

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee February 21, 2025
Rough Draft

ANDERSEN: [MALFUNCTION] Veteran Affairs Committee. I'm Senator Andersen from Omaha, the best district, 49th District in Omaha, and I serve as the vice chair of the committee. This chair-- the, the chairwoman is unable to attend the hearing at this time. The committee will take up bills in the order posted. The public hearing is your opportunity to be part of the legislative process and express your position on the proposed legislation before us. If you're planning to testify, please fill out one of the green testifier sheets that are on the table in the back of the room. Be sure to print clearly and fill it out completely. When it is your turn to come forward to testify, give the testifier seat to one of the pages or to the committee clerk. If you do not wish to testify, but want-- but would like to indicate your position on a bill, there are also yellow sign-in sheets back on the table for each bill. These sheets will be included as an exhibit in the hearing-- official hearing record. When you come up to testify, please speak clearly into the microphone. Tell us your name, and then spell your name-- your first name and last name to make sure we get an accurate record. We will begin each bill hearing today with the introducer's opening statement, followed by proponents of the bill, then opponents, and finally by anyone speaking in the neutral capacity. We will finish with a closing statement by the introducer, if they wish to give one. We will be using a three-minute light system for all testifiers. When you begin your testimony, the light will-- on the table will be on green. When the yellow light comes on, you'll have one minute remaining, and the red light indicates your time has expired. Questions from the committee may follow. Also, committee members may come and go during the hearing. This has nothing to do with the importance of the bills being heard; it is just part of the process, as the senators have a-- may have bills-- excuse me-- to introduce in other committees. A few final items to facilitate today's hearing. If you have handouts or copies of your testimony, please bring up at least 12 copies and give them to the page. If you not-- do not have enough copies, the page will make sufficient copies for you. Please silence or turn off your cell phones. You may see committee members using their electronic devices to access more information. Verbal out-- outbursts and applause are not permitted in the hearing room; such behavior may cause for you to be asked to leave the hearing. Finally, the committee procedure for all committees-- for all committees state that written position comments on a bill to be intro-- included in the record must be submitted by 8 a.m. the day of the hearing. The only acceptable method of submission is via the Legislature's website at nebraskalegislature.gov. Written position

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paper or letters will be included in the official hearing record, but only those testifying in person before the committee will be included on the committee statement. I'll now have the committee members with us today introduce themselves, starting from my right.

GUERECA: Good afternoon. My name is Dunixi-- oh. Dunixi Guereca. I represent Legislative District 7, downtown and south Omaha.

J. CAVANAUGH: Good afternoon. John Cavanaugh. I represent District 9, the best district that is completely [INAUDIBLE] the city of Omaha. Midtown.

LONOWSKI: Good afternoon. I'm Dan Lonowski, District 33. That is Adams County, Kearney County, and rural Phelps County.

WORDEKEMPER: Dave Wordekemper, District 15. Dodge County, western Douglas County.

McKEON: Dan McKeon, District 41, central Nebraska. I have eight counties.

ANDERSEN: Senator Hunt?

HUNT: Megan Hunt, and I represent the northern part of midtown Omaha.

ANDERSEN: Thank you. Also assisting the committee today, to my left is our legal counsel, Dick Clark, and to my far left is our committee clerk, Julie Condon. We have two pages from the-- for the committee today. Pages, please stand up and introduce yourselves.

LOGAN WALSH: I'm Logan. I'm a junior finance and econ major at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

ARNAV RISHI: Hi, I'm Arnav. I'm a junior political science major also at UNL.

ANDERSEN: Thank you. And with that, we will begin the hearing today with LB233. And Senator Conrad, welcome to the committee.

CONRAD: Hi. Good afternoon. Hi. My name's Danielle Conrad, it's D-a-n-i-e-l-l-e, Conrad, C-o-n-r-a-d. I proudly represent north Lincoln's 46th Legislative District. I'm here to introduce LB233, and thank the committee for your time and consideration. So, quickly-- which you know is a challenge for me-- quickly, this bill came to my agenda from my friend Senator Wishart, who had served in the

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Legislature for eight years, and we had a chance to work together on a variety of issues. She had some constituents who were em-- state employees, and in particular employed at the Department of Corrections. And they loved their job working at corrections and trying to make a positive difference there, but they were also facing some fertility issues as they wanted to start or expand a family, and they just found it very cost-prohibitive for them to be able to utilize in-vitro or assisted reproductive technologies under the state plan, and so they ended up paying a lot of money out-of-pocket to welcome the, the, the blessings that they were able to have with successful pregnancies and, and bringing children into the world. So, we started to do a little bit of research, and she suggested that perhaps I pick this up because I was serving on the Government Committee then, and it was a really fun issue to work on. So, we looked at how other states are handling this issue; we looked at some of the policy, legal, and practical issues involved here, and then we, we brought forward a bill. It was unsuccessful in moving from committee in the last biennium, but I remain committed to the concept, and I'm happy to work with the committee in any way to move the measure forward, if we can. So, I draw your attention to a couple of things. One, there's no fiscal note on this bill, and there is no mandate in this bill. All this bill does is it provides that the state can have an optional coverage for fertility services for state employees to buy with their own dime. It just opens up an optional coverage area so that states can-- employees can decide whether or not they want that, that fertility coverage with their own dime. So, it doesn't entangle public resources or public funds that might violate certain members of the government or public's deeply-held religious convictions; it does not force anybody who has moral or religious objectives [SIC] to utilizing IVF or ART to utilize such, but it simply provides an option for the state employee to use their own money to get this coverage if they're struggling with wanting to have a baby or wanting to expand their family. And there's been about, I think at this point in time, about 20 of our sister states that have moved forward in one direction or another to try and increase access to reproductive health care and assisted reproductive technologies for public employees. And then, of course, I'd be remiss if I didn't note that just this week, President Trump issued an executive order as a follow-up to his campaign promises to direct the federal government to figure out ways to make IVF care more accessible to more people. There wasn't a ton of specifics in there, but it did set a hard deadline for 90 days to figure out how we could work collaboratively to go about that on the state and federal level. And

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this is one no-cost, low-cost way that would perhaps help more families start or ex-- start or expand their families without costing the taxpayer a dime. So, I appreciate your consideration. Happy to answer questions, and I will be here for close and to hear the testimony as well.

ANDERSEN: Thank you very much, Senator Conrad. Any questions?

CONRAD: Thank you.

ANDERSEN: Seeing none. Thank you very much. Are there any proponents to this bill? Welcome to the Government, Military and Veteran [SIC] Affairs Committee.

BILLY STOCK: Thank you, Senator. Good afternoon, Vice Chair Andersen and members of the Government Committee. For the record, my name is Billy Stock, B-i-l-l-y S-t-o-c-k, and I'm a field representative with the Nebraska Association of Public Employees. Our union represents more than 8,000 frontline employees who perform more than 400 jobs at 43 state of Nebraska code and non-code agencies in all 93 counties across the state. I'm here on behalf of our executive director Justin Hubly, who couldn't be present today, to testify in support of Senator Conrad's LB233 on behalf of our union. Our union strongly supports offering optional insurance coverage for state employees that includes in-vitro fertilization. Many of our members have shared their struggles with infertility, and when doctors determined that in-vitro fertilization is a necessary treatment, these employees must bear the full cost out-of-pocket due to the lack of insurance coverage. The high cost of in-vitro fertilization often makes it financially unattainable for employees to cover this on their own, and as a result, they are forced to choose between taking on a significant financial burden or seeking employment elsewhere with an employer that does provide this kind of coverage. We believe that no employee should have to make such a difficult decision simply to access that kind of medical care. Expanding insurance options to include in-vitro fertilization would provide critical support to these employees facing these challenges, and it would allow them to focus on building their families without unnecessary financial hardship. This bill, as Senator Conrad mentioned, would require the state to offer such coverage, but the cost of the coverage would be paid by the employee. This is similar to other optional coverages that the state offers, like short- and long-term disability coverage, or additional life insurance. Senator Conrad mentioned the fiscal note as it's written-- the bill has a modest fiscal impact that could be absorbed by the Department of

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Administrative Services, and we also want to highlight again there's no mandate here. Thank you, Senator Conrad and her fabulous staff for bringing this legislation. We encourage you all to advance this bill so that state employees who are struggling with fertility issues are able to purchase the insurance coverage they need to grow their families and stay in state service. Thank you all for your time and your consideration today.

ANDERSEN: Thank you for your testimony, Mr. Stock. Are there any questions?

HUNT: Thank you.

BILLY STOCK: Thank you.

ANDERSEN: I have one question for you.

BILLY STOCK: Yes, sir.

ANDERSEN: So, the cost is covered by the employee, not covered by the insurance company or by the state. Is that correct?

BILLY STOCK: That is correct.

ANDERSEN: Is it just-- out, out of my own curiosity, does that mean as part of an insurance plan, it's cheaper for the employees? As doing it part of a optional coverage on the insurance?

BILLY STOCK: That's, that's my understanding. Yes.

ANDERSEN: OK. Thank you very much.

BILLY STOCK: Thank you, sir.

ANDERSEN: Is there anybody else testing as a-- or, testifying as a proponent? Seeing none. Are there any opponents to this bill?

MARION MINER: Good afternoon, Vice Chair Andersen and members of the Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee. My name is Marion Miner, M-a-r-i-o-n M-i-n-e-r, and I'm here on behalf of the Nebraska Catholic Conference, which advocates for the public policy interests of the Catholic Church and advances the gospel of life by "engedging"-- en-- engaging, educating and empowering public officials, Catholic laity, and the general public. I'm here today to express the Conference's opposition to LB233. You'll see my testimony

is significantly longer than I can get through in three minutes, so I'm going to do my best to summarize it. I also apologize; what you're getting is a pretty big packet of information as far as exhibits go, but what this is meant to do is provide a snapshot of some of the practical problems of IVF even-- that are even occurring today in application. But I'm not going to focus my testimony on that. I encourage you to read that when you have time, and we'll see how much we can get through of my testimony. It's first of all really important to acknowledge that many thousands of couples trying to conceive suffer from infertility. Almost all of us know a number of people who have had to endure it. The Catholic Church suffers with those couples, and accompanies them with spiritual and psychological counseling and moral support. The church also assists them in addressing and healing the root causes of infertility by ethically-- ethic-- ethical and morally-good means. In taking this approach, the church demonstrates its respect for the marriage of each couple, the man and woman's own individual integrity and the dignity and invaluable worth of every human life. It's important to acknowledge also that we all likely know one or many couples who have had children through IVF. I certainly do. In expressing our opposition to this polity-- policy, it is not our wish to alienate or condemn anyone. The vast majority of people who embark on IVF do so without full knowledge of what it entails, and in addition, it is important-- extremely important to emphasize that those children brought into being through IVF are as deserving of love, protection, care, and affirmation as any other child; they are recognized and valued as such by the church and, I hope, by us all. IVF has become common in our society, and it is not difficult to recognize why. It gives couples an opportunity to beget life biologically descended from, from them when the natural avenue for doing so is or seems to be closed. The end toward which it is directed, having biologically-descended children, is certainly a great good. This good end, however, does not justify every means by which we attempt to attain it. IVF makes children obs-- objects of manufacture, screened for genetic imperfections, and eugenically selected for fitness rather than a gift brought about by unitive, active love between parents. In practice-- and I'll-- I'm going to skip some here-- it was estimated in 2015, ten years ago, that there were as many as 1 million embryos created by IVF, frozen indefinitely in liquid nitrogen across the United States. That number has certainly grown since then. Screening newly-created embryos for sex selection has become a common feature of IVF practice as well. I list some statistics there. I really wish I could have gotten to more of my testimony about the practice, but I'll stop there.

ANDERSEN: Go ahead and finish your thoughts.

MARION MINER: OK. Thank you. What I was just in the middle of in this sentence is to say that 73%-- three-quarters of IVF clinics in the US offer screening newly created embryos for sex selection by the parents. And in addition, it is becoming more common also for IVF clinics to offer-- they, they-- the, the, the sophistication of some of these screening techniques is becoming more and more apparent. They can now screen for such things as IQ and offer to select and deselect embryos based on the likelihood of these children's intelligence. So, this is just an industry that is highly unregulated, and it's fraught with opportunity and high incentive for manipulation, for screening out human beings based on desired characteristics, and it leads to the destruction, freezing, and experimentation on thousands and thousands of newly-created embryos. So, I'll wrap up there. Thanks for the time.

ANDERSEN: Thank you, Mr. Meyer [SIC] for your testimony. Are there any questions? Yes, Senator Lonowski.

LONOWSKI: Thank you, Chair Andersen. And thanks for your testimony. Mr. Miner, is there a-- is there a law or anything that, that says they can-- an embryo can only be frozen for 10 years or 20 years, or is this an indefinite thing?

MARION MINER: It's indefinite. Many hundreds of thousands of the embryos that are currently frozen in the United States have been for multiple decades. There's only so long that that process is effective; eventually, they start to deteriorate, and eventually expire or die, for lack of a better term. But there's no limit. Now, in European countries, they do have-- most European countries do have some regulation of this industry, including how many embryos you can create, how many you can implant, et cetera. In the United States, it's almost completely unregulated, not only with regard to how the process begins, how many embryos are created, but also with regard to what you do with them afterward. And many of them are simply discarded, destroyed, turned over for experimentation, or frozen indefinitely.

LONOWSKI: OK. And pardon my ignorance. Who's keeping the embryos? Is it like hospitals, or private--

MARION MINER: It's, it's the-- it's fertility clin-- it's private fertility clinics. Yeah.

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LONOWSKI: OK. Thank you.

ANDERSEN: Is there any other questions? Mr. Miner, thank you very much for your testimony.

MARION MINER: Thank you.

ANDERSEN: Is there anybody else wishing to speak in opposition to this bill? Anybody in the neutral capacity? OK. Thank you very much. Senator Conrad is here to close. On her way up,--

CONRAD: Briefly. Thank you.

ANDERSEN: --letters for the record. We have 11 proponents, 2 opponents, and 1 neutral. Senator Conrad.

CONRAD: Very good. Thank you, Vice Chair. Thank you, members of the committee, for your questions and consideration. I want to thank everybody who took time to be here today. I know that we have a respectful disagreement between myself and the Catholic Conference on this particular issue, but it's always been a pleasure to work with them on a lot of other issues where we find a lot of alignment, like lifting up families, addressing poverty, the death penalty, sensible immigration reform, the list goes on and on and on. But nevertheless, I would never ask them to violate their deeply-held religious beliefs or others, when it comes to their religious beliefs or moral objections with regards to these technologies. But the elegance of this proposal is that it is not an-- it is not a mandate. It allows each Nebraska public employee to exercise their rights to utilize these options if it fits within their religious beliefs, if it fits within their morality. It, it, it strikes the appropriate balance where we as a government don't put our finger on the scale, but we let each individual Nebraska public employee pay, with their own dime, to decide whether or not they want to utilize this kind of insurance and treatment to start or expand a family. So, I appreciate your time and attention. And again, I thank everybody who took time to be here today.

ANDERSEN: Thank you very much Senator Conrad. Are there any questions for the Senator?

CONRAD: Thank you.

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ANDERSEN: Thank you very much. And that concludes the hearing on LB233. We'll now move on to LB224. Senator Guereca, welcome back to the committee.

GUERECA: Good afternoon, Vice Chair Andersen and fellow members of the Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee. My name is Dunixi Guereca, D-u-n-i-x-i, Guereca, G-u-e-r-e-c-a, and I represent District 7, which includes the communities of downtown and south Omaha. I'm here to introduce LB224, which would require the state of Nebraska to provide 12 weeks of paid maternity leave to eligible full-time employees following the birth of their child. Our current policy allows eligible employee to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave. Typically, employees max out their sick and vacation times to cover these weeks without pay. However, this is problematic for various reasons. Obviously, it would not be uncommon for a new mother to need time off to tend to a newborn's appointments, illnesses, or other common postpartum needs. I'm incredibly grateful to our state employees and the sacrifices they make to help our state both function and flourish. These employees, our legislative staff, our Clerk's staff, our agency staff, our governor's staff-- I can go on forever. These employees are fiercely loyal to our state, and in return, we should be providing them with the stability and security they deserve. Looking after our state employees is not only the right thing to do, it also contributes to the, the success-- success of our great state. According to the Maven Clinic, companies that provide benefits as a whole are proven to see increased employee morale, loyalty, and productivity while also enhancing their ability to attract top talent. One study shows that workers are five times more likely to stay at a company where they feel rewarded and valued, and paid family leave is high on the list of desirable benefits. According to one global survey, 83% of millennials said they would be more likely to join a company that offers paid parental leave benefits, and a further 38 considered moving out of the U.S. to another country that provides improved parental leave policies. Paid leave could be the "differentiator" between an employee taking or leaving a role. Research shows that 58% of employers confirm parental leave benefits have played a large part in improving their talent acquisitions. 13 states have passed legislation to create paid family and medical leave programs. According to the National Council of State Legislators [SIC], most state programs are funded through employee-paid payroll taxes, and some are also partially funded by employer-paid payroll taxes. At least six states-- Georgia, Nevada, New Hampshire, South Dakota, Texas, and Utah-- offered paid paternal leave for state

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employees. Georgia, South Carolina, and Utah allow paid leave for birth, adoption, and fostering of a child. When we talk about expanding the good life, I believe providing our state employees with 12 weeks of paid maternity leave is a great place to start. With that, I would be happy to take any questions.

ANDERSEN: Thank you, Senator Guereca. Are there any questions for the senator? Yes, Senator Cavanaugh.

J. CAVANAUGH: Thank you, Vice Chair. Thanks for being here, Senator Guereca. I was just looking at the fiscal note, which is \$4.7 million, and they did that math by number of average children born each year under their insurance plan. And I just thought I would point out that 3.1% of all births are twins, so it really-- I did the math-- I took the liberty of doing the math. It'd be about \$200,000 less of a fiscal note if they actually took into account the twins. Because you're not gonna take twice--

GUERECA: No. No, no.

J. CAVANAUGH: --the maternity leave [INAUDIBLE] right? I mean, you might need a little bit longer than 12 weeks, but--

GUERECA: Right.

J. CAVANAUGH: You're not going to take two 12-weeks.

GUERECA: No.

J. CAVANAUGH: So--

GUERECA: Well--

J. CAVANAUGH: I think you should take up the fact that they didn't factor that into their very thorough math, but--

GUERECA: Sure. Yeah.

J. CAVANAUGH: Thanks for bringing this.

GUERECA: Absolutely.

ANDERSEN: Any other questions? I have a question for you.

GUERECA: Sure.

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ANDERSEN: It talks about the 12 weeks of paid maternity leave, says will not be charged as leave or PTO. So, if somebody had saved up 160 hours of PTO and then another 160 hours of sick leave, so then they could use 12 weeks of [INAUDIBLE] three months off, maternity paid leave--

GUERECA: Yeah, yeah.

ANDERSEN: And then another month of paid PTO, and another month of paid sick leave. Is that true?

GUERECA: Well, I, I don't know the state's policies on the sick leave. I, I [INAUDIBLE] how they use their sick leave, but yeah, that probably tracks.

ANDERSEN: OK, so it ended up being five months--

GUERECA: Yeah.

ANDERSEN: --of paid--

GUERECA: Yeah.

ANDERSEN: --time off.

GUERECA: Yeah.

ANDERSEN: OK. Thank you. Any other questions? Are you going to stay for-- I assume you're staying for closing?

GUERECA: I will.

ANDERSEN: Are there anybody in a-- as proponents to this bill? Welcome to the Government, Military and Veteran [SIC] Affairs Committee.

ERIN FEICHTINGER: Best lighting in the building. Happy to be here. I'm not joking. You all know I'm right. Vice Chair Andersen, members of the Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee, my name is Erin Feichtinger, E-r-i-n F-e-i-c-h-t-i-n-g-e-r, and I'm the policy director for the Women's Fund of Omaha. We'd like to offer our support for LB224, and we thank Senator Guereca for introducing this important piece of legislation. In a state that repeatedly emphasizes its support for women, creating a program of paid maternity leave for its employees is a natural next step towards demonstrating that support. Access to paid maternity leave is an important tool for women, to help

them build and maintain their economic security. Beyond responsibilities to our jobs, women continue to fulfill the role of the primary caregiver within their families. Nebraska women are more likely than their male counterparts to say that in-- an important consideration in accepting a job was having a schedule that fits their needs, which includes access to paid leave and accessible childcare. Women are often asked to sacrifice their career advancement or earning potential to care for their families, but paid maternity leave allows women to maintain their economic stability while caring for a new child without losing ground after they return to work. Women who return to work after paid maternity leave have a 39% lower likelihood of receiving public assistance, and a 40% lower likelihood of receiving food stamps. Between two years after the birth of a couple's first child and a year after, the earnings gap between opposite-sex spouses doubles, and women experience a 15% decrease in pay for each child they have under the age of five. The gap continues to grow until that child reaches age ten; though it narrows after that, it never disappears completely. Much of this quote-unquote motherhood penalty is a direct consequence of the wages women lose during unpaid leave. Women who return to work after paid leave are more likely to stay employed years later, benefiting both their careers, their employee, their employers, and the workforce as a whole. A robust paid maternity leave program is a solution for employees and employers, and for Nebraska. We are, of course, not insensitive to the cost to the state for this program-- though I hear it can be reduced if we account for twins-- but it is our hope that Nebraska will carry its public-facing support for women and new moms into practice for the women employed by the state, and be an employer that wants to put families first as much as its employees do, and LB224 provides Nebraska with an important tool to do that. And I am happy to answer any questions to the best of my ability.

ANDERSEN: Thank you, Miss-- Feichtinger, is that right?

ERIN FEICHTINGER: Close enough. You got the German pronunciation, so we'll take it.

ANDERSEN: I spent seven years in Germany [INAUDIBLE]

ERIN FEICHTINGER: Well, there you go.

ANDERSEN: Thank you for your test--

ERIN FEICHTINGER: Yeah.

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ANDERSEN: --testimony. Are there any questions? Senator Cavanaugh?

J. CAVANAUGH: Thank you, Vice Chair.

ERIN FEICHTINGER: I don't know about twins. I'm just going to contextualize that.

J. CAVANAUGH: Just, just for the record, I only did the math on twins. I didn't account for triplets. I think when you get to an order of magnitude of 313, they use possibility of triplets in there.

ANDERSEN: I wouldn't press your luck.

J. CAVANAUGH: But thanks for being there.

ERIN FEICHTINGER: Was there a question?

J. CAVANAUGH: Do you agree?

ERIN FEICHTINGER: I don't know math as well as I-- on twins. But my child did just turn five, so I'm looking forward to not having my pay decreased.

ANDERSEN: Any other questions? Thank you very much for your time.

ERIN FEICHTINGER: Yeah. Thanks.

ANDERSEN: Is there anybody else here to testify as a proponent?
Welcome back.

BILLY STOCK: Thank you. Long time, no see. Hello again, Vice Chair Andersen, and members of the Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee. For the record, my name is Billy Stock, B-i-l-l-y S-t-o-c-k, and I'm a field representative with the Nebraska Association of Public Employees. Our union represents more than 8,000 frontline employees who perform more than 400 jobs at 43 state of Nebraska code and non-code agencies in all 93 counties across the state. Again, I am here on behalf of our executive director Justin Hubly, who couldn't be present today, to testify in support of LB224 on behalf of our union. So, I think it's evident that we all share the goal here of growing Nebraska and making it the best possible place to raise a family. In order to encourage millennials like me and, and the younger Gen Z folks to stay in Nebraska and raise their families here, we need family-friendly policies. We also need to attract a new generation of public employees to deliver essential services to

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Nebraskans. According to the most recent state employee almanac, over 25% of state employees are already eligible to retire, and 16% of state employees are over the age of 60. So, it's pretty clear we need to prepare now to replace these dedicated workers when they retire, and we need to make public service attractive to our younger generations. Our union just negotiated six weeks of paid maternity leave into our next labor contract for our members, and that benefit's going to take effect on July 1. So, we're very appreciative that the governor listened to this priority that our union members brought forward at the bargaining table. In preparation for negotiations, we survey all of our members and ask them what their priorities are, and over 1,400 responded that access to paid parental leave was incredibly important to them. So, 6 weeks of maternity leave is a good start, but granting 12 weeks of paid leave under Senator Guereca's bill would allow a new mother to have their entire FMLA-eligible leave to be paid. That paid leave is a relatively cheap way for the state of Nebraska to encourage employees to have children and to continue employment with the state while they grow their families. As you all are all more than well aware, we have a workforce shortage here in Nebraska, and this bill is a great way to encourage growth, especially in public service. In the future, we hope to expand paid parental leave that also covers fathers and adoptive parents. We would encourage you to advance this bill to the floor, and we thank you for your time and consideration.

ANDERSEN: Mr. Stock, thank you very much for your testimony. Are there any questions? Senator Cavanaugh.

J. CAVANAUGH: Thank you, Chair. Thanks for being here, Mr. Stock. So, when you negotiate-- when you-- when the-- your union negotiates for your members, does that then apply to other state employees as well?

BILLY STOCK: Yep. So, we represent 8,000 employees all, all across the state. So, anyone that is not a supervisor is essentially-- they are represented by our contract.

J. CAVANAUGH: OK. So, then my read, looking at this fiscal note-- they're pricing it as us having to pay an extra 12 weeks. What you're telling us is we're already paying-- we're going to pay for 6. So, the fiscal note should actually be cut in half for only an additional 6.

BILLY STOCK: So, I, I certainly don't math too good, as my mom likes to tell me. But starting on July 1, we will be doing 6 weeks of that paid--

Speaker 2: OK.

BILLY STOCK: --ma-- maternal leave.

J. CAVANAUGH: So-- well, I-- that would be my read of this. We can talk about it with a-- more of a-- the Fiscal Office isn't going to take into account something that hasn't gone into effect anyway.

BILLY STOCK: Sure.

J. CAVANAUGH: My other question was-- Senator Andersen asked Senator Guereca about whether folks could stack their leave. So, my recollection is under federal law, you have to give 12 weeks regardless, without-- you don't have to give it paid, but you have to give 12 weeks.

BILLY STOCK: Yep. Under, under FMLA, you are entitled to 12 weeks unpaid, and that, that protects your job, but it's unpaid. You can use your sick leave and your vacation time to supplement that, but, but that's it.

J. CAVANAUGH: But you can use the, the paid-- your current sick and vacation leave in that 12 weeks.

BILLY STOCK: Yes, yes.

J. CAVANAUGH: But they don't have to give you more than 12 weeks.

BILLY STOCK: Yes.

J. CAVANAUGH: So this, you would be able to use in those 12 weeks; it doesn't mean you could use that in 12 weeks, and then stack them--

BILLY STOCK: Correct.

J. CAVANAUGH: [INAUDIBLE] take even more time--

BILLY STOCK: That's, that's my understanding. Yes, sir.

J. CAVANAUGH: OK. And I mean, obviously, there's medical reasons, and if you have a C-section, probably you might have a medical reason for more than 12 weeks--

BILLY STOCK: Sure.

J. CAVANAUGH: --things like that. OK.

BILLY STOCK: You know, that's-- but you're, you're right on that.

J. CAVANAUGH: OK. Thanks.

ANDERSEN: Any other questions? I have a question for you.

BILLY STOCK: Yes, sir.

ANDERSEN: You said you represent 8,000 members?

BILLY STOCK: Yes, sir.

ANDERSEN: And you said this being the highest priority was for 1,400 of the 8,000, right?

BILLY STOCK: So, it, it wasn't the highest priority. We-- I'm not entirely sure how they listed it, but this was one of the main things that 1,400 members identified as something that is important for them to, to stay in state service.

ANDERSEN: So I, I used a calculator to do math in public, and that tells me it's on-- it's only 17.5% of your association. Is that true?

BILLY STOCK: So, let, let me clarify that. So, we represent 8,000 individuals. We have about 3,500 members right now. So, it's 1,400 of 3,500.

ANDERSEN: That's a big difference.

BILLY STOCK: So, yeah, it's, it's pretty substantial when you look at in that sense.

ANDERSEN: Senator Cavanaugh can do the math for me.

BILLY STOCK: I wish we could survey the entire workforce, then we could really prioritize it. But that was out of 3,500.

ANDERSEN: Thank you. Any other questions for Mr. Stock? Thank you, sir, for your time.

BILLY STOCK: Thank you all very much.

ANDERSEN: Are there any other proponents for this bill? Seeing none, are there anybody in opposition to this bill? Anybody representing the neutral position? Senator Guereca, you're just coming back up to close. The letters for the record are 20 for proponents, 1 for

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opponent, and zero in the neutral position. Senator Guereca, the floor is yours.

GUERECA: Thank you, Vice Chair Andersen. So yeah, I think with the, with the stacking, I know that to the, the 12 weeks we protected. I don't know, I think for vacation, you probably have to get that approved by your supervisor. So, I don't know if they'll let them take an extra month on top of that; I don't know how those procedures work. But obviously, this is an important thing. On the campaign trail, all I heard was "I need workers, I need workers, I need workers." Every corporation from every industry, that was the main complaint. Same with the state. If we want to attract people to come to Nebraska to live our good life, we need to stay competitive. And I certainly don't want to lose out to Texas and Utah, so. You know, healthy moms, healthy babies, I think is good for the state, and I'll take any questions.

ANDERSEN: Thank you, Senator Guereca. Any questions? Senator Wordekemper.

WORDEKEMPER: I guess I don't know if I have a question, but more of a comment. I'm glad that the, the union and the state worked together to get 6 weeks. I guess my concern without that is, if you had a single mother that had a child, needed the 12 weeks off-- obviously, that's unpaid leave. Then that lady would have to come up with the insurance premium without having a wage coming in to stay on the state's insurance, potentially. So, if she was a single parent, she wouldn't have another income--

GUERECA: Right.

WORDEKEMPER: --to do that. So, she would have to figure out a way to stay on the insurance plan.

GUERECA: And that's why-- I mean, a lot of [INAUDIBLE]-- to-- the, the, the way that came up with this bill is I was actually at a New Year celebration with a friend of mine whose wife is actually a state employee, and her concern was, I may have to-- if I'm-- they're planning to have kids and start a family, they might have-- she, she was considering leaving the, the employment of the state to find an employer that does provide for paid maternity leave, and that's a common thing. I mean, you're hearing from some, some law-- our legislative staffers that when they want to start a family, they understand that they have to leave if they want an employer that does

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provide paid maternity leave. So, this is, is-- it's becoming a reality; that's something that more and more companies are, are adding as a, as a, as a benefit. So, if we want to stay competitive and re-- and attract and retain the very best for this state, I think it's something that's-- we, we need to take a look at, like I said. Senator Cavanaugh here, in, in five minutes has already slashed the, the, the price tag in half. But at the end of the day, it-- it's going to cost money, but it, it needs to reflect this state's commitment to attracting and retaining the very best workforce. Yeah.

ANDERSEN: Senator Cavanaugh.

J. CAVANAUGH: Thank you, Vice Chair. And thanks again, Senator Guereca, for bringing this. This is interesting. I was just thinking-- I see Director Jeffreys is going to be here, I assume on the next bill, and I was just thinking as you guys were talking about where we're losing folks to. We're not going to lose them to Utah and Texas, maybe South Dakota, but the state's going to lose them to Douglas County. I was a Douglas County employee before I got elected, and I had-- we had paid maternity and paternity leave. And so, I assume the Department of Corrections is worried about losing folks to Douglas County Corrections. And we're-- yeah, we're going to lose it to other levels of government that are--

GUERECA: Yeah.

J. CAVANAUGH: --more thought-- thoughtful, I guess.

GUERECA: And, and, and to, to clarify my comments, I don't want to lose to Texas and Utah. I'm, I'm not afraid of our workforce going there. But yeah, I mean that's, that's a great point, Senator. You know, to other government agencies, to other private employers, that's, that's-- it's happening. It's not "it may happen;" it is actively happening. We're losing folks out that want to start their family and are seeking out [INAUDIBLE] that employment to a place that has-- does have this benefit.

ANDERSEN: Any other questions? I have a question for you.

GUERECA: Sure.

ANDERSEN: In the context-- I'm a small government guy, so I, I, I don't want to grow the state government. I don't think we need to grow bigger, I think we need to make it smaller, if anything. Having said

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that, your bill is simply the entitle-- identifies the entitlement for state employees and not all employees across the state.

GUERECAL: Correct.

ANDERSEN: Is there any reason why you didn't do it for all employees?

GUERECAL: You know, that's kind of a, a-- that's a free market thing, right? This is something that we can control. These are folks that, you know, service us every day, that provide services. Then that's-- like I said, the, the, the idea for this was my, my friend's wife. Right?

ANDERSEN: Sure.

GUERECAL: So, that-- start small. I don't know if, if the state-- that's kind of a, a big, big overreach of implementing that mandate while private companies-- yeah.

ANDERSEN: OK.

GUERECAL: But not a bad idea. Maybe something to look, look at for--

ANDERSEN: I'm not advocating for, for all employees. But I do think that, you know, one of the advantages of being a state employee is that there are certain benefits that, that you have as a state employee that you don't have as somebody in the private sector,--

GUERECAL: Right.

ANDERSEN: --and I think there's going to be some other benefits that you don't have that the private sector does.

GUERECAL: Right. Right.

ANDERSEN: So, how, how the balance be-- you know, ends up, I, I guess we'll see. But--

GUERECAL: Yeah.

ANDERSEN: Thank you for your time and thank you for your, your testimony in opening the bill.

GUERECAL: Want to, want to advance something. Well, thank you.

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ANDERSEN: Thank you. That closes our hearing for LB224. We will now move on to LR29. Senator Holdcroft.

HOLDCROFT: OK.

ANDERSEN: Welcome to the Government, Military and Veteran [SIC] Affairs Committee.

HOLDCROFT: Thank you so much, Vice Chair Andersen. Good afternoon, Vice Chair Andersen and members of the-- this is Government, right?

ANDERSEN: Yes.

HOLDCROFT: Not Revenue. For the record, my name is, is Senator Rick Holdcroft, spelled R-i-c-k H-o-l-d-c-r-o-f-t, and I represent Legislative District 36, which includes west and south Sarpy County. I think I've got the wrong-- I do. I have my wrong opening. Can you give me a-- two minutes to run down and get my, my book?

ANDERSEN: So, we'll pause the hearing--

HOLDCROFT: OK.

ANDERSEN: --until the senator returns. Senator Holdcroft, the floor is yours.

HOLDCROFT: Good afternoon, Vice Chair Andersen and members of the Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee. My name is Senator Rick Holdcroft, spelled R-i-c-k H-o-l-d-c-r-o-f-t, and I represent Legislative District 36, which includes west and south Sarpy County. I am here today to introduce LR29. This legislative resolution is being proposed to name the new prison facility the Arbor Correctional Center. Groundbreaking of this facility occurred in August 2024, and it is currently without a name. The new facility is being built to replace the aging Nebraska State Penitentiary. It is the intent of the Nebraska Department of Corrections to name the new prison the Arbor Correctional Center, to represent the growth and opportunity it intends to provide to incarcerated individuals and staff. It is also an attempt to connect with the community, using a name and holiday unique to the citizens of Nebraska and what it represents. To formally name the facility will benefit the Nebraska Department of Corrections' services in its ongoing construction, reference to the facility publicly, and all other technical aspects that benefit from the formal name of the facility. While the construction of a new facility presents itself out of necessity, it is

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also an opportunity to leverage the ability to modernize a correctional facility and provide a new environment conducive to the growth of the population and staff. To name the new facility the Arbor Correctional Center is only the beginning of a long process of construction. The name is appropriate for both the community and what it represents. This is the first step of many, but what Arbor symbolizes is a great representation of what we want the new facility to symbolize for incarcerated individuals, staff, and the citizens of Nebraska. Thank you, Vice Chair Andersen and members of the Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee, for your time and attention, and I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

ANDERSEN: Thank you, Senator Holdcroft. Are there any questions? Senator Cavanaugh? Senator Lonowski.

LONOWSKI: Thank you, Chair. Senator Holdcroft, thank you for doing this. Did you come up with this name?

HOLDCROFT: No, that came from the Department of Corrections, and I'm sure--

LONOWSKI: OK.

HOLDCROFT: --Director Jeffreys will be happy to expand on, on that.

LONOWSKI: OK. Thank you.

ANDERSEN: Seeing no other questions. Senator, are you going to stick around for closing?

HOLDCROFT: Yes, I'll be here.

ANDERSEN: Thank you. Any, any testifiers in-- as a proponent? Welcome to the Government, Military Veteran [SIC] Affairs Committee.

ROB JEFFREYS: Thank you for having me. Well, good afternoon all. Chairperson Andersen and the rest of the Government, Military and Veterans Affairs [SIC] Committee. My name is Rob Jeffreys, R-o-b J-e-f-f-r-e-y-s, and I am the director of the Nebraska Department of Correction-- Correctional Services. I'm here today to provide testimony supporting LR29, the name of the correctional facility, the Arbor Correctional Center. Arbor represents growth, as, as we talked about, and new beginnings, and it res-- it's a reflection of the mission of this new facility. A lot of the testimony I'm speaking on is things that Senator Holdcroft has already spoke on, but Arbor has a

longstanding connection with Nebraska. First celebrated in 1872 and, and encouraging tree planting and what have you, the department felt it was a good idea to provide a name that, that the community can potentially connect with, and connecting hope and communication that the fact of rehabilitation is a task of the state and a responsibility of the community and where the facility is located at. So, it's not just a Nebraska and a government task; this is an opportunity for the state to wrap around the mission of rehabilitation. Naming the facility at this time will also assist, as senator has spoke, to, to be able to use the name publicly and produce associated materials when necessary, as we're doing the construction process. This facility is focused on the elements-- I mean, it's a different facility that talks about rehabilitation. I mean, we're going to, you know, expand upon the re-entry and focus on the natural light using softer colors and wall graphics to simulate the natural light, colors, and scenes of the building with the environment, and that is "coducion" for mental health, rehabilitation and the environment for a correctional setting, and not to mention for the workforce as well, too. The focus of natural light aims to connect the incarcerated population and the staff with the outside, and create a space that in-- that invites rehabilitation. The groundbreaking, as it was mentioned, was August in 2024, and we're looking forward to construction beginning this year. By naming the facility to Arbor Correctional Center, we hope to foster a community connection and represent growth and the opportunity with the intent of rehabilitation for all that are involved.

ANDERSEN: Thank you, Director Jeffreys, for your testimony. Are there any questions? Senator Cavanaugh.

J. CAVANAUGH: Thank you, Vice Chair. Thanks for being here, Director Jeffreys. Not that you came to testify on this, but you heard me talk about the paternity or maternity leave and losing folks. Do you have-- I mean, I know there's been a sort of a competition for correctional staff between Douglas County, at least, in and the State Penitentiary. Do you have any thought or comment on that previous bill? Would that help you guys keep people, if we expand? You don't want to answer? [LAUGHTER] I'm not gonna ask you to do any math.

ROB JEFFREYS: Yeah, that's what I thought was coming at me, right? We're on quadruplets, right? Quadruplets.

J. CAVANAUGH: I mean, I haven't looked it up [INAUDIBLE].

ROB JEFFREYS: But nevertheless, I mean, anything that can help sustain our workforce in the state of Nebraska is good for everybody, right? We don't want folks going to other places because of, you know-- as the bill that pointed out, you know, the inability to support our staff as they want to grow their family. So, yes, I'm in support of it.

J. CAVANAUGH: OK. And then on-- just on this bill, I was just looking-- I never-- I-- honestly never occurred to me that penitentiaries were-- had different names, but none of them seem to have any other name. They're all-- there's community corrections, community corrections, correctional center for women, youth facility, state penitentiary, Omaha corrections, reception and treatment, Tecumseh, work ethic-- so they all kind of say what they are or where they are.

ROB JEFFREYS: Yeah.

J. CAVANAUGH: Is this a new approach?

ROB JEFFREYS: Absolutely. Absolutely.

J. CAVANAUGH: And I guess it's a, a-- an, an attempt to turn the page on what we've-- how we've been doing things [INAUDIBLE].

ROB JEFFREYS: Absolutely. I mean, let's not look at it as a place of incarceration, but a place for redemption and growth, and to better yourself before you get back out into the community. I mean, think about it. You've come from a community where some things didn't work out in your favor, so here's the opportunity to come, and we're going to rehabilitate you and make sure that you're-- get the tools necessary to be prosperous in the community going back out. So, it's signifying growth and rehabilitation.

J. CAVANAUGH: And is-- I guess, is the landscaping going to have trees? And I don't-- I-- [INAUDIBLE]

ROB JEFFREYS: Absolutely. Absolutely. We'll have a nice treeline. Right?

J. CAVANAUGH: What about inside?

ROB JEFFREYS: Yeah.

J. CAVANAUGH: The art, the art of the State Pen's pretty bleak.

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ROB JEFFREYS: Yeah. That's by design, because we want to have trees that are, you know, aesthetically on the, on the outside and around the facility as well. But I would, I would offer you this: when the renderings are come out and made public and what have you, you'll see that the landscaping has a whole, a whole lot of natural feel to it. We're using a lot of water and rocks and, and, you know, you know, landscaping and everything, just to signify a different landscape. I, I mean, you know, we want to give it more of a campus feel, so there's an opportunity to learn, right? As opposed to this incarcerer-- I mean, prison is prison, right? So, there's no changing what it is. So, we don't have to make it look as if it's just brick and mortar and everything. And, and the other piece I'd, I'd mention is staff work here too. So, we got to think about this environment for the staff as well, too.

J. CAVANAUGH: Well, thanks for being here.

ANDERSEN: Any other questions? Yes, Senator Lonowski.

LONOWSKI: Thank you. Thank you, Chair. And thank you for being here, and--

ROB JEFFREYS: Thank you.

LONOWSKI: And I just want to say I hope we get an opportunity to tour this when it's near completion. If you invite us out, that--

ROB JEFFREYS: Absolutely.

LONOWSKI: --I think that'd be a neat, neat little tour.

ROB JEFFREYS: Yeah. Being scheduled for completion fall of 2028.

LONOWSKI: OK. Thank you.

ROB JEFFREYS: Yeah. We'll be ready to rock and roll.

ANDERSEN: Any other questions?

ROB JEFFREYS: Thank you.

ANDERSEN: Mr. Jeffreys, thank you for your time.

ROB JEFFREYS: Thank you, everyone.

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ANDERSEN: Are there any other proponents? Seeing none, are there any that want to testify as-- in opposition to this bill? Welcome to Government, Military and Veteran [SIC] Affairs.

RYAN NICKELL: Hello. Hello, Government Veteran Military Affairs [SIC]. My name is Ryan Nickell, R-y-a-n N-i-c-k-e-l-l. I am Rick Holdcroft's constituent, and frankly, I don't agree with this name. Got his-- after listening to what the last person said about the trees. So, under capitalism, trees don't have any value unless they're cut. So, that's my concern. Thank you.

ANDERSEN: Thank you. Any questions? Thank you for your time. Any other opponents? Seeing none. Is there anybody in the neutral position? Sergeant at arms? Seeing nobody. Senator Holdcroft, your-- your close. The letters for the record, 1 proponent, 2 opponents, and zero in the neutral position.

HOLDCROFT: Thank you, Vice Chair Andersen. Just a couple of things. You know, we hired Doctor Jeffreys primarily because of his experience in re-entry, and, and, and really I think-- and I, I sat in, actually, on his-- as a member of the Judiciary Committee two years ago, when he came before us, and we, we grilled him pretty good. But he's, he's really all about rehabilitation and re-entry and, and cutting down on recidivism. You know, the, the Nebraska State Penitentiary was built-- started building it in 1869. I mean, that's how old it is. And over the last couple of winters, we've had water main breaks in there almost, you know, every six months, or at least in the winter time. And so, that, that, that penitentiary needs to go. And we need to, to build a new one. And he's the right guy to have here to, to, to, you know, to build it from ground up with the idea of rehabilitation and re-entry into society, and, and cutting down on recidivism. Now, you know, we, we do not have a high incarceration rate in Nebraska; we have about 2-- we have about 284 prisoners or incarcerated individuals per 100,000 people in the state of Nebraska. So, that, that ranks us at number 58 [SIC] in the country for incarceration rate. Not 58. I'm sorry. 28. Wouldn't that be nice if it was 58? 28 in, in the state [SIC]. Places like Mississippi have, like, 661 prisoners for every 100,000. So, that's-- you know, I think we're doing a, a pretty good job of trying to cut down on deferment, on deflection at the front end. You know, like, by-- with our, with our problem-solving courts, trying to keep people out of jail. That's one phase of it. We're rehabilitating in the jail, but we're still overcrowded and, and we'll still be overcrowded. Even with the new prison, we'll still be-- we'll have more, more incarcerated individuals than we really have design

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capability. And so, I really-- I think our only hope is with Doctor Jeffreys and his re-entry programs and his rehabilitation programs, and actually reducing the number of people we have incarcerated. So, I think he's the right man for the right job, and this is the right time for, for moving forward on a new prison. With that, I'll be happy to answer any questions you might have.

ANDERSEN: Thank you, Senator Holdcroft. Any questions? Senator Cavanaugh?

J. CAVANAUGH: When you put me on the spot like that--

ANDERSEN: Senator Lonowski.

LONOWSKI: One quick question. Is this-- and thank you, Chair. And thank you for this. Is this a maximum security prison?

HOLDCROFT: It will have elements of that, I'm sure.

ROB JEFFREYS: Multi-level.

LONOWSKI: Oh, OK. I'm just curious. Thank you.

ANDERSEN: Any other questions? Ah, Senator Cavanaugh. I knew it was coming.

J. CAVANAUGH: It's Friday afternoon, I'm going to ask a question. Senator Holdcroft, thanks for being here. Thanks for bringing this LR, and I, I always do really appreciate how much you've thrown yourself into learning about our penitentiary system in the state, and how much you really care about rehabilitating people. So, I appreciate that, and I, and I do like the idea of the name. And I guess my question would be, do you think trees have value in capitalism other than when they're cut down?

HOLDCROFT: I do. I, I believe that they inspire us, and I think they, they are a key part, I think, of setting the tone for, you know-- my wife-- I blame some of my allergies on the amount of, of plants we had in our house, because I think that they put off a lot of year-round, but they-- they're very much, I think-- if trees and, and, and flora, we don't have a lot of them on the ships, but we do-- I think they really do contribute to, to productivity and-- yeah, more than just when they're, they're to be cut down.

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J. CAVANAUGH: Yeah. Well I-- I've always liked the saying we can measure the success of a si-- society based off of whether people plant trees under whose shade they will never be able to sit.

HOLDCROFT: Well, I like that. Yeah.

J. CAVANAUGH: So, I don't know. Thanks.

HOLDCROFT: Thank you.

ANDERSEN: Definitely Friday afternoon. Thank you, Senator Holdcroft.

HOLDCROFT: All right. Thank you.

ANDERSEN: [INAUDIBLE] time. That will close the hearing on LR29, and will close the hearing for the Government, Military and Veteran [SIC] Affairs.