

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

MURMAN: Welcome to the Education Committee. I'm Senator Dave Murman from Glenvil, Nebraska. I represent the 38th Legislative District, and that's 8 counties in the southern part of the state. I serve as chair of this committee. This public hearing is your opportunity to be part of the legislative process and to express your position on the proposed legislation before us. The committee will take up agenda items in the order posted. If you wish to testify on the mic today, please fill out a green testifier sheet. The forms can be found at the entrances to the hearing room. Be sure to print clearly and provide all requested information. If you will testify on more than one agenda item, you will need a new green testifier sheet each time you come forward to speak on the mic. When it's your turn to come forward, please give the testifier sheet and any handouts you might have to the page as you are seated. If you have handouts, we request that you provide 12 copies for distribution. If you do not have 12 copies, please alert the page when you come forward. At the microphone, please begin by stating your name and spelling both your first and names to ensure we get an accurate record. Today's hearing will include a combined hearing for LB870 and LB1061. If you are planning to testify on both bills, you will need to fill out a green testifier sheet for each bill and speak clearly into the mic which bill or bills you are testifying on and your position on each bill. We will begin with the introducer giving an opening statement at the mic, followed by invited testifiers, and following that, the public will be invited to testify. The introducer will then have an opportunity to give a closing statement if they wish. We will be using a 3-minute light system for all testifiers. When you begin your testimony, the light on the table will be green. When the yellow light turns on, you'll have one minute to wrap up your thoughts, and the red light indicates that you have reached the end of your time limit. Questions from the committee may follow off the clock. A few final items to facilitate today's hearing. Please mute your cell phones or any other electronic devices. Verbal outbursts or applause are not permitted. Such behavior may cause for you to be asked to leave the hearing room. Know that committee members may need to come and go during the hearing for other hearings. I will know-- now ask the committee members with us today to introduce themselves, starting at my far right, with Senator Sanders.

SANDERS: Good afternoon. Rita Sanders, District 45, which is the Bellevue/Offutt community.

CONRAD: Good afternoon, I'm Danielle Conrad. I represent north Lincoln.

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HUGHES: District 24, Senator Jana Hughes, it's Seward, York, Polk, and a little bit of Butler County.

G. MEYER: Senator Glen Meyer, District 17, Dakota, Thurston, Wayne, and the southern part of Dixon County.

HUGHES: I'm Megan Hunt. I represent District 8 in the northern part of midtown Omaha.

LONOWSKI: Good afternoon. Dan Lonowski, District 33, which is Adams County, Kearney County, and rural Phelps County.

JUAREZ: Welcome, everyone. Senator Margo Juarez, District 5, Omaha.

MURMAN: And staff with us today are, to my immediate right, the committee's legal counsel, Don Garrell.

DON GARRELL: Garrell.

MURMAN: Gurr-ell? Garrell, right? And to my far right, is committee clerk, Connie Thomas. The pages who serve our committee are-- and I'll let you pronounce your first name.

ELIAS REIMAN: Elias Reiman.

MURMAN: Elias Reiman, and then, he's a-- well, tell us about yourself.

ELIAS REIMAN: Yeah. Junior at UNL, studying psychology and pre-law.

MURMAN: Thank you. And also, Grace?

GRACE HARPER: I'm Grace Harper. I'm from Loveland, Colorado. I am a junior, studying political science at UNL.

MURMAN: Thank you for your help today. With that, we'll begin today's hearing with LB833 and Senator Cowell.

KAUTH: Good afternoon, Education Committee. My name is Kathleen Kauth, K-a-t-h-l-e-e-n K-a-u-t-h, and I represent LD 31 in the Millard area of Omaha. After successfully working with the state colleges over the interim to create another pathway to get into teaching, Paul Turman approached me about an issue they've been having for years with no success, to modify. There have been changes in the positions of those who are at the university about this issue and I expect that we're going to see some flexibility and discussion, but I wanted to get this bill introduced in this session to assure that it's addressed. LB833

deals with the ability of the state colleges to give full accreditation to their agricultural educators. Right now, now, the way it works, they can teach for-- they can teach these kids for 3 years, their fourth year, they have to come to Lincoln to finish out their agriculture education degree. One of the things that it does is it pulls kids away from their rural communities. Their student teaching is probably going to be done in a more urban area here in the Lincoln area, and it really would be better for them to be out in a rural area doing their student teaching. State colleges are not statutorily allowed to independently offer agriculture educator degrees. They-- so they work through a partnership that's already established with the university. The fact that they have to transfer to Lincoln for their fourth degree-- or their fourth year, that's increasing their costs. Rather than living at home or living in a smaller community, they come to Lincoln. It's more expensive. They're away from that rural connection. And student teaching is such an important part of where a prospective teacher winds up. If they're not able to student teach in their rural community, chances are they might never move back. One of the things that we continuously hear from our rural communities is the need to keep people out there, to give them reasons to stay, and I think that this will help. This bill actually will only allow the state colleges to seek future approval of the-- from the Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education for standalone agricultural education program. So it's not a we do this and all of a sudden it's done. They still have to request permission and discuss it with them. The second portion of this bill is to add doctoral degrees in education to the authority of the state colleges, in light of the university eliminating their educational administration programs. And state colleges originally started out as teacher's colleges. That's what they were designed to be. So I think it's really important that those who were designed for teaching the teachers and educating the educators are able to continue doing that. Paul Turman with the State Colleges will be speaking in support of this bill. Jack Moles with the Nebraska Rural Community Schools Association is fully supportive. He was not able to be here today, so he submitted comments online. And I've had conversations with the university, with Dr. Blomstedt about this. I really appreciate the, the fact that we're going to start this discussion and look at how we can rework this and make sure that we have educators who are able to stay in their rural communities if they desire, because they can still come to Lincoln if they really want to. But maintaining that connection with agriculture and with a rural area, this is very important. I'm confident that this bill will help

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Rough Draft

improve agricultural education in rural areas, and I ask for your yes vote.

MURMAN: Thank you, Senator Kauth. I do know in recent years that schools have had difficulty filling ag leader-- or ag teachers. I haven't checked-- I guess, don't remember checking in the last year or so. Has that situation improved, do you know?

KAUTH: And I'll, I'll have Dr. Turman respond to that. But I know he said that they don't have many kids who are taking the agricultural education, so it's not a huge amount. So for the university, they won't be losing huge amounts of money. It's not like we're taking 1,000 kids out. It's, it's very few. But again, just the fact that it is so few really means we need to do everything we can to keep them in their communities.

MURMAN: Thank you. I'm, I'm from out there. [INAUDIBLE] mainly,--

KAUTH: Are, are you really? I, I wasn't aware.

MURMAN: --so I do realize the issue. Any other questions for Senator Kauth at this time? If not, thank you. Good afternoon, Chancellor Turman.

PAUL TURMAN: Good afternoon. Chairman Murman, members of the Education Committee, my name is Paul Turman. That's P-a-u-l T-u-r-m-a-n. I'm the Chancellor of the Nebraska State College System. I am here today in support of LB833, and would ask the-- respectfully ask the committee's consent on this legislation. As Senator Kauth outlined, the bill makes 3 real targeted kind of efforts, as it relates to our statutory authority. And I'll try to highlight each one of those briefly here, and answer questions that you have. As it relates to agricultural-- or agricultural education authority, that Nebraska continues to face, I think, a very critical shortage. Senator Murman, you asked a very important question. Each year, the Department of Education provides data on the shortage areas across the state. Career or technical education reported that it had 37 unfilled teaching positions, and when you drill down into that and look specifically at ag education, the number this last year for reported districts was 6. The vast majority of those are in the rural, kind of Panhandle area of the state, as well. Under the current statute, the state-- or the state colleges must work in kind of that partnership with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, I think partly due to a, a bill that basically says-- or a statute, 85-941, specifying that we must do that in

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

partnership any time a new program came forward before-- or after 1978. This limitation, I think, applies only to ag education and not other education disciplines itself. When the partnership was initially discussed, I think the vision was that it would create an opportunity for our students-- would start at our institutions and then ultimately be able to finish there in delivering our cour-- the courses from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln online. It became evident that that partnership opportunity, at least that pathway, was not going to be viable. And as a result, we looked at other options that might be there as well. I think-- what I passed out is an email exchange that I had with, at the time, President Ted Carter, in-- would have been, I think, the February of 2021, and then followed up in April of '21, as well, trying to find a, a meaningful pathway to address this issue. To date, we've not been able to accomplish that. As a result, I think the, the current students, as Senator had noted, have to start at their state college and then ultimately transition to Lincoln. And I think the handout that I provided gives you a sense of the range of courses that they're asked to complete when they arrive here. Those cour-- courses are specific to the practicum areas within ag education that my presidents feel confident that our faculty have the capacity to be able to teach. The second broad area focuses specifically on doctoral granting authority, the fact that the University of Nebraska has eliminated its educational administration program. State colleges, as we've noted, were your original normal schools. Four years before the University Nebraska-Lincoln was founded as the first land-grant institution, Puru State College was providing teacher education pathways for students. If we have one particular area that should be a focus and a mission for us, it's around teacher education. And the capacity to do that within ag education, and also, doctoral granting authority to serve rural parts of the state, I think are critically important. We have to do partnerships in agriculture, engineering, law, as well as health care. We would like the opportunity to be able to do that specifically within education, which is clearly the mission for the state colleges. I'd be happy to answer any questions that the committee might have.

MURMAN: Thank you. Any questions for Chancellor Turman? Senator Lonowski.

LONOWSKI: Thank you, Chairman Murman. And thank you for your testimony today, Dr. Turman. Can you provide any additional background on the reduced credit bachelor's degree, that option?

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

PAUL TURMAN: I can. And I think that's what Section 2 seeks to address that. Right now, there's what we would classify as outdated language that spells or suggests that a bachelor's degree needs to be a 4-year program. I think it's very evident that that's not the case. A lot of times, we have students who come in with dual credit, earned credit through examination, and so our goal is to get them done much quicker. Right now, the Higher Learning Commission has given institutions the authority to explore reduced credit bachelor's degree programs, and we want to make sure that that statute is interpreted in a way that precludes us from doing that. And so at the most recent board meeting in January, 2 weeks ago, our board has recently approved the 3 first bachelor-- reduced bachelor's programs, 2 in education: special education, at 95 credit hours; and I think-- elementary education is at 96; and then criminal justice. And we know that we have programs coming from Wayne and Peru at our April meeting, as well. And so, I think this flexibility, and we're trying to be as responsive and ensure that we don't see a particular carveout in a state statute that precludes us from happening-- keeping us from doing that was something that Mike Baumgartner, the Coordinating Commission executive director, had identified for us to include in this piece of legislation.

LONOWSKI: OK. And how did these come up as-- to be approved by state colleges? What's kind of the history of that?

PAUL TURMAN: I, I think certainly our bachelor's degree granting authority, and I think the place that we see probably a significant need is a large number of educators, paraeducators who, you know, are ready adults working in small districts. And could we look at the administrative rule changes that the Department of Ed has most recently allowed for licensure, and I think we have an opportunity in this state to provide a much quicker pathway for those candidates. When that surfaced from our faculty at Chadron, I think it became pretty evident that the faculty at the other institutions began to look more closely. So we anticipate business administration, criminal justice, and then those 2 education programs coming from our other 2 institutions, primarily delivered online, to meet that kind of respective need and serve as much of the state as we can.

LONOWSKI: OK. Thank you.

PAUL TURMAN: Thank you, Senator.

MURMAN: Other questions? Senator Juarez.

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

JUAREZ: Thank you. So I just have probably a pretty basic question. You mentioned that the faculty has the capacity to teach for the ag ed that you guys are thinking of, that you want to be there for the fourth year. Do you also have the capacity to work in this new doctoral program in education, also?

PAUL TURMAN: Very good question. Right now, we do have master's degree granting authority, and so the faculty and staff that we have in our teacher ed programs are credentialed in a way to be able to offer doctoral programs, as well. I would also note that we'd probably draw upon adjunct faculty, people with expertise in those areas within the state of Nebraska and in the region, to help support that and do that at a, a relatively lower cost than what we see now.

JUAREZ: And my other question was, I think that one of the positives I, I see with you taking this on in the fourth year, as far as the, the ag ed that you were talking about is maybe it'll even trac-- attract more students when they realize that they don't have to come to Lincoln to finish their last year, so that could be a positive for the program.

PAUL TURMAN: I, I think that's what we're hoping to be able to do, in the way that we market those programs now, with students. And to your initial question, it, it can be essentially threefold. I think our request originally was can these courses be delivered by the University online, so that our students don't need to transition? I also think there's a pathway for our faculty to teach their courses at our institution. And if, if the only mechanism was that by doing that, that our faculty become a part of their faculty to deliver it as adjuncts, and we ask our students to pay their tuition and fees, that's a, a viable pathway that could be explored. In addition to the fact that-- how do we-- is there an opportunity for them to deliver those courses out to our institutions, as well? I think our students start in rural Nebraska with an intent to stay there. The further we migrate them away from it, it increases the likelihood of them-- and no disrespect-- coming to Lincoln and never coming back home again.

JUAREZ: OK. Thank you.

MURMAN: Senator Hughes.

HUGHES: Thank you, Chair Murman. Just for my own figuring this out for the timeline. So a kiddo that is going into ag ed would be at Wayne State or Peru State, whatever. They would do three years there. Then

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

they would transfer to the University System. And I'm looking at all-- is it just one year? Because one semester you're student teaching. Is it just one semester you're spending at the University System, or is it two semesters' worth of classes-- like, would you get done in 4.5 years, how this is? Or--

PAUL TURMAN: I think the vast maj-- who have trans-- transferred since this program started in 2018, it is designed as a way to get them done in four. So 12--

HUGHES: OK. So really, once-- that fall semester, you're taking classes. And then the spring, you're--

PAUL TURMAN: Correct. And I think there's a, a summer transition and there's one class that can be served by our institution and, and by CASNR, as well. And so, I think the, the students are designed to be able to finish those in, in four years.

HUGHES: And then just to be clear, other education, if I'm secondary education, elementary, I can finish that all up at your-- all of it, just-- through Wayne, through Peru.

PAUL TURMAN: Every other discipline, we have it in full.

HUGHES: Every other discipline, we do have. OK.

PAUL TURMAN: Yeah. It's just ag.

HUGHES: This is only ag.

PAUL TURMAN: And because of that carveout-- and I asked the question of Mike Baumgartner at the Coordinating Commission, if I brought forward a proposal asking us to deliver that, he said I would have to notify my commission that by state statute, that's not allowable.

HUGHES: OK.

PAUL TURMAN: And so we're trying to eliminate that small piece, so that we can do this for our, for our students and for our institutions.

HUGHES: Thank you.

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

MURMAN: And just to clarify a little bit, maybe I didn't quite understand the answer. For student teaching, that's typically done in the fourth year. Am I right?

PAUL TURMAN: It is in the fourth, and that's a part of 12 credit hours of what they complete at the university is the student teaching experience, the clinical observations that happen as a result of that, in their, their final semester, once they've completed all the coursework and the content areas have been completed.

MURMAN: So that could take away a little bit from the incentive for them to teach in greater Nebraska, rural Nebraska.

PAUL TURMAN: It depends on the placement. And we don't know exactly what those placements have been, through that partnership with the university.

MURMAN: OK. Thank you, Senator Meyer.

G. MEYER: Thank you, Chairman. How many students are currently enrolled in the ag education program and the partnership with UNL?

PAUL TURMAN: A very good question. I had asked at least our institutions to identify the last 3 years, and so I think the kind of pipeline, in what Senator Juarez had, had noted. Right now, we have 2 students enrolled at Chadron, who came in this year. We had 3 enter in last year. And I think since the partnership that has been in place, we've had 3 students from UN-- or from Chadron, transition to UNL. We do not have a reverse transfer agreement structure in place, so if they graduate in ag education, we, we will not know that. We'll know if they've completed, and those 3 students have. But specifically which program that they're in-- and now, they are alumni of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln rather than Chadron State College. So I think the opportunity to be able to make sure that we're a part of that entire journey is, is what we're trying to accomplish here.

MURMAN: So just another question about the increased-- or decreased time to get to a bachelor's degree. I did serve on some education task force in the interim. And it seems like that's kind of a nationwide movement probably, to address-- well, a big reason would be to address workforce shortage, and especially in education. Would that be a true statement?

PAUL TURMAN: I think that's a true statement. And I think the pathways for things like alternative certification and our secondary programs--

as we've looked at the licensure requirements, as I noted, we have reduced credit bachelor's degree programs in special education and elementary. To get to the content area requirement, the 48 hours of content that they're required to have to meet the Department of Ed requirements, that is very challenging in a reduced structure. But I think students who come in with dual credit put themselves on a much quicker pathway to be able to finish their degree. And I think probably our most successful dual credit pathway is at Wayne, where they have a partnership with districts around their region to get them through the first three courses to that-- start off that elementary-- the education pathways that they have. And so, I think we constantly need to find ways to expedite students through that process much quicker, get them into the districts, get them serving the state of Nebraska and our students.

MURMAN: Thank you. Any other questions for Chancellor Turman? If not, thank you for your testimony. Other proponents for LB833? Any other proponents? Any opponents for LB833? Good afternoon.

MATT BLOMSTEDT: Good afternoon. Chairman Murman, and members of the Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Matt Blomstedt, M-a-t-t B-l-o-m-s-t-e-d-t, and I serve as the Associate Vice President for Government Relations for the University, University of Nebraska. I'm here today on behalf of the University of Nebraska System in opposition to LB833, but to, to be clear, also to be in support of continued efforts to strengthen collaborative partnership pathways across Nebraska's higher education ecosystem. From our perspective, the bill raises 2 related concerns tied to long-term structure and sustainability: the authorization of state colleges to offer doctoral programs, and changes to the coordinated framework for agricultural education. Doctoral programs, whether in the form of a research-based Ph.D. or practitioner-focused Ed.D., are fundamentally different from undergraduate or master's level instruction. These programs require sustained investment in doctoral qualified faculty, research capacity, accreditation, student support, and stable enrollment pipelines. Today, Nebraska has meaningful capacity in doctoral education through the University of Nebraska System, including flexible and online options designed specifically for working professionals. From our perspective, the question before us is a-- is less about the acc-- about access and more about how we ensure that educational programs across the state are aligned, sustainable, and responsive to workforce and community needs over the long term. The same principle aligns to agriculture and natural resources. IANR was created by the Legislature in 1973 through

the passage of LB149, following more than a decade of discussion among state leaders and agricultural stakeholders. At the time, there was a shared concern that agricultural and natural resources were not receiving-- be-- being receiving coordination, investment, or visibility, ultimately warranted their importance to Nebraska's economy and communities. The Legislature responded intentionally by establishing a unified, statewide land-grant structure to ensure that agricultural instruction, research, and Extension work together and remain connected to producers, communities, and industry across Nebraska. That coordinated framework continues to guide how agricultural education and public service are delivered today. Through faculty and staff, statewide research and education centers, and Extension presence in all 93 counties, the university delivers education, research, and outreach that responds to local needs while advancing statewide priorities. The College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources carries that responsibility forward through a coordinated, partnership-driven model that expands access, and aligns public resources, and strengthens Nebraska's agricultural education workforce. That model is built on collaboration. It leverages faculty expertise, a forward develop-- forward-deployed agricultural education presence in central, northeast, and western Nebraska, and strong partnerships with other higher education institutions across the state. We maximize shared strengths, avoid unnecessary duplication, and ensure students can access high-quality agricultural education through aligned curriculum, advising, and regionally embedded learning opportunities. We believe the strongest path forward is a collaborative one, bringing together state colleges, community colleges, and the Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education and other partners to look holistically at capacity, demand, and opportunity across the P-20 and postsecondary landscape allows us to identify efficiencies, strengthen pathways, and grow partnerships in a way that benefits students and taxpayers alike. I'll finish right here--

MURMAN: Sure. Go ahead.

MATT BLOMSTEDT: --if that's appropriate. We share the goal of expanding opportunity and using public resources wisely, and we believe that the goal is best achieved through coordinated strategic planning rather than statutory changes at this time, and ultimately address individual pieces of a much larger, larger system. Thank you for your time. I'd be happy to take your questions.

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

MURMAN: Thank you. Any questions for Mr. Blomstedt? If not, so you-- you're-- you came in in opposition. Are you-- specifically, which parts of the bill are you opposed to and which ones--

MATT BLOMSTEDT: I, I think--

MURMAN: Are-- and are you OK with some of them?

MATT BLOMSTEDT: Yeah. There-- there's elements, I think, of the bill that we certainly want to be able to work together and work effectively with. As I look at it and I think as Dr. Turman noted, there has been a long kind of history of talking about these partnerships, how we would do that. I think what they've presented is an opportunity to think about this a little bit differently. By the way, I-- when I was Commissioner of Education, I happened to be on the State College Board of Trustees. One of the best decisions I made was to second a motion to hire Paul Turman. So, you know, we work well together, is the reality. And I think what we're looking at is really, maybe, for a little bit of time before we would go down the statutory route, route, to have some conversations about what else could be accomplished together.

MURMAN: So the sharing the responsibility with ag education, you're actually-- I mean--

MATT BLOMSTEDT: Yeah.

MURMAN: You work with Chadron. You-- no? [INAUDIBLE].

MATT BLOMSTEDT: Yeah. I think one of the things-- and I-- by the way, Tiffany Heng-Moss is here. So she's not going to testify. But what I want to represent is like, probably, from the expertise of how we would go about doing this, kind of create some other conversations that would make sure that's there. I think, to the point, like, when I was Commissioner of Education, I was always very worried about shortage areas and how we would do particular work to ensure that we're addressing shortage areas and doing-- you know, looking for different ways that we partner. So I actually worked with Tiffany in those points in time on ag education and other fronts, so I've had a long history of working with her. What I could see being able to do is take like, existing partnerships that we have and see how we can actually reframe that to address the challenges that we may face. So I do have a daughter at Chadron State College. So-- also, the president at Chadron State, I was sitting with her and Senator Storer. This

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

conversation came up about how we do ag education, and so even sitting out there going, it's like, yeah, what are the types of things we could do to really enhance how we get students to come into this space and be able to do that work effectively? So.

MURMAN: So, so you have a collaborative agreement with Chadron now, in ag education.

MATT BLOMSTEDT: Chadron and Wayne. I-- and-- on ag ed, I can't-- I'd have to look back. But on the Peru State side, I'm not sure there's an ag ed.

MURMAN: So how would this bill change that collaboration?

MATT BLOMSTEDT: This would actually give them authorization to create kind of a parallel program, not the same program. And so-- or at least to be able to explore those things. I think, to, to Dr. Turman's point, they would still have to go through the Coordinating Commission, to kind of make sure that makes sense underneath those kind of provisions, so.

MURMAN: OK. And then the doctorate in education, you're opposed to that part of the bill, also?

MATT BLOMSTEDT: Yeah. I think on, on that particular part, what I'd really like to-- by the way, I'm a, I'm a graduate of UNL's doc-- doctoral program in higher-- education leadership and higher education. The importance of looking at how we do ed-- educational administration for the future of this state is important. We also have an Ed, an Ed Ad degree at UNO-- and different ways that we should be talking about that partnership to get sustainability in all of those things. I'd love to be able to actually work out an, an approach that's working with state colleges and everyone on a, on a, on a way that's going to do that more effectively.

MURMAN: With the loss of the doctorate in education at the university, wouldn't you welcome the doctorate of education pathway with the state colleges?

MATT BLOMSTEDT: Are you asking me personally or--

MURMAN: No. I'm-- from, from the university perspective.

MATT BLOMSTEDT: No. I think, from the university perspective, we'd really like to kind of talk. When-- you know, in the challenging times

that we're in, trying to make different cuts, trying to address this, we've got to get it to a point where we're looking statewide to do kind of what's best statewide, and that's really what I'm saying. Maybe not just doing that through legislation, but having further conversations. And that's a relatively new conversation for us, obviously, because that-- different than the ag education part. There's some history with that. We, we would like a little bit of time to kind of build those partnerships out.

MURMAN: OK. Senator Hughes.

HUGHES: Thank you, Chair Murman. Thanks for coming in, Mr. Blomstedt. So have you-- so you say yes, let's us work at it, we don't want to do it-- I think anything can be done without a bill is great. Have you-- are there-- do you have meetings set up? Are we-- like, are we going down this path? Like, well, yep, we're going to meet next week. We're going to start this conversation. Because it sounds like-- like if you saw the letter that was to Dr. Carter, which was 2021-- I mean it's-- this has been kind of kicked down the road. I don't know. And maybe just with some upheaval and stuff, it hasn't-- you know, we're at a pause right now, but are we pursuing this or?

MATT BLOMSTEDT: In, in 2021, I was the commissioner of education.

HUGHES: No, I know you were-- or you weren't even here.

MATT BLOMSTEDT: What I would-- my point, though, is like a lot's probably happened in the last five years that's extremely important. I think part of this that's good. I hope I'm a good player relative to these things. I do think it's a different moment in time. But I, I would like to see some progress on these particular points myself, just because I think it helps us as a state. There's been a long history of kind of institutions, public institutions in the state, fighting for, for the students.

HUGHES: Sure.

MATT BLOMSTEDT: You know, competing on those different fronts. I think we're in a very different kind of collaborative model going forward. I really pushed on P-20 initiatives when I was commissioner, even before Ted Carter was president of the university. I'm really pleased that both Dr. Turman, Dr. Gold, and others are, are kind of hosting, and, and from a perspective, working together on lots of different

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Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

initiatives. And I think that will be important for the state and for all of our public-- postsecondary institutions.

HUGHES: And I-- yeah. And I agree. Because we give state funding to all these entities, we need to make sure we're maximizing that tax money that is going to them to benefit the students that we've got. So thank you.

MATT BLOMSTEDT: And it seems like there's plenty of work to do, so we'll do it together and that feels appropriate. So.

HUGHES: OK. Sounds good.

MATT BLOMSTEDT: Yeah.

MURMAN: Any other questions for Mr. Blomstedt? If not, thank you--

MATT BLOMSTEDT: All right.

MURMAN: --for your testimony. Other opponents for LB833? Any neutral testifiers for LB833?

COURTNEY WITTSTRUCK: All right. Good afternoon, Chairman Murman and members of the Education Committee. My name is Courtney Wittstruck. That's C-o-u-r-t-n-e-y W-i-t-t-s-t-r-u-c-k, and I'm here today on behalf of the Nebraska Community College Association and our member colleges to testify in the neutral on LB833. Nebraska's community colleges exist to provide local, affordable postsecondary education across the state. At its core, our shared goal as higher education partners is that Nebraska should be-- Nebraskans should be able to pursue their educational goals, whatever they may be, as close to home as possible. For this reason, we're generally supportive of the initiatives that thoughtfully expand educational access within Nebraska, particularly those that allow, allow students to study close to home. Among other things, as you heard, LB833 would authorize state colleges to offer reduced-credit bachelor's degrees. Efforts to reduce time and cost required to earn a bachelor's degree, when done strategically and aligned with workforce needs, can provide meaningful benefits to students, employers, and communities alike. While this approach would be new to Nebraska, reduced-credit baccalaureate degrees are offered nationally both at traditional four-year institutions as well as community colleges. In fact, community colleges in 24 states are already authorized to confer baccalaureate degrees. Reduced-credit baccalaureate degrees such as those offered by community colleges typically require at least 90 credits, but less

than 120, and emphasize applied learning aligned with local workforce needs. These programs are not intended to compete with traditional 4-year bachelor's degrees. Instead, they often serve as targeted gapfillers addressing unmet workforce needs in specific regions or industries. In states that authorize reduced-credit community college baccalaureate pathways, these programs have been shown to help students enter the workforce more quickly, reduce student debt, and improve completion rates, particularly for working adults and place-bound learners. I'm testing in the-- I'm testifying in the neutral today, not because we're neutral about the intent of LB833, but because we believe this, this issue warrants broader discussion. The question of how Nebraska structures and delivers increased access to bachelor's level education has implications that extend far beyond any single sector or institution. From our perspective, this conversation should include more of Nebraska's higher education partners, include community-- including community colleges. I've spoken briefly with Senator Kauth about the possibility of an interim study involving multiple higher education partners to explore how Nebraskans can best work together to ex-- extend access to bachelors-level education in a way that is both, both effective and sustainable. Nebraska's community colleges would welcome the opportunity to participate in that discussion and to help identify solutions that would best serve students, communities, and the state as a whole. This is not an easy time to be in higher education, which makes coordination and collaboration even more critical. Thoughtful cooperative planning will help ensure we serve students effectively and efficiently, avoid unnecessary cost, and maximize limited resources, particularly in rural areas, while maintaining academic rigor and alignment with workforce needs. And I see I have a red light, so I will stop and be happy to take any questions from anyone.

MURMAN: Thank you. Any questions for Ms. Wittstruck? If not, thank you for your testimony.

COURTNEY WITTSTRUCK: Thank you.

MURMAN: Any other neutral testifiers for LB833? If not, Senator Kauth, you can come up and close.

KAUTH: Thank you all for listening, and I appreciate Dr. Blomstedt and Dr. Turman being willing to sit down and, and figure out a way to do this. I love the idea of doing it without a bill, but I want to keep this bill front and center. We may need to-- if we figure out a way to do it, there may still need to be some statutory changes, but I'll

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Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

work with them over the next 2 weeks to figure out what we can do and how we can make things work well for everybody involved. And if it's OK with the committee, I'll let you know what happens.

MURMAN: Thank you. Any questions for Senator Kauth on her close? Senator Juarez.

JUAREZ: I just wanted to make a comment. A concern that I thought of after Matt left his seat is, you know, with the university having to search for a new chancellor now, I'm not sure. Does not having somebody in that position delay decisions to be made because we don't have someone in that position, or it's just something that President Gold can make and there's no issues?

KAUTH: I, I think, if anything, the Regents would be involved with that, but I don't think not having the, the chancellor-- we have an interim chancellor, who's-- who will certainly be brought into the loop. I don't think that this is something that will be earth-shaking to the university as a whole or to Lincoln as a whole. So I think we'll be OK with that, but that's a good question. Thank you.

JUAREZ: OK. Thank you.

MURMAN: Any other questions? If not, online-- thank you, Senator Kauth. And online, we had 2 proponents, 1 opponent, and zero neutral. And with that, we'll close the hearing on LB833, and open the hearing on LB956, and welcome Senator John Cavanaugh.

J. CAVANAUGH: Thank you, Chairman. Good afternoon, Chairman Murman and members of the Education Committee. This is my first time in front of the Education Committee.

HUGHES: Wow.

J. CAVANAUGH: Yeah.

CONRAD: Ever?

J. CAVANAUGH: Ever.

HUGHES: That's crazy.

J. CAVANAUGH: My name is Senator John Cavanaugh, J-o-h-n C-a-v-a-n-a-u-g-h, and I represent the 9th Legislative District in midtown Omaha. I'm here today to introduce LB956, which would improve

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Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

and streamline collection of salary data for postsecondary education to inform retention and recruitment efforts. LB956 creates duties for the Coordinating Commission on Postsecondary Education to compile and verify compensation information at postsecondary institutions. The commission has asked to clarify some of the language in the bill, and I'm happy to work with them on additional language. I brought this bill because I have 5 postsecondary institutions located in my district. Having accurate and timely data about compensation at colleges and universities will give our institutions the ability to respond to the challenges and needs of recruiting and retaining their workforce. Though this bill is primarily focused on public institutions, it will be useful data for all institutions. As I said, I'm willing to work with anyone on language to make this bill better. I'm going to keep my introduction brief because I know you have a long afternoon ahead of you. And I would ask you to advance LB956 to the floor for further consideration. I thank the committee for your time, and be happy to ans-- answer any questions.

MURMAN: Thank you. Any questions for Senator Cavanaugh at this time? Senator Conrad.

CONRAD: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Senator Cavanaugh. Welcome to the Education Committee. Good to see you.

J. CAVANAUGH: Thanks for having me.

CONRAD: Just a quick question. I mean, conceivably all of this information is already available via public record or public statutes. Is that right? Is this just an effort to try and bring that together in a more useful form, or?

J. CAVANAUGH: Well, I don't, I don't think it is easily accessible or available.

CONRAD: OK.

J. CAVANAUGH: I think that it is some-- and you'll probably hear from some people about the hurdles, in terms of collecting the data--

CONRAD: OK.

J. CAVANAUGH: --behind me. But yeah. It's to make sure that it is clear that we're all using the same vocabulary, the same standard, when we're talking about what we're paying people, in terms of benefits and costs and things like that.

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Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

CONRAD: OK. Very good. That's helpful. Because I know, for example, I think maybe a partnership exists between Flatwater Free Press and the Platte Institute, where they have like a public employment compensation kind of searchable tool or database out there. So I was just wondering how this complemented the existing legal framework.

J. CAVANAUGH: So-- and, and to be clear, this would not be-- you know, like in those sorts of things, it would be-- you can see, you know, Senator Conrad gets paid \$12,000.

CONRAD: Well, yes.

J. CAVANAUGH: That's not a secret. Everybody knows that. But you can see by name, and this would not be searchable by name. This would be more of an aggregation of the information, say, persons of this class are paid this amount by this institution.

CONRAD: Got it.

J. CAVANAUGH: And, and what's their burden, in terms of benefits and things like that.

CONRAD: That's helpful. Thank you. Thank you.

MURMAN: Any other questions for Senator Cavanaugh? Senator Hughes.

HUGHES: Thank you, Chairman Murman. Thanks for visiting with us today. Is there any potential privacy issues with collecting this data-- or I mean, it sounds like it's pretty much out there anyway. You're just kind of putting it together at a easy-to-find spot.

J. CAVANAUGH: Yeah, and so that the reporting requirement would be to report it without--

HUGHES: Without name. OK.

J. CAVANAUGH: --the identification attached.

HUGHES: Just by position. OK. Thank you. That's it.

MURMAN: Any other questions? If not, thanks for the opening.
Proponents for LB956.

TIM ROYERS: Good afternoon, Chair Murman, members of the Education Committee. For the record, my name is Tim, T-i-m, Royers, R-o-y-e-r-s. I'm the president of the Nebraska State Education Association, and I'm

here on behalf of our members to testify in support of LB956. I want to start by thanking Senator Cavanaugh for being a strong partner in introducing this bill on behalf of our higher education members. I'm going to pause and just clarify, because a lot of folks assume we are just the teachers union for K-12 districts. But we actually represent educators on the majority of our state's postsecondary institutions as well, so we represent bargaining units for the community colleges, state colleges, and the U-- University of Nebraska at Kearney. For 10 years, I was a part of the negotiations process in my local school district. One of the critical parts of the effective collect-- of collective-- effective collective bargaining is being able to identify, down to the individual employee's job class, how the compensation in your local school district compares to other school districts. Getting that data was one of the first steps completed every year when we went to go bargain our contract. As I stepped into this role as president of the state organization, I quickly learned that such information, again, foundational to the collective bargaining process, is far harder to come by at the postsecondary level. At the PK-12 level, one of the reasons we can quickly compare one school district to the next is because the salary schedules are easily translatable from one local to another. The same is not true for higher education. In order to determine comparability, more specific data is also needed from peer institutions. For 4-year schools, much of that information is currently guarded behind a proprietary firewall, and educators are barred from accessing it. Those institutions compile their data through an organization known as CUPA, the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources. CUPA data, as it's commonly referred to, provides all the essential data to effectively determine comparability and to see what issues need to be addressed at the table. However, CUPA prohibits anyone but human resources from a university from accessing that data. We would happily pay the license fee, but we're prohibited as a union from doing so. LB956 would simply require our higher ed institutions to share that broad, aggregate data that Senator Cavanaugh referred to, so we can make more informed decisions while negotiating agreements. This idea came to us from surveying our higher ed members and from hosting a roundtable discussion with educators in December. At a time when dwindling resources for postsecondary schools has put a considerable burden on our members, I would ask that you please vote to advance this very small, reasonable ask out of committee. This will be a step in the right direction to give our members the data they need to effectively bargain for their salary and benefits. Thank you, and I'm happy to answer any questions that you may have.

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Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

MURMAN: Thank you. Any questions for Mr. Royers? Senator Lonowski.

LONOWSKI: Thank you, Chair Murman. Thank you, Mr. Royers. So CUPA has all the data we need?

TIM ROYERS: Correct.

LONOWSKI: And you said you can't go there because you're union. Can someone else, somehow--

TIM ROYERS: If a-- if the universities, you know, side in the process chose to share that data, I, I don't know if their agreements allow them to, but no university, to my knowledge, has shared that data directly with the other side of the bargaining process.

LONOWSKI: OK. Thanks.

TIM ROYERS: Mm-hmm.

MURMAN: Any other questions? Senator Juarez.

JUAREZ: Thank you. I wanted you to know that I went to a job summit conference last summer, and we had an entity come to speak about the-- would it be the Department of Labor-- wherever the wage data goes to, whoever handles that-- to really provide the state with a lot of details of many occupations, you know, that are reported in their database for analysis. That's supposed to help us better as policymakers so we can see, statewide, where occupations are located, you know, how much they're making, if they lose employment, you know, all this kind of stuff that's reflected in the statistics. So to me, I look at this as just being a part of what the recommendation was when I went to this job summit. So I think that it's a good idea, because it lets you know clearly, you know, where the gaps might be in our resources that we need throughout the state. And I just wanted to comment about that. Thank you.

MURMAN: Any other questions? If not, thank you for your testimony.

TIM ROYERS: Thank you, everyone.

MURMAN: Other proponents for LB956? Any opponents for LB956? Neutral testifiers for LB956? If not, Senator Cavanaugh, you're welcome to come up and close. And while he's coming up, we had, online, 3 op-- 3 proponents, zero opponents, and 1 neutral. Go ahead.

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

J. CAVANAUGH: Thank you, Chairman. And thank you, committee, for your attention. Again, I'll be brief. As I stated, I've, I've had some-- my office has had some conversations with the Coordinating Commission about their technical concerns. Very happy to address those. I think they are reasonable requests. And, you know, as Mr. Royer has pointed out, this would be very helpful in the, the bargaining process, of course, but I think that there is just a, a higher obligation of transparency in the-- how we are making these decisions in all aspects. And I know-- like I said, this is my first time in this committee. I'm sure you guys have dealt, dealt with higher ed issues, in terms of financing and requirements and things many times here. But I, I do think that this is something that should be available to the public to know what we're paying for each type of professor and things like that, and have a better idea of how much we're spending on a classroom and how much we're spending on outside the classroom and administration and things like that, and I think this will help us get a handle on those sorts of things. So, thank you.

MURMAN: Any questions for Senator Cavanaugh? Senator Lonowski.

LONOWSKI: Thank you, Chair Murman. And thank you, Senator Cavanaugh. This is intriguing to me, because it's got a fiscal note-- not a lot, \$10,500. But the information is out there. It seems like we could work on something where, where we just require that information to be released.

J. CAVANAUGH: And the fiscal note is from the Coordinating Commission, so they're, they're the ones who would have to publish and put it on their website and things like that. And so, yeah, you're, you're right. The university has this information and could probably share it at, at a very minimal cost. But what the bill does is requires the Coordinating Commission to collect that and then aggregate it and put it on their site, so I think that's what that cost is associated with.

LONOWSKI: OK. Thank you.

J. CAVANAUGH: So they don't have the data, is what I'm saying already. The Coordinating Commission doesn't.

LONOWSKI: OK.

MURMAN: Any other questions for Senator Cavanaugh? If not, thank you.

J. CAVANAUGH: Thank you.

MURMAN: And that will close the hearing on LB956. And we will open the hearing on LB870, and this is a combined hearing with LB1061. Yeah. Go ahead.

ANDERSEN: Good afternoon, Chairman Murman and members of the Education Committee. I am Senator Bob Andersen, B-o-b A-n-d-e-r-s-e-n, and I represent District 49, which includes northwest Sarpy County and Omaha. I'm introducing LB870 to eliminate the in-state tuition for those not lawfully present. In 2006, LB239 was introduced to qualify undocumented students for in-state tuition rates despite having no legal status. The bill was passed but subsequently vetoed by then-Governor Dave Heineman. Governor Heineman cited objections with respect to the rule of law and federal statute. Unfortunately, his veto was overridden. LB870 is a simple bill to re-implement common sense and fiscal responsibility. In-state tuition rates are lower and a privilege reserved for Nebraska residents. LB870 re-implements the obvious. If a potential student is an alien, then they are not a legal resident of our great state. If they are not a legal Nebraska resident, they should not qualify for in-state intuition. By closing this loophole, it should bring down the cost to provide quality education to all Nebraskans. For example, the University of Nebraska System only receives approximately 36-43% of their tuition from in-state students versus out-of-state students. As stewards of taxpayer dollars, we are obligated to provide-- to properly manage the state's resources. Since tuition for higher education is supplemented by the Legislature, I hope, over time, to decrease our appropriation to the universities. LB870 will also bring Nebraska into compliance with federal law. 8 U.S. Code Section 1623 states that, quote, an alien who is not lawfully present in the United States shall not be eligible on the basis of residence within the state or political subdivision for any postsecondary education benefit unless a citizen or national of the United States is eligible such benefit in no less than the amount, duration, and scope without regard to whether the citizen or national is a legal resident. Nebraska should not-- would not be the first state to recognize this issue and rectify it. Texas, Oklahoma, Kentucky, and Florida have already recently removed their provisions. Regarding the Nebraska-- University of Nebraska System's fiscal note, first, it states that the, the passage of LB870, they will no longer be required to grant in-state tuition to non-Nebraska residents. To be clear, they were never required to provide in-state tuition rates to nonresidents. They chose to do so using a high school transcript to bypass federal statute 8 U.S.C. 1623. Second, University of Nebraska System is the only institution of higher education to

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

claim they'll need additional manpower to implement this change. They claim they will need an additional person receiving over \$93,000 in compensation at each campus. Even if an additional person would be required, I failed to understand why they would, they would not have one centrally-located person supporting all 4 campuses. This seems exorbitant to me. LB870 is about good fiscal management, once again, respecting the rule of law and living up to our obligation to our fellow Nebraskans. I thank you for your time and attention, and I'm happy to take any questions.

HUGHES: All right. Do we have any questions for Senator Andersen? Go ahead, Senator Conrad.

CONRAD: Thank you, Senator. Thank you, Senator Andersen, for being here. I understand that everybody comes to the Legislature with a different background and there's a lot of complex issues in legislation that you've brought forward and similar legislation that Senator Murman brought forward that's subject to this joint public hearing. But I, I do just want to give you a chance to perhaps correct the record or maybe take it up on, on your close later. Senator, I noted in your introduction that you kind of cast a wide net and indicated that this legislation provides benefits to people with no legal status. And I don't think that's quite accurate, from an immigration perspective. So I just want to make sure that-- and I know sometimes with the rhetorical flourish that we paint with too broad a brush. But for example, there's a variety of different folks that are Nebraska neighbors that are not U.S. citizens but do have legal status. U and V visa holders, T visa--

ANDERSEN: Sure.

CONRAD: --holders, asylees, refugees, DACAs and Dreamers-- I mean, there's a whole list of folks who are not yet citizens, but who do have legal authorization to be here. So I did-- did you want to provide a distinction in your legislation or in your comments, or I just wanted to maybe get your thinking on that.

ANDERSEN: Yeah. This, this simply states that they have to have legal status. Now whether that is a, a, a green card or whether they have asylum and they've been granted legal status in the United States, then yeah, they could qualify, as long as they reside within the state of Nebraska. But if they don't have that status, then they, they are not authorized by federal statute, and it should be the same for, for our laws.

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

CONRAD: OK. Yeah. I'm glad we cleared that up, because I do think-- I think that is an im-- important term of art here. And then, you cited a component of federal law, Senator, and I was just wondering, in that same relevant section of federal law, is that benefit defined? Do you know? I don't know off the top of my head, and we can follow up on it later.

ANDERSEN: I can get, I can get you an answer.

CONRAD: OK. My, my last point would be, if your contention is that Nebraska state statute in this regard violates federal law, why isn't the appropriate remedy in court? Why are you here in this committee?

ANDERSEN: I was just making a reference to it that with the-- the commentary on the fiscal note from the University of Nebraska System said they were required to give visa in-state rates and that's, and that's not true. They, like other institutions, have chosen to use a transcript, a high school transcript, and call that good enough for having legal status, when actually, we both know that's not necessarily true. It may be, but it's not. And it's, it's a way to bypass what is written as federal statute.

CONRAD: OK, I'm not sure that was 100% responsive, but I understand what you're, what you're saying in that regard. And then I was wondering, with the wording of that component of your legislation and Senator Murman's, do you think it's going to provide any sort of headache or heartache for homeschool students, just in terms of how the language is presented?

ANDERSEN: No. And that was interesting in the, in the, the comments on the fiscal note from the University of Nebraska--

CONRAD: Yeah.

ANDERSEN: --System. It made reference to, to it having some impact on homeschoolers [INAUDIBLE] that I certainly didn't understand.

CONRAD: OK.

ANDERSEN: I've had brief conversations with the university and we're going to continue the dialogue.

CONRAD: OK. And then the last question-- and I know other members want to, to perhaps weigh in here, as well. I know that you noted that kind of your primary objective in moving this forward was to ensure fiscal

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

savings in a time of, of fiscal crisis. That is not reflect-- there is no fiscal savings reflected on the fiscal note. So if indeed the fiscal note does not show opportunity to glean fiscal savings, would you ask that this bill be held?

ANDERSEN: No. I think we're going to have to find out as we get down the road exactly how many-- how much in-state tuition is given and rates are being used, as opposed to where it should be full rates. So, I did the research and if you look at the full rate of tuition, that's what the typical cost is for providing the, the education. What we do in Nebraska is we provide in-state rates, which are anywhere-- if you look at UNL, it's a discount of 64%, UNO is 60%, UNMC is 57%, and that difference is made up by appropriation from the Legislature. So if you stop giving in-state rates and you start-- and you get the full rate, then there should be the logical track that you would start-- have to have less appropriations, because they'd be getting more money. Does that make sense?

CONRAD: I-- yeah. I understand your thinking there. And then, of course, on the flip side, the more people that you make a higher education accessible to means more students, in general, which helps to defray costs for, for everybody, as well. But I'll-- just put a finer point on it, Senator, because I know that you're courageous in your advocacy. Is this simply a cost-saving measure or is this part of a broader effort to target and demonize Nebraska immigrant neighbors?

ANDERSEN: It's-- as I said in my opening, it's a cost-savings effort, and making sure that the people that are entitled to the-- to get the entitlement actually get it.

CONRAD: OK. Very good. Thank you, Senator. Thank you, Senator.

HUGHES: OK. Thank you, Senator Conrad. Other questions for Senator Andersen? I'm going to start with Senator Juarez, please.

JUAREZ: Thank you.

HUGHES: You're fine.

JUAREZ: OK. You mentioned, if you could repeat, please, the states you said that have already done this change.

ANDERSEN: Yes. Texas, Kentucky, Oklahoma, and Florida.

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

JUAREZ: Texas, Florida, and Oklahoma. OK, so how long ago did they make this change? Is this something that's fairly recent?

ANDERSEN: I would have to find out.

JUAREZ: OK. Because what I would like to know is to see if you can get any data, depending on when they made this change on what has been the impact, you know, on their fiscal end--

ANDERSEN: Sure.

JUAREZ: --as far as revenue that the schools may have been receiving in the past, versus making a change like this, and did it decline? Because that's really one of my concerns, is what is the true impact on the fiscal side when we have less students attending because they can't afford the full tuition rate? And, you know, for sure, I think that it's always better for us to have an educated, you know, population in our state, and for anywhere in the world, as far as that goes.

ANDERSEN: I agree.

JUAREZ: It's always better to have an educated population. So if you could get some statistics on that, I would appreciate it.

ANDERSEN: Sure. We can do the research. What I would caution is that when you look at these different states, certainly Texas is not like Florida and Kentucky is not like Oklahoma. So there's going to be some demographic differences. There may be trends that, that would be revealed. I don't know. But you'd-- I think we'd have to have some caution to make sure that we have the-- a like demographic. Does that make sense?

JUAREZ: Yeah. I understand your point. Thank you.

ANDERSEN: Sure.

HUGHES: OK. Thank you, Senator Juarez. Senator Lonowski.

LONOWSKI: Thank you, Vice Chair Hughes. Thank you, Senator Andersen, for being here. Does the university have a way to check on someone's status? So if a Grand Island-- if a, if a illegal immigrant has lived in Grand Island for 10 years and, and they're sending their, their kid to college now, and they put their residence down as Grand Island and their high school as Grand Island Senior High School, and that's all

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

factual, is there a way for the university to say, yeah, but we don't have this other information, or do they collect that data? Do you know?

ANDERSEN: That's a great question. And I was just talking to a University of Nebraska representative in the hallway before coming in here to the hearing. And we talked about there's a couple of different ways that they could do it, but they would have to be refined, as far as database access and things like that. So there's, there's ways to try and do it, specifically to reduce the fiscal note and make it more factually sound.

LONOWSKI: OK. Thank you.

HUGHES: Other questions? Oh, Senator Meyer, please.

G. MEYER: Thank you, Senator Hughes. It says-- thank you for coming in, by the way-- UNL will no longer be required. Will they-- do they intend to continue this program of their own volition, voluntarily?

ANDERSEN: Yes. They were, they were never required to, to do that.

G. MEYER: What's habitually present?

ANDERSEN: What is it with?

G. MEYER: Habitually pre-- present. The, the language also eliminates the requirement of in-state tuition for individuals who are habitually present in the state and graduate from a Nebraska high school.

ANDERSEN: Yeah. I don't know. I, I saw the same thing, and I'd have to ask the University of Nebraska folks what they meant by that.

G. MEYER: I, I just thought that was interesting--

ANDERSEN: It's an interesting term.

G. MEYER: --lumped in along with the homeschool students and the DACA. So. Yeah. Thank you. So, thank you.

HUGHES: Thank you, Senator Meyer. Other questions? OK. Thank you for your time. And then, I believe we will now have Senator Murman open on LB1061.

MURMAN: Good afternoon, Vice Chair Hughes and members of the Education Committee. My name is Dave Murman, D-a-v-e M-u-r-m-a-n, representing

Nebraska's 38th District. Today, I have the opportunity to introduce LB1061, which seeks to correct a mistake this Legislature made in years past. Before I begin, I will note, Senator Andersen brought a very similar bill, as you just heard, LB870. After some discussion, I plan to support his legislation. And while I would have withdrawn my own bill to put my full support behind his, it would have required a suspension of the rules to modify the hearing agenda to do so. As a result, I'll simply use this opportunity to speak on this issue, with a note that Senator Andersen's LB870 has my vote. In 2006, the Legislature passed a bill to allow for in-state tuition for illegal aliens. Then-Governor Heineman wisely vetoed the bill, pointing out that it was bad policy and likely violated federal law. He was right then, and he is still right today. In national political conversations, perhaps right now, no topic is bigger than addressing immigration, with more and more Americans demanding laws that prioritize legal American citizens first. In fact, it is likely because of the public's opinion on this topic that today, President Trump is back in the White House. In light of these conversations, I think it's time to reexamine that law and repeal this 20-year-old mistake. Very simply, LB1061 and Senator Andersen's LB870 repeals the 2006 law so that illegal aliens reside-- residing in Nebraska are not eligible for the taxpayer-subsidized, in-state tuition benefits. But this isn't just about a growing public opinion, it is also about legality. Nebraska cannot grant in-state tuition to allow aliens not lawfully present in the United States unless we offer in-state tuition to all citizens or nationals of the United States. In other words, we can't charge non-subsidized tuition to legally-residing students from Texas, Kansas, or any other state if we are giving special benefits to non-legally residing students here in Nebraska. But don't take my word for it. In Texas, they have a very similar law to allow illegal aliens to receive in-state tuition if they meet certain criteria, closely mirroring Nebraska's. This resulted in the U.S. Department of Justice suing the state of Texas. U. S. Attorney General Pam Bondi wrote: under federal law, schools cannot provide benefits to illegal aliens that do not-- that they do not provide to U.S. citizens. A U.S. District Court agreed with the Attorney General's assessment and ruled the law unconstitutional, issuing a permanent injunction against its application. As a result, today, no state tax dollars are going to subsidize the tuition of illegal aliens in the state of Texas. The same situation could happen here in Nebraska. And what happens then? Nebraska, and more importantly, the Nebraska taxpayer, is dragged through unnecessary legal costs to litigate what other courts have already found to be unconstitutional. Some might say, well, this law

has been on the books for years without a problem. Why change it? To them, I would point out that the Nebraska law-- or the Texas law had been in the books since 2001. The federal government may move slowly, but I wouldn't count on-- count out that they may very well take a look here at Nebraska. Secondly, the national conversation has changed. When Governor Heineman's veto was overridden in 2006, it received the bare minimum amount of votes needed to do so, exactly 30. Since then, Americans have grown louder and louder against this sort of thing. A 2024 Pew Research poll shows that 78% of Americans believe immigrants living in the U.S. illegally should not be eligible for public assistance provided by state and local governments. The majority of Republicans, Democrats, and Independents all agreed. And let's be clear, in-state tuition is given at a significantly subsidized rate at the assistance of the public. With that, I propose we send LB870 out of committee and see where the body stands today. Thank you, and I'm happy to answer any questions.

HUGHES: Thank you, Senator Murman. Do we have questions for-- Senator Conrad?

CONRAD: Thank you. Thank you, Senator. Thank you Senator Murman. Good to see you, as always. I, I do just want to, again, make sure that we're accurate in the hearing as we're building the record, because I know there's a lot of complexities with federal law and state law, and immigration law itself is incredibly complex. It's actually one of the few specialties they recognize in legal practice. It's not like every, every lawyer under the sun can just jump into an immigration case because of the, the complexities of it. But I, I-- you noted--

MURMAN: I'll try and explain it then.

CONRAD: Well, OK, all right, good. Then we'll get our--

MURMAN: No, no. Go ahead.

CONRAD: Maybe I can get a CLE for it. But at the end, you did, you did note-- and I think perhaps there was a conflation there. When we talk about public assistance, generally we're talking about things like food stamps, and childcare subsidy, maybe housing assistance, Section 8, maybe Medicaid benefits, those kinds of programs. Safety net programs, work support programs are, are usually what we mean when we, we talk public assistance. And, and again, I think the, the legal term of art and precision matters there. Is, is that your understand-- we

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Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

usually don't talk about in-state tuition as public assistance. I don't, I don't know if you want to clarify that or--

MURMAN: Is, is that wording in the bill? I guess I'm not exactly sure, but.

CONRAD: Yeah, I was just going off your opening comments--

MURMAN: OK.

CONRAD: --when you were citing polling, in regards to public assistance

MURMAN: Well, public schools are, of course, paid for by the public. So it is a taxpayer-funded benefit. So I don't know about the fine-tuning of what, what is and what isn't public assistance, but it is paid for by the taxpayers. So it's a public program.

CONRAD: Right. But I-- yeah. There's no doubt public schools are paid for with public resources. Yes. We agree on that point. But my, my question there is, I, I, I think it's unusual to talk about in-state tuition or even public schools as public assistance. That, that usually has a, a different set of meanings. But I, I do just want to clarify that, because the polling that you cited, I think, relates to a whole separate area of public opinion in regards to public benefits, public assistance programs. I'm, I'm not sure it's precisely related to how the public feels about letting Dreamers, who we've educated their whole lives, who were brought here through no fault of their own, access in-state tuition after graduating from our high schools. So would you maybe clarify that for us in your closing, or if this bill does move forward? I'd appreciate that.

MURMAN: Well, I'd have to go back and--

CONRAD: That's OK.

MURMAN: --and check the exact wording I used.

CONRAD: OK.

MURMAN: But, of course, public schools, public education is almost totally funded by taxpayers so--

CONRAD: That's true.

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Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

MURMAN: That's-- it's a responsibility of the taxpayer to support those.

CONRAD: OK.

MURMAN: And it's an expense to the taxpayer, whoever goes through public school, public education.

CONRAD: OK. And I guess just the similar question to Senator Andersen, if-- and you were a little bit clearer perhaps in your intent in bringing the legislation. But if there is no fiscal savings documented from these measures moving forward, would you ask that the committee hold them?

MURMAN: Well, I, I would think there would have to be a-- an expense for-- I know that in-state tuition does not fully cover the cost of tuition in our colleges. So, to not-- even if we have less students, and I'm, I'm not even sure that would be true, but if that was true, if in-state tuition is not fully covering the cost, that would have to be a savings to the state to have students either pay full tuition or even not be there.

CONRAD: OK. And then just the last question, you heard me talk with Senator Andersen about there's a lot of Nebraska neighbors that are here that aren't citizens but have legal protection and status, trafficking victims, crime victims, those who have been granted asylum or refugee status because of turmoil in their home countries. Is your intent to limit access to in-state tuition for those Nebraska neighbors as well, or are you solely focused on Dreamers and DACA recipients?

MURMAN: No, only those that are here illegally, is what the bill focuses on.

CONRAD: OK, but what does that mean, is my question to you.

MURMAN: Well, the, the--

CONRAD: Because that's not clear.

MURMAN: --people you mentioned are not-- I mean, they are legal. So even though they may not be citizens, they are legal. So no, I'm only focused on those that are-- don't have legal status.

CONRAD: Got you. Thank you so much. Thank you.

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Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

HUGHES: OK. Thank you. Other questions? Senator Hunt.

HUNT: Thank you. I was kind of staying off of this topic, but one thing I wanted to note as we talk about: oh, I just care about the illegal ones. I, I don't want-- I think everyone should get an education, but I just don't want the illegals to be taking resources from real Americans or something like that. But noting that type of attitude in the context of what's happening in the country right now, where we see, in cities around the country-- Minneapolis most visibly right now, but in many cities around this country-- in my city in this country, people who do have legal status, who do have asylum, who do have TPS, who are Dreamers, who are here the right way, quote unquote, are still getting caught up in these dragnets. And so, as they are in the McCook facility, or El Paso, or getting shipped to El Salvador, or whatever, in these prisons, leaders in our country can say, well, they weren't here legally. So the definition of what's legal is very ambiguous at this time right now, in our country. And so that's something, on the record, that needs to be clear, as we discuss any kind of policy change that affects the immigrant and migrant community. Because, you know, what's illegal to somebody seems to be a moving target, and that's important politically. But some of your answers to Senator Conrad made me wonder, for, for bigger-picture context of your intentions with this legislation, Chair Murman. Do you believe that any public-- any, any public funds should be used for education of undocumented youth? Because I thought I heard you say something that, that-- about that.

MURMAN: I don't know the exact definition, I guess, of undocumented youth. As Senator Conrad referenced, it's complicated as to immigration information. But my intention is-- we've got a broken immigration system, of course, and it's-- that's a lot of the reason that we have-- or the whole reason, probably, that we have those problems that you're referring to, right now, in our country. But I do think that to get in-state tuition, we, we need to provide that only to students that are here legally, not to those that are here illegally. And, and it's unfortunate, but that's a result of our broken immigration system.

HUNT: Do you, do you know who's here legally? What is a legal resident to you?

MURMAN: Well, citizens definitely are here legally.

HUNT: That's one.

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Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

MURMAN: And then, there are other subgroups that also have legal status that may not be citizens. Senator Conrad mentioned several. So I'm, I'm only concerned about those that are not here-- that are not here legally.

HUNT: OK. Maybe that would be good to clarify with an amendment or something like that, but food for thought for later. So, thank you.

HUGHES: Thank you, Senator Hunt. Senator Lonowski.

LONOWSKI: Thank you, Vice Chair Hughes. Thank you, Senator Murman. I'm, I'm going to take a little different look here. And I'm looking at the-- what it says if a person is serving in the military, in the Army National Guard. But in order to do that, they would have to be on a visa or on a work permit. Is that correct?

MURMAN: I think so. You would be more familiar with that than I would be, but yeah, I think so.

LONOWSKI: Yeah, I know when we were in Afghanistan, we did a legalization process for 78 people that were all mostly Hispanic, but they were all on a visa or a work-study, or were from one of our commonwealths or whatever. But it was, I, I guess, an avenue for them to get their, to get their citizenship.

MURMAN: Well, they would be here legally, if I understand what you're saying.

LONOWSKI: So yeah. So, so it doesn't really apply, because then they wouldn't be able to join the military, so. All right. Thank you.

HUGHES: Thank you, Senator Lonowski. Senator Meyer.

G. MEYER: Thank you, Vice Chair. And I probably was remiss in not asking Senator Andersen the same thing. And maybe it's going to come from a testifier behind me. Do you have any idea how many this affects in the UNL System? How many students in a dollar amount? Is there, is there some way to quantify that?

MURMAN: No, that's a great question, but I hope someone behind me will be able to answer it.

G. MEYER: I didn't want to put you on the spot. I assumed you did not have that. But I think that's an important question, you know, as we're talking about--

MURMAN: It is.

G. MEYER: --the budget situation we're in, and, and whether that we need to balance the budget on the backs of certain individuals, but I think just having an idea of what those numbers actually are would be important.

HUGHES: Thank you, Senator Meyer. Anybody else? Yep, Senator Conrad.

CONRAD: Thank you, Vice-Chair. Thank you, Senator Murman. Just wanted to follow up on a couple of other, other threads here. One, I just want to note for the record that the sen-- the senators pushing these measures didn't lift a finger to stop budget cuts at the University of Nebraska when we were working through budget deliberations, so to now claim that it's about saving money at the university is curious, I think, at best. I also wanted to get your reaction to-- there's been a lot of discussion and there is a case moving through the courts that President Trump is seeking to end what's commonly known as birthright citizenship, which has been the legal standard under our Constitution for a very, very long time. Is your-- have you contemplated if that change were to be upheld by the courts, what that would mean for U.S. citizens that are here now, that were granted citizenship by, by virtue of their, of their birth?

MURMAN: Well, the first part of your question, I've always supported the university. We have to make difficult decisions. So.

CONRAD: I know, I know you have, in-- with your words. I, I do. Equivalence to the record in terms of legislative votes, from a budgetary perspective, but I know you are a proud graduate.

MURMAN: I'm fiscally conservative, so we have to make difficult decisions, but I totally support the university. I'm, I'm a graduate of the university.

CONRAD: I know, yes.

MURMAN: My daughter is, several extended family members, so.

CONRAD: Yes.

MURMAN: But the second part of your question, I, I know that's in the courts right now, so it just depends on what the courts decide. I think birthright citizenship has always been-- that's something that's been on the books for a long--

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Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

CONRAD: Yeah.

MURMAN: --for many decades.

CONRAD: Yeah.

MURMAN: So it's in, it's in the courts. Whatever the courts would decide would-- I mean, I'd agree with that.

CONRAD: OK. But you, you do understand that it is because of these legal complexities the, the question of citizenship is in flux and a moving target, so it may be premature to move forward with a measure like this, considering that decision could impact countless American citizens and, and, and Nebraska residents and Nebraska neighbors that would lose an opportunity to access higher education if, if that legal understanding shifted?

MURMAN: Yeah, we've, we've got a broken immigration system.

CONRAD: That part we agree on.

MURMAN: And--

CONRAD: Yes.

MURMAN: We're, we're trying to fix problems that have been exacerbated in recent years. And it's unfortunate that we go so long without getting it fixed. And I know it, it hurts families and, and individuals, young people, and that's unfortunate. But at the same time, we've got to be responsible to our taxpayers, also. And we can't discriminate against Amer-- citizens of the state of Nebraska at the expense of-- at-- their expense at people that aren't here legally. So.

CONRAD: OK.

MURMAN: It's, it's too bad, but that's--

CONRAD: Yeah, I'm hoping that perhaps if there's no fiscal savings here and there's a lot of legal questions in flux, it just seems premature to move this forward. But I look forward to working with you, maybe Senator Andersen and others, so that we could call on our congressional delegation to pass, finally, overdue comprehensive immigration reform that would benefit business and family and ag, and has been called for by human rights groups and faith groups. That

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

seems to be, maybe, a better remedy than, than targeting young people who are trying to, to get a better education, so.

MURMAN: Well, I'm, I'm not targeting young people, but I am responsive to the taxpayers of Nebraska. And I totally agree with you. We need to fix our immigration system.

CONRAD: Thank you. Thank you, Senator. Thank you.

HUGHES: Thank you, Senator Conrad, and Senator Juarez.

JUAREZ: Senator Murman, I wanted to ask you, do you think that people who are in this state who are currently undocumented don't pay any taxes here?

MURMAN: No, most do pay taxes.

JUAREZ: OK, so then--

MURMAN: I've, I've employed--

JUAREZ: If they pay taxes--

MURMAN: --even on my farm, and they-- everybody paid taxes, I, I think they're here legally. I know you-- we're, we're supposed to ask for, I forget the documentation now. 10--

CONRAD: 979, or something [INAUDIBLE].

MURMAN: Yeah, It had a 9 in it. I know that. So I assumed they were legal. But if not, they did pay taxes.

JUAREZ: Yes. They pay taxes quite often, I bet, in a month's time. Just like when you and I-- if you just think about all of the economic aspects of someone who is undocumented in this state, I bet that they will easily make up this tuition difference that they may be going to school for, for 4 years. You know, maybe we should think of a system in the state, where-- since it might take a long time to get all of the undocumented people out of the country. If that ends up being the long-term goal, maybe we should give them a card so everywhere they go, they don't have to pay state taxes. Maybe, maybe we should develop a system like that in the meantime, that they not pay any state taxes at all, so that way, they're not benefiting the state if they can't get the benefit of in-state tuition. It's just an idea I'd like you to think about. Think about the student who's driving a car, going to

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

school. They pay tax when they go and fill up their gas tank. They pay tax when they got their automobile. They pay a lot of taxes. They don't get away from not paying taxes in a lot of ways in this state. And it's just an idea I'd like you to think about. Thank you.

MURMAN: Well, most, whether they're legal or not, work for an employer that does withhold taxes. So--

JUAREZ: Yes. That's right.

MURMAN: I do agree. They almost all pay taxes. And no, I, I support anyone that's here in this country to work. But we just need to fix our immigration system and be responsible to the taxpayer, also, and keeping fairness between citizens and noncitizens.

JUAREZ: I just want you to remember that they are taxpayers, too. That's what I want you to remember. Thank you.

MURMAN: I totally agree.

JUAREZ: Thank you.

HUGHES: Thank you, Senator Juarez. Other questions? OK. Thank you. And now, we will have our first proponent. And we're-- you know, this is for both LB870 and LB1061. So, so just going forward, if you could say your testimony is for one of the bills or both of the bills, like, just to be clear.

DOUG KAGAN: All right.

HUGHES: Thank you. Go ahead.

DOUG KAGAN: Good afternoon. Doug Kagan, D-o-u-g K-a-g-a-n, Omaha, representing Nebraska Taxpayers for Freedom, in favor of LB870. The federal statute prohibits states from granting postsecondary education benefits on the basis of residence to illegal aliens, unless the same benefit is also available to all U.S. citizens, regardless of residency. Therefore, our current offer of in-state tuition to illegal aliens violates federal law, because Nebraska does not offer in-state tuition to residents of other states. Failing to repeal LB239 will incur the wrath of the Trump Department of Justice on our state like that already targeting other states. This wrath will include lawsuits, suspended or terminated federal funding for failure to comply with federal immigration policies, possibly an end to federal student loans, and federal civil rights investigations. The Trump

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

Administration aims to make compliance with federal immigration law a material condition for federal contracts and grants, exposing Nebraska institutions to False Claims Act litigation, which can result in triple damages. The administration has directed the Justice Department, and Department of Homeland Security to review all federal contracts, grants, and agreements with educational institutions that provide service to illegal aliens. Nebraska taxpayers would pay dearly to counter this federal onslaught. Maintaining the present situation places financial strain on our university system and resources already under financial pressure, potentially leading to higher tuition costs for legal residents or reduced educational quality for all students. Sustaining this benefit is a magnet for further illegal immigration into Nebraska. With millions of student borrowers unable to repay their student loan debts, it is insulting for our university system to offer scholarships to illegals. This benefit is unfair to legal U.S. citizen residents who must pay out-of-state tuition costs. LB239 is compelling taxpaying Nebraska parents, some of whom cannot afford to pay college tuition, to subsidize the education of illegal aliens through their taxes. Providing preferential financial aid to illegal aliens to fill, fill college admission slots undermines the goal of giving every Nebraskan an opportunity to pursue a higher education. This hefty discount, granted regardless of legal status, while U.S. citizen students, including children of Nebraska military families not currently stationed in Nebraska or children with parents who recently moved to the state but not yet residents, must pay higher rates. Students who come here legally through international entrance programs must pay full out of state or international tuition rates. These international students who follow the proper visa process and bring valuable academic backgrounds with them face financial hurdles yet receive none of the tuition breaks or state-funded aid available to students residing here illegally. Thank you.

HUGHES: Thank you for your testimony, Mr. Kagan. Questions? No? OK. Thank you so much.

DOUG KAGAN: OK.

HUGHES: Next proponent, please. OK. We will start with opponent. And again, if you want to say if you're talking on both bills or just one in particular, that would be great.

LINA STOVER: Both bills.

HUGHES: OK.

LINA STOVER: FYI. My name is Lina T. Stover, L-i-n-a S-t-o-v-e-r. I'm a sociologist whose research has focused on access to higher education, and I spent 15 years of my career working in admissions. My doctoral research, Latino Students Maneuvering Through the College Admissions and Retention Systems, examines how students navigate college admissions and retention systems. This work gives me a strong scholarly foundation to explain why LB870 and LB1061 will harm Nebraska's long-term economic and workforce development. Research consistently shows that Latino students and students from low-income families often have fewer resources and limited access to college guidance and support networks. When students also face uncertain or stigmatized legal status, which I would argue all immigrants are feeling that stigmatized status right now, these barriers become even more severe. They encounter restricted access to financial aid, fear discrimination, and other structural obstacles that make college enrollment and persistence more difficult. These challenges are created by policy, not by lack of ability, motivation, or talent. These bills also send a harmful message to middle school students from immigrant families that they are not welcomed or valued in our education system. When students believe college is unattainable because of cost, they're more likely to disengage from school and leave the college prep track. This limits their options in years to come. Nebraska is experiencing population decline and continuing brain drain. We're losing young, educated residents to neighborhood states and beyond. If we're serious about strengthening our workforce, tax base, and rural and urban communities, we must adopt policies that encourage talented students to stay, graduate, and contribute here. In-state tuition is one of the most effective recruitment and retention tools available, so much so that Nebraska offers in-state tuition rates to our neighboring states like Iowa and South Dakota. This is a move-- this Legislature is a move-- proposed legislation is a move in the opposite direction. They make higher education less accessible to students who have grown up in our communities, attended our schools, and are already considering Nebraska their home. Limiting affordable access will increase their likelihood that they will leave the state and never reach, reach their full economic potential. From an economic, educational, and workforce perspective, these bills are short-sighted. Nebraska cannot afford to exclude motivated, high-achieving students from higher education. I urge you to oppose LB870 and LB1061, and instead, support policies that strengthen our talent pipeline and our state's future. Thank you.

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Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

HUGHES: Thank you. Thanks for coming in, Ms. Stover. Questions?
Senator Lonowski.

LONOWSKI: Thank you, Vice Chair. Thank you for your testimony. Do you have a number of-- like an approximate number of how many kids this affects at UNL, or?

LINA STOVER: So let me, let me put it in, in this way. There's only 2 million people in Nebraska, so we're not talking about millions of people.

LONOWSKI: Obviously. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

LINA STOVER: Obviously, right? And the, the way that the program works is that it-- as long as a student graduates from a Nebraska high school and has been in the school for 3 years-- so they have to be here in the state for a while-- then they're able to pay in-state tuition like any other Nebraska high school graduate. Because the admissions process does not ask for citizenship status, it's all about a guess. But we know that it's a small number of people that are-- that, that fall in this category. That said, also, the small number of people that anecdotally, I have met, are also the small number of people that have gained status after graduating from college and then they're ready to work-- to go into the workforce, right? They're the, they're the doctors, the lawyers, that were in between, fell in love, and here we are. It's a small number.

LONOWSKI: Thank you.

HUGHES: So I just have a question, just kind of what you just went through. So it's-- you've lived here in the state of Nebraska 3 years, and you graduated from a Nebraska high school. So we've got-- it-- it's transplants from other countries, like at Kawasaki, or we've got Agrifac, from Netherlands, in Seward. Those families are here working, and they bring their kids. That applies to them, as well, I'm assuming.

LINA STOVER: Correct.

HUGHES: So I could be a, I could be a German family. I've lived in Nebraska and worked, you know, for whatever company for 3 years, my kids graduate from whatever high school, they could go there, too.

LINA STOVER: Correct.

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

HUGHES: So that would affect those guys, as well. OK. Thank you. Other questions?

LINA STOVER: Thank you.

HUGHES: No? OK. Thank you so much. Next opponent. It was Lina, L-i-n-a Stover. Go ahead.

LUCIA PEDROZA-ESTRADA: Good afternoon, members of the Education Committee. Can you hear me well? I'm kind of soft-spoken.

CONRAD: Been quiet all day, I feel like. Maybe that's just me.

LUCIA PEDROZA-ESTRADA: My name is Lucia Pedroza-Estrada, and I'm here to testify in opposition of LB870 and LB1061.

HUGHES: That's better.

LUCIA PEDROZA-ESTRADA: Nebraska leaders--

HUGHES: Spell-- go ahead and-- you got to spell your first and last name.

LUCIA PEDROZA-ESTRADA: OK. First name is L-u-c-i-a, last name, P-e-d-r-o-z-a-E-s-t-r-a-d-a. Do I start?

HUGHES: Yeah. Go ahead.

LUCIA PEDROZA-ESTRADA: Nebraska leaders frequently warn about brain drain and the urgent need to retain young talent. LB870 and LB1061 move us in the opposite direction by making college more expensive and less accessible to students who grew up in Nebraska and graduated from Nebraska high schools. I'm not speaking of hypothetical people. Part of my work is coordinating a scholarship program that has been active for the past 13 years, and has awarded hundreds of thousands of dollars in scholarships to immigrant students who are not eligible for FAFSA. We have personally watched these young, hardworking students complete degrees and workforce credentials while waiting, often for many years, for a backlogged, punitive, and increasingly hostile immigration system to decide their futures. Today's context matters. Immigration enforcement is more aggressive, more punitive, and in many cases, violent. Families are being separated. People are being detained for minor technical issues. In this environment, making access to education directly connected to immigration status or future petitions does not just create paperwork hurdles or administrative

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

hurdles. It creates fear. Despite that fear, these students are doing exactly what we're asking young people to do. They're staying in school. They're gaining skills. They're preparing to contribute and paying taxes. When they finally obtain legal status, they're immediately work-ready and they stay right here in Nebraska in the communities that raised them. Across Nebraska, especially in small towns, employers know immigrant workers are essential to keeping businesses open and local economies alive. Penalizing students who use a dangerous and uncertain waiting period to become educated and employable is short-sighted and harmful. You cannot claim to want to retain Nebraska talent while pushing educated, work-ready young people out. We're not protecting Nebraska's future. We're actively undermining it. Please reject LB870 and LB1061. Thank you.

HUGHES: OK. Thank you for coming in and, and your testimony. Questions for Ms. Pedroza-Estrada? OK. Thank you very mu-- oh, sorry. I'm sorry. Go ahead, Senator Conrad.

CONRAD: Thank you. Thank you. Good to see you again. I'm glad that you brought up a point because, I think, again, and not to belabor the point, but there is a lot of legal terms of art in immigration law, in this public policy. And I've had a chance to read through a lot of the comments in support of Senator Andersen and Senator Murman's bills, and then those that are opposed. And you touched upon it in your, your testimony, so I wanted to make sure to be clear about this for the record. But de-- a state having the ability to define who's eligible for in-state tuition is not a scholarship, is not a public benefits program. It's, it's an important legal and policy nuance there, but I, I think that you lifted up, from your experience, that many undocumented youth or people who even are here legally, who have status but who are not citizens, are not eligible for scholarships and other public benefits. Do you want to help us tease that out or learn a little bit more about that, perhaps?

LUCIA PEDROZA-ESTRADA: Yes, and I, I personally graduated 20 years ago, when this first change happened, so even back then I wasn't eligible for FAFSA. Since then, I don't think immigrants are eligible for FAFSA, but people still want to, you know, pursue their education, people that I know personally. But for the actual, you know, legal definition of what you're asking, I'm sure there's somebody behind me--

CONRAD: Yes. Very good.

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Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

LUCIA PEDROZA-ESTRADA: --that's going to define that. So, yes. FAFSA is not accessible to undocumented immigrants or immigrants with-- who are not citizens, I believe. I mean, maybe for residents. I'm not really sure, actually. So, yeah.

CONRAD: No, that's OK. And I know it-- it's definitely complex, but I know, you know, there's just been so much in our public dialogue about undocumented people being able to access public benefits programs. And we know that's-- there's already restrictions there and that's not really the case, and, and I see perhaps, some of that same misinformation or misunderstanding present in this bill. And I just-- I wanted to make sure to at least put a note down in the record so that we could, could all work through that together.

LUCIA PEDROZA-ESTRADA: Thank you.

CONRAD: Thank you.

HUGHES: Thank you. Thank you, Senator Conrad. Other questions? Oh, she's gone. All right. Next opponent. Go ahead.

RUBY MENDEZ LOPEZ: OK. Thank you. Good afternoon. My name is Ruby Mendez Lopez, spelled R-u-b-y M-e-n-d-e-z L-o-p-e-z, and I am with the Immigrants and Communities Program at Nebraska Appleseed. Nebraska Appleseed is a statewide nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to justice and opportunity for all Nebraskans. Today we are testifying in opposition of both LB870 and LB1061. As the committee knows, both of these bills would repeal Nebraska's successful in-state tuition policy of 20 years, designed to ensure that longtime community-- longtime Nebraska community members who grow up in local communities were able to attend college in Nebraska. Access to college in Nebraska is vital to ensure people can pursue an education that develops their talents and builds a career that supports not just a person's family, but also Nebraska and its economy as a whole. Immigrant Nebraskans who have accessed college before because of Nebraska's in-state tuition policy make valuable contributions to our state fields-- to our state in fields like health care, business, education, agriculture, social services, and many more. For years, we have heard firsthand from community members about how Nebraska's in-state tuition policy provides meaningful access to education, and from employers about talented employees giving back to their Nebraska communities. As just one example, I-- one Nebraskan said the following: I graduated from high school as a DACA recipient and encountered barriers at every step on my path to college, but I persevered. Because I did not qualify for

financial aid, I worked full-time to pay for my education. The most critical support I had was this policy, which allowed me to pay in-state tuition like my peers. I later became a high school teacher to help my students navigate the same challenges. I urge you to not create yet another barrier to college access for Nebraska students. Before I end, I just want to make 2 quick points. First, I am not an attorney, but our team did look at the relevant federal statute, and in-state tuition is not a kind of benefit that supports-- that supporters of these bills purport it to be. Under federal law, benefit refers to payments or assistance. In other words, it refers to money given by a college to students. Tuition is essentially the opposite of that. It refers to the money given by students to a college. So definitionally, tuition is not subject to limitation 8 USC 1623, and does not apply. These in-state tuition rules are not controversial. They were enacted in 2006 with strong bipartisan support that overcame a gube-- gubernatorial veto. The Legislature also declined to repeal these rules or even pass this proposal out of committee in 2011. They also reflect the fact that whatever the federal government stance might be on immigration in the moment, maintaining common sense, workable immigration laws that value people, families, and education is broadly supported in Nebraska. The current policy is one that supports Nebraska youth, our future workforce, and Nebraska's colleges and universities. Thank you for your time, and we would ask that this committee not advance either LB870 or LB1061. And also included in the sheets I handed out was a letter from former Senator DiAnna Schimek. She tried to submit a comment online, but we're not 100% sure it went through. So we wanted to make sure you guys had it.

HUGHES: Got it. Thank you for coming in, Ms. Mendez Lopez.

RUBY MENDEZ LOPEZ: Yes.

HUGHES: Questions for her? Yeah. Go ahead, Senator Conrad.

CONRAD: Thank you, Senator. Thank you, Ruby. Good to see you, again. We had the opportunity to work together years ago, so it's, it's nice to see you. I, I was just wondering if-- and I know you're not an immigration lawyer and you work for an advocacy group, but I know you also have really deep community roots. Can you maybe just, from a general perspective or a layperson's perspective, help the committee understand that sometimes, Nebraska neighbors have a pathway to citizenship. And to work through the current broken immigration system with pretty lengthy backlogs, et cetera, it takes a while to sort out the law there. And while those determinations are pending and being

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Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

made, this does allow for the person to continue their education, if in fact, they end up having a pathway to citizenship.

RUBY MENDEZ LOPEZ: Yeah.

CONRAD: Could you just talk generally about how some of that works?

RUBY MENDEZ LOPEZ: Yeah. And, and like I said, I'm not an attorney.

CONRAD: Yes. No, that's OK.

RUBY MENDEZ LOPEZ: But I think, I think 2 things can be true. There are some folks who have statuses that are a pathway to citizenship. For example, if we have-- if you were a victim of a crime, you first have to get what's known as a U or T visa, and then you eventually have to wait, I think on average it's 20 years to then qualify to be a citizen. So you have to go through a bunch of different statuses and prove that this happened to you. And I think the most common actual situation is that there is no pathway to citizenship for any folks. There's no way to apply for an immigration status if you don't have a family member in the United States.

CONRAD: Right.

RUBY MENDEZ LOPEZ: And --yeah. It's-- yeah.

CONRAD: Yeah. Sorry. Just-- I was going to say, usually the 2 pathways are employment or family-related.

RUBY MENDEZ LOPEZ: Yeah.

CONRAD: And then there's all these other special visa categories.

RUBY MENDEZ LOPEZ: And then there's like 20-year backlogs for all of those.

CONRAD: Right. Right. Right. So there is actually--

RUBY MENDEZ LOPEZ: Yep, so there's a bunch of different ways, yeah. If you do have a pathway to citizenship, people wait on average like 20 years, I think, to get citizenship.

CONRAD: OK. And then-- sorry. I didn't mean to interrupt you.

RUBY MENDEZ LOPEZ: No, that's totally fine.

CONRAD: I was just going to jump in there. And then the other piece I, I just wanted to either look for your testimony or if there's others coming later, too. We-- a lot of times, we think about DACA recipients and Dreamers as, as really, really young people, right? And that is the case, in some instances. Thank you so much for joining us. And I think there's-- you know, I remember when the Legislature was debating Senator Schimek's bill, because I was a part of the process back then. And there was definitely, I think, a pretty significant amount of empathy and kind of a focus on human rights to recognize that little kids aren't responsible for their parents' decisions and their immigration status. They can't control that, as young people. So I, I, I remember, in addition to the educational and economic benefits that were part of the public policy debate there, that was a pretty clear through line for a lot of senators across the state and across the political spectrum. But, but I think the, the other piece today, now that we've had this policy on the book for over 20 years, is that there's DACA recipients who aren't little kids anymore, who matriculated through higher ed, who are working as doctors and lawyers and law enforcement, perhaps serving their country. So this, this really can apply, perhaps very broadly.

RUBY MENDEZ LOPEZ: Yeah. I think it's more common that we'll see older DACA recipients at this point, since they're not accepting any new applications. Most are of college age or older, at this point. There are some that are maybe a little bit younger. But I think, more commonly, they're in the workforce now, already contributing, using their degrees, and yeah, being a big part of Nebraska.

CONRAD: And then, just the very last question. You don't have to be an immigration lawyer on this one, but I want you to, to help share your experiences doing community organizing and outreach and education work, because this is an issue that I see reflected in the, the public comments that we have for, for both of these bills, on, on both sides of these bills. And Senator Hunt has noted this, as well. There's, there's really a, a very pitched, a very heightened sense of harm right now, because of political decisions and political changes. I mean, we're, we're kind of sitting here trying to act like everything's normal, right, having, having a hearing on the finer points of in-state tuition residency requirements. And every single person in this room and beyond is really grappling with understanding and trying to understand, you know, how American citizens are being shot down in the street under the guise of immigration enforcement. I know when I was knocking doors this fall and talking to citizens in my district, I met a, a family that had citizenship, came

here the right way, as people like to say, and they were afraid to leave their house for basic things-- doctor's appointments, sending the kids to school, going to the grocery store-- because they felt like they would be targeted because of the color of their skin. I know that the introducers of this measure are people who take seriously their role in this body in serving their constituents, but I think that we have to put a name on the fact that, you know, this is, this is really just another attack, I think, on immigrant neighbors in Nebraska and has very little, if anything, to do with, with budgetary savings. Do you want to talk about what you're hearing and seeing as--

RUBY MENDEZ LOPEZ: Yeah. I think--

CONRAD: --you're doing education and awareness?

RUBY MENDEZ LOPEZ: I think you did a great job of describing the 2 things we're seeing, which is fear and harm, right, and both kind of tied together. Harm being caused by our federal government, but also by folks who are-- yeah, who are trying to take away things that, that folks have had for-- also, are targeting folks who have lived here for years, decades, and also, fear that like anything could happen to me at any moment, because folks believe something that isn't true about me. If I am a citizen, no one, no one can tell that by the way I look, right? And I think this, this bill, in particular, is just one thing on top of many, many, many things that our folks are fearing. Folks just want to be able to live their lives like their neighbors do, right, and, and try and go and get groceries without fearing that someone might stop them and arrest them, even though they are citizens, because the way they look. So, yeah. I, I would love to see less harm caused to our neighbors, and be supportive of them during this time.

CONRAD: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

HUGHES: Yep. Thank you, Senator Conrad. Anybody else? Yep. Senator Lonowski.

LONOWSKI: Thank you, Vice Chair Hughes. Thank you for your testimony.

RUBY MENDEZ LOPEZ: Of course.

LONOWSKI: You should move to Hastings, Nebraska, because everyone's still living harmoniously. I have a question. Is there a middle ground here somewhere? You know, like, let's say you are offered in-state tuition, but you have to sign-- I don't know-- stay in the state for 4

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Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

years after that to, to work, to-- you know, is there any thought to that? And I guess I-- again, come back to military, as my tuition got paid, but I had to sign up for 6 years.

RUBY MENDEZ LOPEZ: Yeash. I think maybe the current law is a middle ground. The folks who, like DACA recipients who qualify for in-state tuition, have legal status in the United States, right, but just aren't citizens or residents. They don't qualify for any benefits, so they don't get FAFSA, they can't qualify for scholarships. I believe maybe we are at a middle ground with the current policy that exists.

LONOWSKI: If they have legal status, then they get in-state tuition. Correct?

RUBY MENDEZ LOPEZ: Yes.

LONOWSKI: OK. OK.

RUBY MENDEZ LOPEZ: Yes, they do. Yes. And that's what this bill is doing, right? Or the bill has done for 20 years.

LONOWSKI: And I, I thought I heard you or someone say that the wait time is 20 years to get through immigration?

RUBY MENDEZ LOPEZ: It can be. Longer, shorter sometimes, but more often than not, it can be 10-plus, 20 years. Yeah.

LONOWSKI: OK. Thank you.

RUBY MENDEZ LOPEZ: Yeah.

HUGHES: Other questions? Yes, Senator Juarez.

JUAREZ: I just wanted to make a comment that I think that Nebraska is like the most backlogged court in the country, as far as immigration goes, right?

RUBY MENDEZ LOPEZ: I don't know for sure. I'm sorry.

JUAREZ: Yeah, I think that it has the reputation of being towards the top for the most in backlog. I just wanted to add that. Thank you.

HUGHES: Other questions?

CONRAD: Thank you.

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

HUGHES: No? All right. Thank you.

RUBY MENDEZ LOPEZ: Thank you.

HUGHES: Thanks for your time. Next opponent. If you want to go ahead and get started, you sure can.

CRYSTAL GARCIA: OK. Greetings, representatives. My name is Crystal Garcia, C-r-y-s-t-a-l G-a-r-c-i-a. I have a Ph.D., and I'm a professor in the study of higher education at UNL, though my views are my own. Representatives, I'm here to speak to your sense of humanity, to vote against LB1061 and LB870. Children attending schools in our communities here in Nebraska are Nebraskans. It's our job to provide these children with the care and support that they need to thrive. And that includes ensuring all Nebraskan children have access to pursue higher education, should they choose to do so. These bills work against that aim. Representatives, are you aware that about 87% of first-time, full-time undergraduate students attending public institutions receive financial aid in some form to pay for their college experience? And from conversation now, I'm sure that you're also aware that undocumented students cannot access federal financial aid, including grants or loans. And in Nebraska, they also cannot access state financial aid. I depended on financial aid to get through college and cannot fathom how I would have graduated without it. Providing in-state tuition rates to these students is the only small way we have lessened their financial burden, and now these bills threaten to eliminate that one kindness. I wish we were here today discussing legislation to help people and improve the lives of Nebraskans. But instead, we're discussing ways to continue terrorizing our immigrant neighbors to ensure their children cannot access colleges and universities. Because, to be clear, documented or not, Nebraska residents pay taxes and contribute economically to our state and deserve access to this state benefit. The proposed bills do not in any way improve the lives of Nebraskans. It will also hurt Nebraska colleges and universities, as they will certainly lose students who will pursue education outside of Nebraska, and the critical revenue along with those students, should they be passed. Our colleges and universities' finances are precarious, as has been discussed today. They cannot afford to lose more students. As an educator, I will always stand against efforts to prevent others from accessing education. And as someone who teaches on the history of higher ed in the U.S., I'm also aware there were times when different groups of people were not permitted access to higher education. The reasons were never ethical. It was always to maintain control of and exploit those

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

people. Legislators made that happen, and now that's part of their legacy. Representatives, do not make keeping Nebraskans from higher education part of your legacy. Vote against LB1061 and LB870. Thank you.

HUGHES: Thank you for your testimony. Do we have questions for Ms. Garcia? Yes.

G. MEYER: Thank you, Chair. We've been at this a while, and my attention span isn't what it was when I was much, much younger. And so, perhaps we have plowed this field already. But how does UNL, how does UNL--thank you-- how does UNL determine if someone-- would they determine if someone was not here legally? It seemed like there was the, the, the protocol to ask or find out isn't really well defined.

CRYSTAL GARCIA: Yeah. As a faculty member, I'm not sure what the admissions process is for students, generally speaking, in terms of checking their legal status. I don't see that there would be a need to check their legal status. If students are established as residents of the state of Nebraska, then they would be privy to those in-state tuition benefits, just like we've kind of discussed today. I know the question has come up, kind of time again, of, you know, how many students are we talking about and what kind of significant-- significance does this make to colleges and universities? And what I have been kind of simmering on back here, is we don't know the numbers. But let's say that there were 10. In the whole state of Nebraska, there were 10 that were going to UNL. They're paying \$5,000 a year out-of-pocket, because they don't qualify for financial aid, right? We've already discussed that. That's-- if there were 10, \$50,000 that would be going to UNL in that given year-- that's a salary for a staff member. And 10 is quite low, if we're thinking about estimates. And so, I, I don't think that we should hinge our decisions on how much money students are making for the university, but it is a reality. If, if the university stands to lose students. Because if they're not going to get in-state tuition here, what would then not compel them to go to a different university? They're going to be paying out-of-state tuition elsewhere anyways. Why not choose to go to Iowa? Why not choose to go elsewhere? And so, I think that that's an important consideration, too.

G. MEYER: If they went out-of-state, though, they'd have to pay out-of-state tuition under the [INAUDIBLE].

CRYSTAL GARCIA: Absolutely, right? So if I'm paying out-of-state in Nebraska and the cost is the same-- or maybe out-of-state tuition might even be lesser at a different university in a different state, maybe I would pursue that route instead. The, the students who are pursuing education, either A, we're going to be stopping them from pursuing education at all because we're gonna cost them out, or B, we are going to force them out of our state. And when we educate people in our state, they're more likely to stay here. And don't we want highly educated folks who may be pursuing a route to, you know, residency more permanently? But wouldn't we like to retain that talent here? I'm a daughter of an immigrant. And I pursued my Ph.D., and I've dedicated my life to education and supporting other students. And so, it's generational as well. If we're keeping people who are pursuing higher education in Nebraska, they're going to contribute to us, their, their children, their children's children, and so on.

G. MEYER: I'm a great grandson of immigrants, also, so I think probably all, all of us-- most of us in this room have that same status. My question was, how do we determine who is and who isn't illegal? And, and I don't know if we've broached that, but anyway, I, I thank you for your, your time.

CRYSTAL GARCIA: Yeah, I mean, I don't know if you mean like if the universities are deciding on who are-- who isn't legal or illegal or.

G. MEYER: Well, you know, that seems to be the question here, who's illegal and who isn't, who qualifies, who doesn't. What-- what's the mechanism, what's the protocol to make that decision on who is and who isn't. And, and it doesn't appear that there is a clear-cut answer for that.

CRYSTAL GARCIA: No, I think that that burden probably would have fallen on those that proposed the amendment to the bill. The bill, or, or the, the, the law, as it stands, has a pretty clear-cut mechanism to determine who gets that residency status. So if you look at all of the text that has been, you know, struck through in the updated version that's being proposed now, all of those parameters would help us to determine who gets that in-state tuition. And again, like folks have said today, what we have been using for the past 2 decades has been working to support our communities. We're adding complexities to target people and it's just unnecessary and ill-defined, as you're pointing out now. Right.

G. MEYER: Thank you.

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

HUGHES: All right. Thank you, Senator Meyer. Other questions? We got no one on the right. So, OK. Thank you for--

CRYSTAL GARCIA: Thank you.

HUGHES: --your testimony. Appreciate it.

CRYSTAL GARCIA: Thank you for the stats.

HUGHES: Thanks for being a teacher at the university, too. OK. Next opponent.

ITZEL LOPEZ: Good afternoon. My name is Itzel Lopez, I-t-z-e-l L-o-p-e-z. I'm the chief executive officer of the Latino Economic Development Council, a business owner, and one of more than 3,000 DACA recipients that lives here in Nebraska. I am here today to oppose, oppose both of these bills, LB870 and LB1061. This-- specifically on LB870-- will repeal a higher education policy that has been in place and functioning effectively in Nebraska for more than 20 years, as you have heard. Current law allows students who graduate from Nebraska high schools and meet residency requirements to pay in-state tuition rates, regardless of immigration status. This new-- this policy does not create new benefits or provide financial aid, as you heard. It simply allows long-term Nebraska residents to be charged the same tuition rates as their peers. From a policy standpoint, repealing this law is counterproductive. Nebraska faces persistent workforce shortages across health care, education, skilled trades, agriculture, technology, et cetera. In-state tuition has been a proven tool to retain young talent educated in our K-12 system and ensures that students who already are part of our communities can complete postsecondary education and contribute to Nebraska's economy. Data consistently shows that higher educational attainment leads to higher earnings, increased tax contributions, and reduced reliance on public services. By increasing the cost of higher education for a specific group of Nebraska graduates, like these bills will, will do, it will decrease college enrollment and completion rates, ultimately shrinking, not strengthening our workforce pipeline. This policy also promotes fairness and administrative, administrative clarity. Students eligible for institution have already demonstrated long-term residence, academic completion in Nebraska high schools, and compliance with institutional requirements. Reversing this policy introduces uncertainty for colleges and universities, disrupts enrollment planning, and sends a message that Nebraska is willing to invest in students through high school but not-- but unwilling to see

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

that investment completion through-- investment through completion. As a business owner, I can also say Nebraska's economic competitive-- competitiveness depends on stable, educated workforce. Policies that restrict access to education undermine that goal and place our state at a disadvantage compared to others that are likely investing in talent retention. For those reasons, I urge you to oppose both of these bills and maintain Nebraska's longstanding, results-driven, in-state tuition policy. Preserving this law is not only a sound education policy, it's a sound workforce and economic policy for the state of Nebraska. Thank you.

HUGHES: Thank you, Ms. Lopez. Questions for her? No? OK.

ITZEL LOPEZ: Thank you.

HUGHES: Thank you for spending time with us today.

JUAREZ: Thank you for coming.

HUGHES: Next opponent.

LARRY BRADLEY: Hello.

HUGHES: Go ahead.

LARRY BRADLEY: My name is Dr. Larry Bradley, L-a-r-r-y B-r-a-d-l-e-y, and I'm at 6068 Country Club Oaks Place, Omaha, Nebraska, 68152. I'm going to oppose LB870 and LB1061. I have a few bullet points to read from the National Immigration Forum, and then I had a few things of my own ideas about why to oppose LB870. First of all, I've been an adjunct professor at University of Nebraska at Omaha for about 2 decades now, and I've been a post commander of the local veterans post-- former commander for 8 years. I'm a veteran. So we'll get into this a little bit. Dreamers serve in our military, contribute to our economy, and together with their families, make our nation a better place. Up to 2.3 million "undocumented"-- undocumented immigrants-- and I choose undocumented-- not to say illegal, not to say unlawful, but to say undocumented immigrants, who were brought to the U.S. as children, known as Dreamers, live in the US. These young people grew up and have lived in the U.S. for most of their lives, graduated high school, and are currently pursuing a bachelor's degree or higher education, enlisting in the military, or working jobs. Dreamers help the American economy. Young undocumented immigrants who currently have DACA contribute to their communities and the economy by working legally, paying their fair share of taxes, and building business that

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

hire American workers. Over the next 10 years, young, undocumented immigrants who currently have DACA will contribute an estimated \$43.4 billion to the GDP, \$60 billion in fiscal impact, and \$12.3 billion in taxes to Social Security and Medicare. Which leads me to this: that taxpayers of the state of Nebraska have already invested in these students' through-- K-12 education, and that's been sort of said before-- previous testifiers. So as a taxpayer, I'd like to see us-- you know, some return on this investment, and that this will help the economy of Nebraska, small-town Nebraska GDP, small-town, mid-town, mid-level town, and metropolitan cities. Moving to another bullet point for me, is if the students targeted by LB870 can join the military and they can take an oath to uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States, then they should be able to further move along and get in-state tuition. And I hope Senator Lonowski will be on top of all that if LB870 possibly makes it out of committee. But the language of that, because I know that many in the veterans community who served, it will have heartburn and negative feelings if-- you know, that they can join the military, but they-- then they cannot have in-state tuition. Real quick, the Fourteenth Amendment was mentioned. And it was made into law in 1868, right after the Civil War. So there are a lot of issues and situa-- situations from that. So I say that we should keep the Fourteenth Amendment because of the, the thousands and thousands of potential people we have, in case we have to draft in the military. It would be folly to remove the Fourteenth Amendment. Thank you.

HUGHES: OK. Thank you for your testimony, Mr. Bradley, coming in from Omaha. Questions for him? OK. Thank you.

LARRY BRADLEY: Thank you.

HUGHES: Appreciate it.

CONRAD: Good to see you.

JUAREZ: Thank you.

CONRAD: Thank you.

HUGHES: Next opponent. It's a race for the seat.

NATASHA NASEEM: A slow race.

HUGHES: Slow race, yeah. You can start whenever you're ready.

NATASHA NASEEM: OK. Thank you.

CONRAD: Thank you so much.

NATASHA NASEEM: Good afternoon. My name is Natasha Naseem, N-a-t-a-s-h-a N-a-s-e-e-m, and I am an immigration attorney with the Center for Immigrant and Refugee Advancement, or CIRA, here in opposition to LB870 and LB1061. Our organization serves immigrants and refugees across the state by providing free legal representation, social work services, and refugee resettlement. We frequently work with individuals from a very young age who are eligible for immigration relief or status and spend numerous years waiting for their applications to be processed by the federal government. At the same time, some of these young people are also managing cases before our immigration courts. The significant backlogs experienced by both USCIS and our immigration courts have been widely reported and changes over the past year like mass layoffs at USCIS offices in Lincoln and other closures nationally have only worsened these years-long delays. While these applications are processing, we see firsthand-- excuse me-- firsthand that our young clients carry on, growing up, attending school, participating in extracurriculars, much like any young person in our state. We see them growing into successful, capable individuals, despite the challenges they have experienced as immigrants. All the while, like senators have mentioned today, their families are paying taxes and contributing as well. Many of these young people also know that their immigration path may not result in a path to citizenship, like DACA recipients, requiring them to pay upwards of \$600 every 2 years just to retain their ability to work and safely remain in the only country they know. And they still keep moving forward. It is with this context that we oppose the proposed changes to in-state tuition. LB870 and LB1061 eliminate provisions for students with immigration applications pending, as well as those who have attended and graduated from Nebraska high schools to receive in-state tuition. It is unfair to treat young people who grow up in our state and attend our schools as outsiders, simply because the federal government hasn't prioritized processing their applications. There are plenty of barriers that exist outside of this legislation, in terms of college access for young immigrant Nebraskans, from changes in FAFSA to facing years-long delays in getting a Social Security number, despite having legal status. Allowing the immigrant youth we serve to continue to pay the same tuition rate as their peers is not a selective benefit or a scholarship. It is a fair policy to ensure that youth can continue their education, and our state can, state can retain their talents despite the challenges they are already

navigating in our immigration systems. For these reasons, we respectfully urge you to oppose these proposed changes, and thank you for your consideration. I'm also happy to take any questions. I know quite a few have come up so far, about immigration issues.

HUGHES: OK. Thank you for coming in, Ms. Naseem. And yes, you, you would be knowledgeable about this very subject. So hopefully, it'll be good questions. Questions? Yes, Senator Juarez.

JUAREZ: I just, I just have a simple question. Are all DACA students-- and adults now, I guess I should say-- have all of them been given a Social Security number?

NATASHA NASEEM: That's a really good question. So DACA does allow a person to get a Social Security number. DACA stands for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. So it's not an immigration status. It's deferred action, which means that immigration enforcement is deferring any action against that person, but the government doesn't consider it a status. So they are, in the meantime, offered the opportunity to get a work permit, to get their Social Security number, and they have to keep renewing that every 2 years, their work permit. So they do have a Social Security number. But we also have cases-- a, a status I wanted to bring up is called special immigrant juvenile status, which we see a lot of young children in our state receiving, because they are victims of abandonment or neglect in their home country and are now being placed with a guardian or a family member here. And that is considered a status, but it does not come with a Social Security number as it exists right now. So these are children attending our schools and, you know, growing up here, because it's in their best interest to stay here and not be returned to their home country, but they are not afforded a Social Security number until their status puts them in a place to be able to get a green card, which is many, many years down the line because of how long the processing is taking. So all to say, DACA recipients, yes, receive a Social Security number, but they don't have a pathway to a permanent status. Those-- especially our young Nebraskans that we're talking about, who will be growing up and, and entering high school age, currently, a lot of these kids are not in a situation where they have a Social Security number, despite having legal status. So there's complexities to this, and I just wanted to, to try to raise that as a comparison, especially as we're seeing people grow older and out of DACA-- you know, college age, sort of that, that demographic. There's, there's a lot of other complexities with the statuses that we see day-to-day, in our office,

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

that impact whether a person's going to have that Social Security card.

JUAREZ: So my next question is, because they're, they're in this deferred status, technically, if President Trump wanted them to all exit the country, he could do that because they don't have citizenship, because they've been waiting to try to get it, right?

NATASHA NASEEM: So deferred action can be revoked, and so that would mean that they are actionable. The immigration enforcement can be-- immigration laws can be enforced against them and they can be removed, so yes. Granted, when they are, are given that deferred action, when they've applied and received that, that relief, it lasts for 2 years. And unless they've committed a crime or something, it should stay in place, but we are seeing, across the country, stories coming up of people where that is not the case. There are people who are deaf, who are DACA recipients, who could not, you know, articulate that they have DACA, and that is what landed them in a detention facility. So there's nuances to all of this, but we're seeing it be respected less and less, because of the, the atmosphere that we're in.

JUAREZ: OK. Thank you.

NATASHA NASEEM: Yeah.

HUGHES: So I have a question. As part of our-- right now, the last 20 years, under Section (7), part (iv)-- I just wasn't aware of this. It says: "Provided to the state postsecondary educational institution an affidavit stating that he or she will file an application to become a permanent resident at the earliest opportunity he or she is eligible to do so." So any student getting that in-state tuition at our schools here in Nebraska submit an affidavit saying that as soon as they can, they will apply to become a permanent resident. And is what I'm hearing then, for a DACA person, there's-- as of this time, there's no application for them to become a permanent resident?

NATASHA NASEEM: Yeah. On-- just as DACA recipients, they will not be eligible to become permanent residents, with just DACA alone. But--

HUGHES: Well, there are other, there's potential other ways.

NATASHA NASEEM: There's-- yes.

HUGHES: OK.

NATASHA NASEEM: If there's other changes in their life, either through work petitions or, or a, a family member.

HUGHES: Someone they marry or where they work-- yeah, yeah.

NATASHA NASEEM: Right. But also--

HUGHES: But everybody that's getting that-- I mean, I think this is like-- I didn't know this, that they have signed an affidavit saying that they will pursue permanent residency as soon as they can. Or could some of these kids or the young adults or whatever, could they have already applied for this? And--

NATASHA NASEEM: That is--

HUGHES: I mean, that's that's the thing, right there. OK.

NATASHA NASEEM: The technicality of the, of the university side or how--

HUGHES: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

NATASHA NASEEM: --that process is blended. But I will say, also-- I mean, a lot of DACA youth did attend high school here, right? Because that was something that came into fruition, like, when I was in high school. So I, I think there's both parts of this that these proposed changes are addressing are going to be affecting the same groups of people that we've been talking about for the last hour, at least.

HUGHES: OK.

NATASHA NASEEM: So, but yeah. Sorry. Does that answer the question?

HUGHES: No, no. Thanks. Thanks for coming in.

NATASHA NASEEM: Yeah, of course.

HUGHES: Questions? Other questions for Ms. Naseem? Yes, Senator Lonowski.

LONOWSKI: Thank you, Vice Chair. And thanks for being here. And this is a little bit off-topic, but do you work with law enforcement officers when you know that someone comes in the Center for Immigrant Services, that they may have committed a, a heinous crime? You know, are--

NATASHA NASEEM: If they've committed a crime, I don't think we typically represent them. They're usually screened out before they even reach--

LONOWSKI: OK.

NATASHA NASEEM: --me. But if there are-- there are some, you know, things-- if a person is a, is a client and then they are-- they've committed a crime, it's usually-- law enforcement's already been involved by that point. We work with law enforcement in a positive way for our clients who are victims of crime and have to file their U visa applications, and that requires certification from law enforcement. So we have good relationships with law enforcement at our organization. But yeah, I'm, I'm happy to talk about that more, probably on a separate--

LONOWSKI: Yeah, sure.

NATASHA NASEEM: --interval.

LONOWSKI: OK. Thank you.

NATASHA NASEEM: Yeah. Sure.

HUGHES: OK. Other questions? Yes, Senator Conrad.

CONRAD: Thank you so much. Just wanted to ask you another quick followup here. And maybe this isn't within your practice expertise, but I know that you work in the immigration sphere a lot and have a lot of deep background on this. I don't know if what Senator Lonowski was trying to get at was something to make some sort of point about crime and immigration causation or correlations. But from your vantage point, have you always-- the statistics and studies that I have seen demonstrate that there's actually a lower level of criminality amongst immigrant neighbors and their-- versus American citizens. Do you want to respond to that?

NATASHA NASEEM: I mean, I don't have the numbers, but anecdotally, absolutely. I mean we are dealing with people who are in very difficult, challenging legal systems that we've been trying to figure out for the last-- like, an hour or so. And we are, as an organization, trying to help them navigate that. So a huge part of our advice is to inform them that any interaction with law enforcement comes at a much higher cost for them, because any status that we are working on is likely to go away as soon as they are, they are involved

in any interaction with law enforcement. It could be as simple as running a stop sign. We have literally seen that in the past week. So it is very serious, and I'm, again, anecdotally going to say, our clients take it very seriously.

CONRAD: Yeah. OK. Very good. Thank you.

NATASHA NASEEM: Yeah.

CONRAD: Thank you.

HUGHES: Thank you. Anybody else? All right. Thank you. Thank you for coming in.

NATASHA NASEEM: Thank you, all.

HUGHES: Appreciate it. Next opponent.

ROGER GARCIA: Good afternoon, Madam Chairwoman and Senators. Roger Garcia, R-o-g-e-r G-a-r-c-i-a. One of my daytime jobs and roles is serving as the County Chairman of [INAUDIBLE] County Board of Commissioners, but today I am here in my personal capacity, just as a fellow Nebraskan who grew up in Columbus and Schuyler, Nebraska, and now has been in Omaha for 20 years. I would say-- and I'll try to be brief and not overly redundant, so let me jump into it here. I wanted to say that 20 years ago, and I was actually here 20 years ago as a college student getting my bachelor's, seeing the, the sausage being made, that this entity, as the Legislature and as a legislative body, chose to ingrain a layer of compassion in their policymaking with this bill on top of, of course, always considering fiduciary financial matters and working within the legal limits that you have as a Legislature. But you ingrained compassion into this bill as a body. And I say that because this body recognized that these children, yes, they have to be here minimally, minimally, as high school graduates with at least 3 years attending their high school, minimally. But many of them have actually been here since age 2, 3, 4, 5 years old, in Nebraska, growing up here, so these are our children. These are our youth that have grown up in Nebraska and that love our state, and so that's where the elements of compassion and recognizing who this policy actually helps to encourage to keep going in their education. So there are children-- these are children that have gone through our public schools, in many circumstances, that we've been investing in. And jumping to the college age, once they actually do enter college-- again, this is not a scholarship. This is not a financial grant. There

is no money going into their student account. They are paying tuition. And many of these students, if you know them personally, are actually the students-- since they don't qualify for FAFSA or financial aid, these are the students that are not only going to school full time, they're actually working 2 or 3 jobs to be able to pay that tuition, and their rent, and help their families, so these are actually pretty outstanding students and young individuals in our state. And quick note. Yes, these students-- Senator Hughes, you mentioned the affidavit, which had not been talked about much. But my, my wife, Yanira, has worked in admissions and I've seen the affidavit, where students have to pledge that they will seek a legal adjustment as soon as possible, if there is any pathway in the future for them to do so. My wife was a, a DACA recipient and undocumented individual for about 25 years, and then DACA for about 12 years or so, 10-12 years, was finally able to adjust status through marriage, through myself. And we now have been married 10 years, have 2 children, and pay a lot of taxes as a family. But she's now working for First National Bank, has her master's, went through UNO, UNL, and she is one of these youth that went through this, this process of receiving this benefit of in-state tuition. So I see the red light, so I'm going to try to wrap up here. Again, we don't even have a number. Is there 10 students, 50 students a year that are benefiting? We don't know. Let's say it's 50. Financially speaking, it's like 0.001 of an effect, whether this is given or not, to the financial budget. But this is also 50 lives that we are benefiting and encouraging to continue on a positive pathway towards further education which will lead towards more economic output in our economy here in Nebraska if they're better educated and have those better jobs. So I'm going to respect the clock here and go ahead and stop.

HUGHES: All right. Thank you so much for coming in, Mr. Garcia. Questions? Senator Conrad. I want to say Danielle, but that's not very professional.

CONRAD: That's OK. No, I know. We've known each other a long time. As [INAUDIBLE] the opportunity to know the commissioner for a long time. It's good to see you again, Commissioner. I know that you've been deeply involved in this work through a long history and tenure of your advocacy and community engagement work. And then I know that you've been at the forefront of this, wearing a different hat now, as an elected member of the Douglas County Board. But I was just hoping that perhaps you could help to paint a picture, for the record, about the level of fear and terror that exists for immigrant families in, in Nebraska today, and whether or not you think measures like this are

helpful or harmful to turning down the temperature, deescalating, helping to reestablish community relations, including with law enforcement that are important for our shared public safety goals. Can you help me to broaden the lens and paint the picture a bit more?

ROGER GARCIA: Yeah. The fear is unfortunate. Because at a national level, you'll see that, on average, a Latino population will have about 60% U.S. citizens, about 20-30% legal permanent residents, green card holders, and then about 10% that fall under more of that, either a temporary protected status, asylum, or maybe DACA, et cetera. And so, we're really talking about a small minority that kind of fall into this sliver of where these kind of policies support that demographic that fall into that sliver. But when it comes to the, the fear of the overall temperament and the rancor and noise that is currently happening and, and has happened throughout our history as a country, it affects the entire community. Whether they fall into a status that is in legal limbo or happens to be undocumented at the moment or not, it affects the entire community. To, to the extent that on the June 10th raid, our businesses were closing down out of fear. Our businesses did not reopen for a week or 2 in many cases, and people are still scared to go to the grocery store. And literally, there was 2 ICE agents at the neighborhood Walmart in south Omaha just last week. And so, the fear is-- there's, there's a reason to fear. And when anybody who looks of a certain demographic is up for questioning and being detained for who knows how many days, the fear is real. And it's unfortunate, because we know that the immigrant demographic has been so vital in adding to the robustness and the economy of all of our towns and cities in Nebraska. For all of us who have come from small towns and more rural communities, we know that those downtowns look a little different nowadays. And we know that the immigrant community has contributed so much to our local economy across our state, from the smallest of towns to the biggest of city, in Omaha, we see that, tangibly. And we know that the immigrant community is now a fabric of who we are as a state, and they're contributing back. But unfortunately, the rancor does affect the entire community, not just that small sliver mentioned.

CONRAD: No, I, I think that's really helpful. Thank you for putting that in the record. And then I think perhaps, Commissioner, you were here when the introducers were providing kind of their, their policy rationale for bringing the, the, the measures forward. And it prompted a good discussion with both Senator Andersen and, and my friend, Senator Murman, about maybe even if we have a disagreement about how we're looking at these bills, there seems to be a lot of common ground

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Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

to recognize that an appropriate remedy might be calling for and working towards comprehensive immigration reform, which ag leaders, business leaders, community leaders, faith leaders, a very, very broad and diverse coalition of people have, have been asking for, for, for a very long time. Would you be willing to work with myself and these other senators to, to try and take some constructive steps in that regard?

ROGER GARCIA: Yes, of course. I always like to mention that there's a reason why our local and state Chambers of Commerce have supported "compresent"-- comprehensive immigration reform. There's a reason why the Cattlemen's Association has supported comprehensive immigration reform, and many other entities, from business to faith, et cetera, is because we acknowledge that first, yes, the system is broken. Second, the immigrant community is so vital to our future workforce and to our local economy. And so, let's indeed, come together to do something about it that actually will benefit all of us. And, you know, you can support bills like the-- excuse me-- you can support the current law that provides in-state tuition, while also supporting strong border security and also supporting an overhaul of the system, while at the same time, recognizing that these laws, like the one that exists, allows our youth, our youth in Nebraska to pursue their dreams. And there's nothing wrong with that either. It can all co-exist.

CONRAD: Very good. Thank you, sir. Thank you.

HUGHES: I liked your ending. All right. Other questions? No. Thank you.

ROGER GARCIA: Thanks. Appreciate it.

HUGHES: Thanks for coming in.

ROGER GARCIA: Thank you.

JUAREZ: Thank you for coming.

HUGHES: Thanks for your work as a commissioner, too. That's not always appreciated either, is it? Except you get paid more. All right. Next opponent.

CHRISTIAN OLSON: Good morning. My name is Christian Olson, C-h-r-i-s-t-i-a-n O-l-s-o-n. Keep my remarks very brief. Eight-- 85-502, Section 9 is how many students who choose a nontradition-- choose or are forced into a nontraditional route end up being able to

get in-state tuition. That includes students like myself, who, who are forced to get a GED rather than a high school diploma. After I got that, that GED, I did leave the state briefly, to go work a job, job in Kansas, where I had better opportunities. I then returned to this state. I am now currently a second-year transfer student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. This bill risks preventing people who temporarily--who come from a nontraditional background and temporarily leave the state from being able to come back and enjoy the benefits that their parents and their grandparents have paid for through their tax dollars, by getting in-state tuition. It will also decrease the number of them who decide to come back and stay in our state. Thank you.

HUGHES: OK. Hold on. Any questions for Mr. Olson? All right. Thanks for coming in. Appreciate it. Next opponent, please.

BLASE ROKUSEK: Hello. My name is Blase Rokusek, B-l-a-s-e R-o-k-u-s-e-k, and I'm here as just a individual citizen of Nebraska in opposition of both stated bills. So a lot of-- like, my testimony today is going to be in the form of a series of questions. A lot of these have been posed, either directly or indirectly,. And not trying to undermine any of the humanitarian ideas of this, but I think some of the numbers are important to know. Especially, like as a citizen paying for leaders in this body to make informed decisions, it's very important to have-- like, these questions have to be answered before any sort of intelligent debate or vote can be had on it, in my opinion, to like even leave this committee. So the first one would be, is we've said this many times, but how many currently eligible students would lose resident tuition status under these revisions? Like that's a really important question to know if we're going to vote on it. What is the projected enrollment impact on Nebraska postsecondary institutions if affected students leave the state or forgo enrollment entirely? And then with that, what's the projected cost savings of the state, if this really is for financial benefit? What's the cost savings of implementing the statute? And then, at the same time, what's potential incurred loss, in terms of tuition revenue, in-state recruitment to the workforce postgraduation, taxes paid while in the state going to college, and potential for donation to universities, you know, years after you graduate. There's always a lot of-- like, you have a lot of-- people like their universities usually, and you have a lot of like, respect for that. And then, just a couple of other points that I think are good to clarify. So there were a couple comparisons to Nebraska in relation to, like, other states, like Oklahoma, Texas, Florida, in terms of, you know, it's the

common sense thing to do what they did. But then, when there was a motion to kind of use, maybe-- let's look at some of the data they have, how did it work for them? We were cautioned immediately that we can't draw generalizations from those states because there's differences in demographics. I mean, I would argue you can't really use that as a justification. Like, like it, it's either one or the other. And then, finally, I think it's really important to know what the-- like, what's the reason or the impetus for bringing this statute forward at all? So like, was there data? Did we identify a whole list of possible costcutting areas? Surely this isn't the only area that could be identified for costcutting for the state and the university system? Or is it simply political points we're trying to score, especially when using inflammatory terms like common sense, 20-year-old mistake, without having any objective data? Further, was I right, Senator Murman, that you have, like you said--

HUGHES: You, you can't ask the Senator a question.

BLASE ROKUSEK: Oh, you can't? OK. The, the only thing I-- the, the only thing I was going to say about that is that there seemed to be a mention that Senator Murman had people who had immigrated work on his farm. And it was very wishy-washy as to what documents-- like, you know, I heard presumed legal status. If we can't use, like, high school transcripts-- that was mentioned that was not a good proxy for immigration status. Like, I'm sure we need to be a little more-- you know, when it comes to just cheap labor-- also be considering these things, as well. So thank you for your time.

HUGHES: Thank you for stopping in. Do we have any questions for, say your last name one more time just to make--

BLASE ROKUSEK: Rokusek, R-o-k-u-s-e-k.

HUGHES: Rokusek. Thank you. Mr. Rokusek, Oh, yes, Senator Lonowski.

LONOWSKI: Thank you for your testimony. You know, the very first question you asked was how many current students are on it, and you probably found that out through testimony that we don't really--

BLASE ROKUSEK: Yeah.

LONOWSKI: --ask the question, because everything else would kind of hinge on that. I, I do think you have some good questions here, because it's-- it really is-- is it worth, is it worth fighting? Is it worth money to the state? Does it cost the state? Does it cost people

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Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

to go out-of-state, just because we've gone from in-state to out-of-state tuition costs, which I looked up earlier, and it goes from \$10,000 to \$28,000, so it is a significant difference. But yeah, some good questions. I don't know how we answer that without answering that very first question, though. Thanks.

HUGHES: All right. Anybody else? No? Thank you. Thanks for making the time. Other opponents?

JUAREZ: I don't have a question. I was just going to make a statement. I can do it with the next person.

HUGHES: Is there anybody else going to testify? Because if you are, can you just-- just one? All right. I just-- I'm just curious. I'm like, I don't know if all the people sitting there are going to do it. All right. Go ahead. Start when you are ready.

MATTHEW ROKUSEK: Hi, I'm Matthew Rokusek. Matthew, and then R-o-k--

HUGHES: Are we related?

MATTHEW ROKUSEK: Yeah.

HUGHES: Just kidding.

MATTHEW ROKUSEK: R-o-k-u-s-e-k, and I'm in opposition to both bills. I think LB870 is a little worse. But yeah, I, I had some questions as well, and just a, a few clarifications, I guess. And I'm-- I, I read the bills, but I'm not exactly sure if this is like-- if there's more context to this. But will these be re-- like re-evaluated for the new standard, mid-degree? So like students who have already been here for 2 years, for example, for the next 2 years, are they going to have the like, lower tuition rate, or is it still going-- I mean, you know? I, I, I was just curious about that, because I didn't think that was really clarified. It probably should be, I feel like. And then, I had some questions that I prepared beforehand, too. I, I didn't realize like, it, it seems to be fairly poorly researched like, before the bill was proposed. But like, I was wondering, like a workforce study impact. So essentially-- a workforce impact study. So like, basically, there's like, you know, health care, for example, like in rural Nebraska, all this kind of stuff. If there's less people that are going to, you know, presumably attend a school with a lot higher tuition, then how is that going to affect like, downstream, whether or not there's gonna be more people working in the state, as far as that goes, because definitely, rural areas will be affected by that quite a

bit. And then, so I, I-- both Senator Andersen and Murman mentioned that this was about illegal residents, but I, I don't think that they know for sure what that means. Because, like, for example, when Senator Hunt asked Senator Murman, he, he didn't really like, know what to respond-- I, I don't-- he didn't appear like to know at all what it meant to be lawfully here. And, and like, I noticed that, too, because it wasn't clarified in the bill, either. But yet, it was stated as one of like the-- one of the intentions for them. So I guess, yeah, I feel like that should definitely be clarified what exactly is meant by lawful, in terms of like, you know, whether or not somebody is still seeking like, adjudication for an asylum claims or anything related to that, too. And then, and then this is, this is another thing, too. So I guess maybe this is-- I'm not sure if this is like-- [INAUDIBLE] my, my understanding is that the university does not like directly cover the cost for a specific student when they come, like, you know, and they get in-state tuition. They just-- the reason why you say like, it would cost less is because they cov-- cover the cost of the university as a whole. Common sense was mentioned earlier. And when we think about that, like, are one or two students in every classroom really going to cost the university that much more? I mean, I, I can't-- I mean, what, taking more water from the water fountains or something? I mean I-- there's really not much cost, like in addition to it, that's like going to be incurred. And when you think about it, I mean, there's parking, there's, there's housing, and there's still the tuition that they're paying, and meal plans, all this stuff. I, I, I can almost guarantee it's going to be a pretty substantial loss in revenue, actually. So yeah. I, I, I guess I'm not really sure where the, where the, yeah, common sense thing comes in. But that's about-- yeah. That's really about all I had.

HUGHES: All right. Thank you for coming in, Mr. Rokusek. Other questions for-- yes. Go ahead, Senator Juarez.

JUAREZ: I just wanted to make a statement when we were asking about checking on immigration status. Mr. Turman of the Nebraska State Colleges who provided a neutral view says the colleges do not have a mechanism for verifying the immigration status of all students. So, I wanted to make sure that that was on the record, that information he provided. And he said they rely on what the students report. And the great thing about state colleges, which I didn't know, they have a single consistent tuition and fee structure for both resident and nonresident students. What a great idea that is. Thank you for coming.

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Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

HUGHES: Thank you. Any other questions? You're good. You're good. Thank you. Other opponents? Good afternoon.

SPIKE EICKHOLT: Good afternoon, Vice Chair Hughes and members of the committee. My name is Spike Eickholt, S-p-i-k-e E-i-c-k-h-o-l-t. I'm appearing on behalf of the ACLU of Nebraska, in opposition to both of the bills. I did a visit with Senator Murman and Senator Andersen regarding our opposition. You've heard a lot of testimony in opposition. And unfortunately, I was in another committee hearing so I didn't hear the introducers or the proponents testify. But generally, we see this bill as part of a larger, legislative effort to intimidate, intentionally or otherwise, the immigrant community. We stand in opposition to the bill and in solidarity with our immigrant friends and neighbors. What the bill does, and you talked about this, is it deprives Nebraska residents, for lack of a better term, who graduate from Nebraska high schools from getting in-state tuition, and we just see that as unfair, and we oppose that part of the bill as well. I'll answer any questions if anyone has any. I just wanted to be appreciative of the committee's time.

HUGHES: Thank you, Mr. Eickholt. Questions for-- one of my favorite names, Spike? Spike and Lash, it was very interesting my first year when I heard those names. Sorry. I'm getting spicy now. It's like, getting late. Any questions? Yes, Senator Conrad.

CONRAD: Thank you, Vice Chair. Thank you, Mr. Eickholt. I was just wondering, I know you were in another committee hearing, so you maybe didn't have a chance to hear this, but both introducers and, I think, some proponents have lifted up, kind of the specter of some related litigation in the Fifth Circuit or in Texas. Do you maybe want to give the committee an update about the posture of that and/or relevance to this hearing today, kind of how that fits in with, with Nebraska?

SPIKE EICKHOLT: I don't know the exact nature of that litigation. I know that in 2025, there was an effort, maybe similar to this, in Texas, to deprive Texas residents, Texas DACAs-eligible folks from getting in-state tuition. I think, ultimately, Texas settled with the Trump Administration, and just either ceased or changed its tuition calculation policy. We're not in the Eighth Cir-- we're not in the Fifth Circuit, we're in the Eighth Circuit. So I don't know if any-- what impact, if any, that has on Nebraska. I'm not aware of any threats from the federal government regarding how the university or any other postsecondary institution in Nebraska considers in-state

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Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

versus out-of-state tuition rates. I haven't heard anything about that.

CONRAD: OK. Very good. Thank you.

HUGHES: Other questions for Mr. Eickholt? Yep, go ahead.

CONRAD: Sorry. One more.

HUGHES: No. Go ahead.

CONRAD: Mr. Eickholt, I know you're a practicing attorney and focus more on the criminal defense side of things, but perhaps use some intersections with immigration law in your practice. And I know Ms. Naseem was here, but just to, to perhaps put a finer point on it, to help the committee understand that immigration law itself is very complex, and that sometimes, it takes a, a long period of time to get a resolution as to whether or not somebody who is here today and who may not be a citizen may actually have a path to citizenship, through employment, or family, or lawful presence due to qualification and eligibility for different types of visas, et cetera. Do you just want to talk generally about what the ACLU sees in that regard, or do you know from your practice?

SPIKE EICKHOLT: I know some things from my work with ACLU and also some things from practice. I mean, when you hear the public generally talk about immigration, they talk about citizens and illegals, as if it's just one or the other. But there is a lot of different status that people can be in the country, permissively, lawfully, short of being a citizen. I remember a few years ago, I represented a woman who was here undocumented. She was assaulted very severely by her partner, hospitalized. She cooperated in the prosecution of her abuser and then she obtained what they call a U visa protection, because she cooperated in the prosecution and arrest and conviction of her-- basically her husband. There's a concept called T visa, which applies for trafficking victims. So there's that protective status. You can come here from another country and be a green card holder, be what they call a permanent resident, and then try to be a citizen. I know this from my personal life. My wife came here in 1994 as a permanent resident from Sweden, and she became a citizen finally, in 2013. It took almost 20 years. No record. She had two children born in the country. She married two men, not at the same time, who are both U.S. citizen-- who are both U.S. citizens, and it takes just a long time. And you asked about that earlier, [INAUDIBLE]. It simply does. Senator

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Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

Lonowski, excuse me. Ozzie suiting And that's assuming you don't have any sort of minor criminal thing. In my criminal practice, I will tell you that if you're here lawfully, you get certain convictions-- any kind of drug conviction, misdemeanor or otherwise, you're jeopardizing your status staying here. You're not going to get your green card removed and if you apply and trigger that review, you're probably going to end up getting removed and removed from the country. So there's a lot of nuance to it. It's-- and not-- no disrespect to the introducers, but when you introduce something like this, you just sort of cut across a cross-section of all those different things, which is why you've heard all kinds of different arguments against this bill that are just not addressing specific issues by doing this. And it's just an arbitrary, punitive reaction that's really going to hurt young people who grew up in Nebraska that want to go to college.

HUGHES: OK. Any-- yes. Go ahead.

CONRAD: Sorry. Thank you. That's helpful. Just one more question. I know that the-- this had come up in the hearing before. And perhaps you could touch base with your clients at ACLU of Nebraska, and I know that they did a fairly comprehensive report about the backlogs in the immigration court, particularly in Omaha, somewhat recently, in the last year or so, I think. Maybe, maybe a little bit longer than that-- but demonstrating there's, you know, literally massive backlog over-- backlog, over 30,000 cases pending. You know, very few people, very few litigants are represented.

SPIKE EICKHOLT: Right.

CONRAD: There's a very limited advisement of rights. These cases are severely understaffed amid a time where we see increased enforcement as well. So it just-- even folks who are trying to work through the system are, are finding administrative barriers, perhaps.

SPIKE EICKHOLT: That's right.

CONRAD: If you could just share that with the committee for, for our files, I--that might be helpful.

SPIKE EICKHOLT: I would do that. And I would just add that the problem has gotten worse. Because what you've seen with this administration is a removal of a lot of "immi" court-- immigration court judges, which are not independent, they're agency judges, in an effort to either

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Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

accelerate a certain resolution for many cases or what have you, but the backlog has just intensified.

CONRAD: Thank you. Thank you.

HUGHES: OK. Anything else? Senator Lonowski.

LONOWSKI: Thank you, Vice Chair. Thank you for your testimony. So it seems like every time we-- every time somebody testifies, we get back to this point where we've got this huge backlog of maybe waiting for 15 or 20 years. Is it-- I recall, at one point, President Biden had wanted to hire 60,000 or 80,000 IRS people, and I don't know that that ever came to-- would we be able to do the same with, with legalizing people, and like up the number by thousands, so that at least these people have been waiting for 15 years can maybe finally get their day in, in court?

SPIKE EICKHOLT: I think so. I mean, that's a-- it's a policy decision, just like you say. It's the policy decisions made. And apparently, our administration has invested more in enforcement, police removal, and those kinds of things, and not processing.

LONOWSKI: Yeah, that sounds better than IRS agents. They just sound evil. I'm just curious. I'm thinking out loud and other ways to get around what seems to be the ultimate problem, and that's not being able to get citizenship, so thank you.

HUGHES: OK. Thank you. Senator Hunt.

HUNT: Thank you. Nothing important to add, but your story reminded me, my, my cousins and my aunts and uncles immigrated here from Russia during, you know, it took them about 20 years and they just got their citizenship pretty recently, too. And they've been living here as a part of my family for my whole life, basically so. And that really taught a lesson to my conservative Republican family, my parents, my aunts and uncles and grandparents, about, you know, what the reality really is for immigrants who are, quote unquote, doing everything right. I think there's this boogeyman that people picture of like, oh, they're coming up from the caravan, they're going through the-- you know, they're trafficking people-- I don't know-- some kind of like, very nefarious criminal thing. But these people live among us all the time, and I don't need to pontificate anymore, but thank you.

HUGHES: Thank you. Anybody else? All right. Thank you, Mr. Eickholt.

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Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

JUAREZ: Thank you for being here.

HUGHES: Other opponents? OK, none. Any in the neutral? OK. And then, Senator Murman can come back up, but I got a note from Senator Andersen's staff that he's wa-- he's planning to waive closing, because he's in an exec session for General Affairs. So it will just be Senator Murman to close, and, and then we'll be done with this one.

MURMAN: Well, we won't be done. I think [INAUDIBLE].

HUGHES: Well, we won't be done, done. We'll just be done with these 2 bills. We got one more bill after. Senator Juarez.

MURMAN: Yeah. Well, in-state tuition, of course, is a special benefit that's reserved for in-state and, and now for people that are not here on a legal, legal status. So what I want to make sure is that-- with this bill, is that we're compliant with federal law, because as been mentioned more than once. There was a lawsuit in Texas. They had a similar law there that was found unconstitutional and I want to make sure that we do not end up the same way here in Nebraska. It will be a cost to the taxpayers to defend the university if that would happen here-- if the lawsuit would be filed here. And, of course, if there are clear definitions about legal eligibility of-- in higher education, we can identify those and work on those. I'm definitely open to that. So with that, I'll close and take any more questions if, if--

HUGHES: OK. And I--

MURMAN: --they haven't been answered yet.

HUGHES: I do have one question. So you said, concerned about if we're following the federal law. Did Attorney General Hilgers talk to you about this, like, want to bring this proposal, too, at all or-- since he would be our-- OK. No.

MURMAN: No. No. But, you know, it happened in Texas. There was a lawsuit against Texas.

HUGHES: Yeah, I saw that.

MURMAN: So I assume the same thing--

HUGHES: OK.

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Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

MURMAN: --could happen here.

HUGHES: Other questions for Senator Murman? OK. Thank you. So that-- oh, let me read comments. LB870, LB870 had 30 proponents, 120 opponents, and 1 neutral. And LB1061 had 2 proponents, 95 opponents, and 1 neutral. So that concludes LB870 and LB1061, and Senator Murman is back to finish out the day.

JUAREZ: Here, the best one is coming up and everybody's leaving. That's why I didn't want you to put me last.

CONRAD: Best for last.

MURMAN: Well, that can work both ways, for or against. But with that, we'll open the hearing on LB745, and welcome Senator Juarez to stay a little longer.

JUAREZ: I know that we're all glad that we are on the last one. Good evening, Chair, Chair Murman and the Education Committee. My name is Senator Margo Juarez, M-a-r-g-o J-u-a-r-e-z. I'm here today to introduce LB745, a bill that makes a targeted change to Nebraska laws governing high school equivalency diplomas. Specifically, this bill strikes a portion of a statute that delays awarding the general education development diploma, GED, to 16- and 17-year-olds until they turn 18. And I didn't even know this happened until I got this bill. Beyond this change to the age at which the diploma can be issued, the bill does not alter the educational requirements for earning a GED or Nebraska's compulsory attendance age. I passed out two support letters, one from the Nebraska Department of Education and one from the School Counselor's Association, for you to review as I open. Under current Nebraska statute and policy, students who are 16 and 17 can take the GED test with appropriate documentation and approvals, but cannot receive the GED diploma until after their 18th birthday. This statutory delay creates unnecessary burdens on young people who have met all academic requirements and are ready to move on to the next stage of their lives. This bill was brought to Senator-- by Senator Machaela Cavanaugh by a constituent in her district who has firsthand experience with how the current statute can limit opportunities for motivated students. You will hear directly from the student's mother, whose story highlights how the delay in issuing the credential can disrupt employment opportunities, postsecondary enrollment, and workforce planning. Recent Nebraska Department of Education reporting shows in the 2023 school year, 20 16- and 17-year-olds passed. In 2024, 33 16-17-year-olds passed. And in 2025, 22 16-17-year-olds

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

passed the GED. Though this is a small amount, each one of these students worked hard, met the requirements, and passed. But they had to wait a year or-- year or 2 to receive their diploma because of this statute. Here in the Midwest, Nebraska and Iowa are currently 2 of about 10 states that retained a statutory requirement preventing GED diplomas from being issued to qualified 16- and 17-year-olds until age 18. Removing that requirement aligns Nebraska with the majority of states and respects young people's achievements without lowering the rigor or purpose of the GED credential. Although this bill provides a narrow technical change, it has very real consequences for Nebraskans who are ready, willing, and able to enter the workforce, pursue postsecondary education, enlist in the military, or support their families. For these young people, receiving the GED diploma at the time that they earn it rather than waiting means recognition of their academic accomplish when it matters most. Thank you.

MURMAN: Thank you. Any questions for Senator Juarez at this time? If not, thank you for your open.

JUAREZ: Thank you.

MURMAN: And we'll call for proponents for LB745.

BRIANNAN SANDAU: Hello. My name is Briannan Sandau, B-r-i-a-n-n-a-n S-a-n-d-a-u. I'm here today on behalf of my daughter, Selma, and all of the kids in Nebraska like her. Selma's education has had variables that so many can relate with. She started her schooling as a homeschooled student until the 7th grade, where she entered mainstream public school. She found success there. She was active in choir. She maintained pretty close to straight A's. She was in every advanced placement or honors high school class. She even earned a placement with the National Junior Honor Society. All of her hard work came crashing down halfway through her freshman year when she became the target of severe bullying. I spent multiple days a week either on the phone or in person with the school's administration, the deans, the principal, even the superintendent. By the end of the school year, she was severely depressed. When summer came, we hoped that her mental health would heal and that the next fall would be better. It wasn't. A month into her sophomore year, it was markedly worse, as well as her 16th birthday. Now, Selma, she's a really smart girl. Sorry. We'll get through this. She did her own research. And when she came to me and said, mom in the state of Nebraska, I can legally drop out of school at the age of 16; I can't go back or I'll end up killing myself, that was heartbreaking. All of the adults who should have been protecting

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

my daughter have failed her. This girl who had dreams of going to Harvard and getting a law degree shattered. I consoled her and I told her we don't give up, and we looked at all of the options. The best option for Selma was to withdraw from school and go back to homeschooling, and she immediately applied to take her GED. From the start, the GED was a difficult task, from misinformation from the Nebraska Department of Education led to delays and confusion. Finally, by May of 2025, still at 16 years old, Selma passed her GED test with flying colors. She was excited and proud, and anxiously awaited her diploma in the mail, but it never came. When I called the Nebraska Department of Education again, I was informed that no one is allowed a diploma until the age of 18. When I pushed back that that was nonsense, there's plenty of kids watch a-- walk a graduation stage at the age of 17 and are handed their diplomas right then and there, I was told, well, that only applies to GED students to deter kids from dropping out. I would argue that who is just dropping out probably isn't motivated for a GED and that makes no sense. But you know who's taking this test at a younger age? Homeschooled kids, bullied kids, the kids who are overachievers, the kids who know what hard work and struggle looks like, the kids who need to clear this hurdle for a better life or to move on to the next chapter. This law as it current-- currently sits, hurts hardworking kids. A GED is not a participation award. It is a hard-earned, even sacrifice-filled choice many have made. They deserve that final award when it is earned, not on a delay. So I'm here as a mom who watched her daughter be broken and failed, and I will not allow her to see the world through that lens. I want her to see that hard work is not for nothing, and I want her to see that we can do hard things and see that sometimes change comes from unexpected ways. Thank you for your time and your consideration.

MURMAN: Thank you. And thank you for your heartfelt testimony. Any questions? Senator Hunt.

HUNT: Thank you, Chairman Murman. Thank you so much for coming. And you shared some very vulnerable things in that testimony, and I just want you to know that really reached me and-- yeah. I relate a lot to what your daughter went through, so.

BRIANNAN SANDAU: Thank you.

HUNT: Thank you.

MURMAN: Any other questions? Senator Lonowski.

LONOWSKI: So, yeah. Thank you for coming in. Thank you, Chair. So the only reason they had to withhold it is that's what the law was at the time? Is, is that correct?

BRIANNAN SANDAU: Yeah, I was told by Miss Shirley at the Department of Education that it's some law from 1952 to deter students from dropping out of school and going the easy way. It's not easy.

LONOWSKI: No. A GED is, is not easy.

BRIANNAN SANDAU: It's not easy. But that's-- I even argued with her on the phone. I said, I graduated-- I'm, I'm originally from South Dakota, but I graduated when I was 17 and I walked across that stage, and I know plenty of other seniors in high school. They're, they're walking across the stage and shaking hands at 17. What are you talking about? And she's like, well it just, it just applies to the GED. I'm like, that's absurd. What are you, what are you saying? Like, make this make sense to me. And she said, well, call your Legislature. So I did.

LONOWSKI: Well, thank you.

MURMAN: I've got to ask one quick question, and this is-- I'd just like to get this on the record.

BRIANNAN SANDAU: Absolutely.

MURMAN: So would you agree that, at least from some school educators' point of view, the supporting the school system is more important-- and this is just from some point of view, not everybody-- but is more than the education or the best interests, interests of the child?

BRIANNAN SANDAU: I think that whatever education the child needs is what's in the best interest of the child. And in my daughter's case specifically, when you're going to a school that touts having a zero doll-- zero bullying policy, and they are not doing anything about it because the No Child Left Behind Act trumps anything you're going to do in regard to a bully, and it's to the degree that you have children who are willing to kill themselves instead of go to school, that's a problem. So, to then further punish them, the, the choice she made-- and, and when I say we looked at options, we looked at, do you want to transfer to another school? We're from Omaha, so there's plenty of school options. We can, we can go to the other-- the next-closest high school, you know, but it's, mom, I can't do it. So I think it, it, it literally is a matter of we actually have to look at what's going to

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

be beneficial to our kids. Starting her off as a homeschooled child in her earlier years was actually my ex-husband's choice, not mine. Divorce is why she entered real school, because I, I insisted. Because I am a product of public schooling, as well, and I believe in the public school systems. But I, I see where my daughter was failed, because my other children are thriving. I think it is dependent on children and we know our children. And, and when I comment that I would argue kids just dropping out of school don't get their GED, that's from a place of personal experience, as well. My oldest sister dropped out of high school. She's 52 now. She's never gotten a GED. She dropped out. She didn't want to go, she didn't want to finish. So, it's, I think, silly to say that this is just to deter kids from dropping out. If they're dropping out, they're going to drop out. But like my daughter, a homeschool child, you know, there, there are kids out there who, a GED is the option, they are doing the hard work, getting a GED is not an easy thing.

MURMAN: So having options as to how families are best served in education is a good thing to have.

BRIANNAN SANDAU: Yes. Absolutely.

MURMAN: Thank you. Senator Hughes, did you have a question?

HUGHES: Well, and maybe I should know this, and if you don't know for sure, that's fine, too.

BRIANNAN SANDAU: Sure.

HUGHES: Is the only way-- if you homeschool your kid, let's say you had just chosen to do it all the way through. Do most homeschool kids take the GEDs to get their-- OK.

BRIANNAN SANDAU: Yes. That is--

HUGHES: So that's usually their way to get [INAUDIBLE].

BRIANNAN SANDAU: Yes. If she would have finished homeschooling straight throughout--

HUGHES: Straight throughout.

BRIANNAN SANDAU: --her whole education--

HUGHES: Uh-huh.

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

BRIANNAN SANDAU: --it would be a GED. Some curriculums you can buy online and that sort of thing, they'll offer their curriculum's diploma. But to be considered a--

HUGHES: But to count for college.

BRIANNAN SANDAU: Right. To be considered an actual graduate, you would have to take the GED test. So that would have been her, her end--

HUGHES: Anyway. Anyway, yeah.

BRIANNAN SANDAU: --anyway. So that, that is a thing. And given her trajectory-- and, and she's smart as a whip. I swear. She probably would have been taking it at 16, 17 years old, regardless. So we would have been still sitting here, going she didn't get her diploma anyway.

HUGHES: OK.

BRIANNAN SANDAU: You know.

HUGHES: Well, thank you. Thanks for answering that.

BRIANNAN SANDAU: Yeah.

MURMAN: Any other questions? If not, really appreciate the testimony.

CONRAD: Great job.

BRIANNAN SANDAU: Thank you.

MURMAN: Other proponents for LB745.

CHRISTIAN OLSON: Good morning. My name is Christian Olson, C-h-r-i-s-t-i-a-n O-l-s-o-n. I'm currently a second-year transfer student, studying grasslands ecology and data science at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. But I'd like to take you back to 2020. That was the year that I dropped out of high school. And by that, I mean it was COVID, and I stopped going. I-- there was a lot of reasons behind how it happened. I had begun suffering from a medical disorder called dysautonomia, where my heart rate and my blood pressure no longer were kept in check by my body. Additionally, I had developed auditory processing disorder and ADHD, and my school was not willing to follow my accommodations. They penalized me for attempting to use my accommodations, and it led to a situation where I became so depressed, so done with the school system, that going back for me

wasn't an option. That was the time that my grandmother, a educator from Alliance, Nebraska, told me, go get your GED. And I had a very similar experience with there. When I first contacted Douglas County about trying to get my GED, I was told 17-year-olds can't take the GED. That's only 18 and over. And then I later found out that I could take it, I just wouldn't get it. And that's when I just-- frankly, I gave up. I went, at that point, and I figured, I have to get out to work. I have to make money. I have to survive, and studying for a test that I wouldn't be able to take for almost 9 months that wouldn't actually help me at this moment wasn't worth it. It took me almost 2 years before I was able to get back, take the classes, and get the-- my GED. In that time, I lost 2 years of possibility for me to get education. It led to me having to move. It led to me having to be on my own at an age in an unsupportive environment that was-- led to a lot more problems in my life than I can say, and it led to a lot more stress for my family. I want to echo what she said before. People who drop out of school and then take the GED, they're not dropping out because they want an easy way out. The GED was not an easy test, if only because it offers actually less accommodations than the ACT and the SAT when you have to take it when you're a person with disorders. It took months of studying on my own time, on my own dime, to try to pass that test. This rule doesn't prevent people from dropping out of school, it only limits their opportunities after they do drop out. Thank you.

MURMAN: Thank you. Any questions? That makes total sense. It, it delayed you from-- well, it kind of made a confusing 2 years of your life-- you know, started having to work, and then not having the GED.

CHRISTIAN OLSON: And then you have to attempt to try to both study for the GED while you're working--

MURMAN: Yeah.

CHRISTIAN OLSON: --which is a difference from when you're just a high school student, or if you're 16, and this is the right opportunity for you at that time.

MURMAN: Sure. Senator Hunt, did you have a--

HUNT: I'm OK. Thank you.

MURMAN: Any other questions? If not, appreciate the testimony.

CHRISTIAN OLSON: Thank you.

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

MURMAN: Other proponents for LB745.

SPIKE EICKHOLT: Good afternoon, Chair Murman and members of the committee. My name is Spike Eickholt, S-p-i-k-e E-i-c-k-h-o-l-t. I'm appearing on behalf of Education Rights Council in support of this bill. I don't need to restate the testimony, but what this bill does do is it does address sort of an anomaly in the law. As Senator Juarez indicated before, 16- and 17-year-olds may take the GED exam. And there are limited circumstances for what justifies them being able to withdraw from school and being able to do so. I'm having passed out the actual form that the Department of Education has for 16-17-year-olds who are applying to take the GED. But as Senator Juarez explained, unfortunately, even if a student were to meet all of those conditions, take the GED, get it, they can't get the actual diploma until they're 18 years old, which really doesn't make a lot of sense. This bill resolves that discrepancy. I can answer any questions if you have any, but we would urge the committee to advance the bill.

MURMAN: Thank you. Any questions for Mr. Eickholt? If not, thanks for your testimony. Other proponents for LB745? Any opponents for LB745? Neutral testifiers for LB745? If not, Senator Juarez, you're welcome to close. And while she's coming up, online we had 11 proponents, zero opponents, zero neutral.

JUAREZ: Thank you very much. And I really would like to thank everyone who came to support me today on testifying on behalf of this bill, especially the folks from Omaha who came who have been waiting patiently, committee, for us to get to this point. I did want to make a couple comments, though, as far as other supporters that you mentioned in those stats. One of them is from Omaha Public Schools. They are supportive of this change. And another group is the Nebraska Social Work Advocacy Committee. Excuse me. They also were supportive. And it was-- I read a comment here, where they thought people in the foster care would definitely appreciate having a change like this. So I want to reiterate that this is a tiny fix that can mean a lot for those students who take their own path. Any, any diploma or certificate awarded to our Nebraskans is truly an accomplishment and something to be proud of. Let's make it easier for our motivated students seeking their GEDs. And that's it. Thank you very much.

MURMAN: Thank you. Any questions for Senator Juarez? Senator--

HUGHES: I just have a quick one.

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Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

MURMAN: Hughes.

HUGHES: Thank you. [INAUDIBLE].

MURMAN: I almost said Hunt.

HUGHES: Like, like I'm kind of surprised this wasn't ever brought before, but you first heard of it because of a constituent that called you to [INAUDIBLE].

JUAREZ: Mm-hmm. [INAUDIBLE] for our guest that was here today.

HUGHES: Yeah. OK. Thank you.

JUAREZ: That's why her mom said she's so smart, see? She was put in [INAUDIBLE].

HUGHES: She figured it out.

JUAREZ: That's right.

HUGHES: All right. Thank you.

MURMAN: Senator Lonowski.

LONOWSKI: Thank you, Chair Murman. And thank you. I spoke to you a little bit about this, Senator Juarez. Appreciate it. But this summer, we were working on a, a bill to get kids in Chadron, Chadron Job Corps to be able to take their GED when they were 16 or 17. So you cover everything. But the NDE said, you know what, we don't need a bill. We can work with Chadron Job Corps and just make correlation or that-- simplify that. But now, you're, you're all-- if we make this go, you're actually making it--

JUAREZ: For everyone, that [INAUDIBLE].

LONOWSKI: --easier for everyone that's 16 and says I'm done with school.

JUAREZ: Beat you to the punch.

LONOWSKI: You stole my thunder, Senator Juarez.

JUAREZ: Right. I like that.

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Education Committee January 26, 2026
Rough Draft

MURMAN: OK. Any other questions? If not, thank you very much, Senator Juarez.

JUAREZ: Thank you.

MURMAN: And that will close our hearing for the day. Thank you all for being here, for staying.