

to have a detrimental effect on the children, and that's what happens in divorce today. And we can't alleviate all those problems, obviously, by this act, but we can sure go a long ways towards getting there. As I said, 33 states have adopted similar parenting plan type of...types of processes. Most of them are, to some degree, mandatory. We have made this bill about as close to nonmandatory as you can get already by saying one parent, one parent can request it. Both parents don't have to request it. One parent can request it, and that all...and that the parents need only go to one meeting, and if the one meeting doesn't work, then the mediation is over and the case goes back to court. So we have already, we have already amended this bill down to make it...to make it so that there's a lot of voluntariness in it. So what we have then is a, one, is a process of mediation, two, the development of a parenting plan and, three, we have a process that will encourage the parties to get together now on these issues. Now this system has worked in the other states, continues to work in the other states and, in Nebraska, there has been an experiment out in Kearney, Nebraska. Judge Icenogle out there has sent me a letter last year when this bill was introduced agreeing that this is a good concept, suggesting some technical changes to the bill, but saying we've tried this in Kearney and it works; we suggest that you pass this bill in the Legislature because it's worked in Kearney. I have handed out to you a step-by-step analysis of the bill and I'm not going to go through that. I'll be happy to answer any questions that you might have. One other issue, the cost of this process or this mediation process is borne by the parties but there's a sliding scale. Each county is directed to devise a sliding scale so that in those cases where the parents do not have the means their fee for the mediation will be quite low, and on that issue I would make this point, that I would suggest to you, and the other...the experience of the other states makes it absolutely clear, that the cost of a custody fight or a custody battle is reduced substantially, one, if they can...if agreement can be reached and, two, if a lot of the issues involving custody can be resolved within the mediation process, you're not running up attorney fee time at a hundred dollars an hour and...

PRESIDENT MOUL: One minute.

SENATOR ASHFORD: ..and you can pay 65 dollars for a one mediation session. So it's going to save the litigants money. It's going to save court time and that was the basic idea behind