 8 to 10 diapers a day when he was nursing. And obviously, that decreases as they get older. But diapers are incredibly expensive. Again, they're not covered by WIC. They're not covered by SNAP. This is a large expense. For low-income families, as was mentioned, it's often out of reach, and that becomes a health issue for the baby. It becomes a health issue for the family. It becomes a human dignity issue at some point, as one of our testifiers mentioned, using plastic bags or t-shirts or other children's underwear in place of diapers because they don't have

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enough to use on the baby. It's a really big problem. And so I would hope that as a state, we're not asking for a huge amount of money here, but I think that, again, partnering with the facilities that already have the infrastructure to implement this type of program I think it would be really effective in going a long ways in addressing a dire need that we have for the low-income families in our state so.

**CLEMENTS:** Senator Dorn.

**DORN:** Thank you. [INAUDIBLE] this question. It's been a long time since we bought diapers.

**DAY:** Yeah.

**DORN:** What's the cost of diapers?

**DAY:** That's a good question. It's been a long time since I bought diapers too. Mine are 15 and 11 so I don't even know. Like a package of 100 is.

\_\_\_\_\_: Average is 29 cents a diaper.

**DORN:** 29 cents a diaper.

**DAY:** 29 cents a diaper.

**DORN:** OK.

**DAY:** Right. So you're looking at for 100 diapers about 30 bucks.

**DORN:** Yeah. OK.

**DAY:** It's a lot of money. Again, as if you're going through 8 to 10 a day, you've got 10 days, you're spending \$30 every 10 days, you know, with a newborn. That's a lot of money. You know, it doesn't seem like much. We talked about my SNAP summer, summer EBT, \$40 on food per child per month. That's a lot of money. It goes a really long ways when you're-- especially when you're low income. So \$30 a week we're looking at, I mean, that's an incredible expense. So yep.

**CLEMENTS:** Seeing no other questions, we have position comments for the record: proponents, 11; opponents, 3; neutral, 0. That concludes the hearing for LB1223. That concludes our hearings today.