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FLOOR DEBATE

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potential benefits for the patient from enacting such change now would make it rather an urgent issue that I wanted to offer for your consideration in connection with LB 724. The committing mental health board still would need to be notified and the board would still have the prerogative to convene a hearing with respect to the patient and would be required to convene a hearing at the request of the county attorney to determine if the patient is still mentally ill and dangerous. The only thing that would change is the requirement that the regional center give seven days notice in advance of any intended discharge. Mr. Gibson, in an e-mail, said the section requires the regional centers to hold a patient that is ready for discharge for seven days after giving the mental health board notice that the patient is ready to discharge. If the mental health board does not disagree the patient can be discharged. Dr. Dreher, who works at the Hastings Regional Center, has treated over 600 patients over the last six years and only twice has the mental health board questioned the decision to release the patient. Holding patients for seven days after they are ready to be discharged is very expensive. It takes up beds. If we did not think the patient was ready to be discharged, we wouldn't notify the mental health board of that decision. At HRC, we treat and discharge over 600 patients annually. By removing this requirement, we could save 600 discharges times seven, or \$400 per day. We could use this money and capacity to take care of patients waiting in crisis centers on postcommitment basis, or we could use it for other less restrictive services other than the acute in-patient care. The change would possibly free up some funding for the Nebraska Health Care Cash Fund currently going to emergency protective custody costs, which could be used more for the development of community-based services. More important than the potential fiscal impact, I believe the amendment is just the right thing to do for the patients. If they are ready to be released, why should we keep holding them? I would ask for your adoption of this amendment. Thank you, Mr. President.

SENATOR CUDABACK: Thank you, Senator Jensen. You've heard the opening on AM1574. Open for discussion on that amendment to LB 724. There are no...I am sorry, Senator Stuthman.