

SENATOR CULLAN: Mr. President, members of the Legislature, LB 602 is a bill designed initially to transfer the responsibilities for medical care for indigents from the counties to the state. It really just substitutes the state for the counties on the basis of the Elizabethan poor law so far as it relates to medical care. The committee amended the bill because we're concerned about the potential fiscal impact of moving from...of the state adopting responsibility for indigent care. And so the committee adopted a set of standards that would be the maximum or a ceiling of what the Department of Welfare could establish as the standards when it defines indigency. The income standards which the Public Health and Welfare Committee recommends to the Legislature as a ceiling on indigency are as follows: For a single individual maximum annual income of \$4,310. For a couple an annual income of \$5,690. For a three member family, \$7,070. For a four member family, \$8,450, so on and so forth. Now these are not the standards which are adopted and we are not defining indigency. Rather we are placing a ceiling on what indigency would be for purposes of indigent care. The current situation is this. The counties are responsible for indigent care and there is some litigation as to whether or not they are actually meeting the needs or actually carrying out their responsibilities as far as indigent care are concerned and it's felt that, number one, we should take over the system so that we could establish a uniform statewide standard for indigency. The other part of the committee amendment defines or makes the effective date of the bill July 1, 1983. The purpose of having that effective date primarily is to allow the Department of Welfare to promulgate rules and regulations defining the standard for indigency and then that standard will be published back to the Legislature before we meet again and that will allow us to look at that standard and if further legislative action is necessary we can do that. Those are the committee amendments. I'll very quickly explain my rationale for the bill too so I can preserve some time here. One of the main reasons, impetus, for bringing this bill before the Legislature was the change in the indigency care policy of the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha. The University changed its policy on indigents because they were not being compensated by counties for the expenses which they incurred with treating indigent patients. In the period of time from, I believe, October 1st to January 1st of last year, more than a hundred people were turned away from the University of Nebraska Medical Center and were not treated because the counties did not make arrangements with the Medical Center to pay their bills and that is currently what the University of Nebraska requires. The goal with LB 602 is a uniform system statewide that defines what an indigent is and