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Health and Human Services Committee
February 19, 2015

[LB199 LB243 LB296 LB441]

The Committee on Health and Human Services met at 1:30 p.m. on Thursday, February 19, 2015, in Room 1510 of the State Capitol, Lincoln, Nebraska, for the purpose of conducting a public hearing on LB199, LB296, LB243, and LB441. Senators present: Kathy Campbell, Chairperson; Sara Howard, Vice Chairperson; Roy Baker; Tanya Cook; Sue Crawford; Mark Kolterman; and Merv Riepe. Senators absent: None.

SENATOR CAMPBELL: If you could all find a chair and we will start. I want to welcome you to the hearings this afternoon of the Health and Human Services Committee. I'm Kathy Campbell. I serve as the Chair of the committee. I represent District 25.

BRENNEN MILLER: Senator, I'm sorry...

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Do I have to repeat it?

BRENNEN MILLER: You need to pause for a minute.

SENATOR CAMPBELL: We don't have the best of technology. There are a number of senators who are lobbying for better equipment. (Laughter) Are we on pause permanently?

BRENNEN MILLER: I'll--if I can--explain. This is...yesterday we had issues with this machine. It has been replaced with a new 1980s machine. (Laughter) This one, instead of being broken on just one side has decided to be broken on both sides, so...

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Would you like us to start just recording on our phones and things like that?

BRENNEN MILLER: Yeah.

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Well, we can...Brennen, we can do the procedures, can't we?

BRENNEN MILLER: Yeah.

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Okay. We'll go back to where we were at pause. I'm Kathy Campbell and I represent District 25 which is here in Lincoln. And it is our practice here: We do self-introductions. So, Senator Kolterman.

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SENATOR HOWARD: I'm Senator Kolterman from the 24th District, Seward, York, and Polk Counties.

SENATOR BAKER: Roy Baker, District 30, Gage County, part of southern Lancaster County.

SENATOR CRAWFORD: Good afternoon. Senator Sue Crawford, District 45, eastern Bellevue, Sarpy County, and Offutt.

JOSELYN LUEDTKE: Joselyn Luedtke, committee counsel.

SENATOR BAKER: I'm Senator Tanya Cook from District 13 in Omaha and Douglas County.

SENATOR RIEPE: Thank you for making it through the snow. I'm Merv Riepe. I'm the state senator from District 12, which is Omaha, Millard, and Ralston, and have laryngitis.

SENATOR CAMPBELL: He's talking a little bit better than he did yesterday. The gentleman who explained our machine problems is Brennen Miller who is the clerk of the committee. And then we have two pages with us today: Jay--and Jay is from Dalton Nebraska, is majoring in ag economics at UNL--and Brook is from Omaha. And Brook is also at UNL majoring in marketing, advertisement, and political science. Did I get them all?

SENATOR RIEPE: You got something.

BROOKLYNNE CAMMARATA: Close enough.

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Close enough, okay, good. We'll go through the procedures for the committee. First of all, if you have a device that makes noise of any kind, would you turn it off or silence it? I'm very embarrassed to admit that I was in a hearing over the noon hour and my phone went off. It was horribly embarrassing because a former member of the Health and Human Services Committee was giving me a very bad time about it. So we'll remind you to do that. If you're testifying today, make sure you have one of the orange sheets from either side and print as legibly as you can. You do not need to have handouts or copies of your testimony but if you do, we would like 15 copies and you can talk to the pages if you need some help there. We in the committee use the light system. And you'll have five minutes. It will be on green for what seems like a long time and then it will go to yellow and you have one minute. And it will go to red and you'll look up and I'll be trying to get your attention. This is to ensure that--we have four hearings today so we have a long afternoon--and making sure that the first testifier and the last testifier get an equal amount of time and our attention. When you come forward and sit down at

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the chair, before, you can give your orange sheet or any handouts, anything that you want distributed, to Brennen and he will have one of the pages distribute those for you to the committee. Please sit down, state your name for the record and spell it so the transcribers, as they listen to the recording--hopefully we now have a machine that records--will be able to pick out your voice and know how to exactly spell your name. So, Brennen, are we ready or are we on pause?

BRENNEN MILLER: It's a little...we're okay.

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Okay. You sure?

BRENNEN MILLER: Yes.

SENATOR CAMPBELL: All right. So we'll start with the first hearing this afternoon, Senator Howard. Senator Howard's bill, LB199, is to provide stipends for social work students. Senator Howard, welcome.

SENATOR HOWARD: Good afternoon, Senator Campbell and members of the committee. I am Senator Sara Howard, H-o-w-a-r-d, and I represent District 9. Today I bring you LB199 to continue the conversation about how best to harness federal funds for child welfare. This conversation left off last year with LB790, a bill I introduced that provided for consistent training of social workers. There was an issue around differences in training "curriculums" of...between the Eastern Service Area and the rest of the state that impacted our ability to draw down IV-E funds. And so by having the necessary legislation to ensure that they had consistent training programs, we were able to clarify that drawdown. So that portion of LB790 passed. But we were not able to include the provisions in this bill, which is very exciting, so we're going to try again this year. LB199 would require the Department of Health and Human Services to work with Nebraska schools of social work to develop a IV-E stipend program. And for the new folks on the committee, we'll just talk about IV-E for a minute or two. IV-E funds refer to the...to Title IV-E under the federal Social Security Act. And under this act, states, territories, and tribes are entitled to claim partial federal reimbursement for the costs of providing foster care, certain kinds of adoption, and child welfare assistance to children who meet federal eligibility criteria. Under Title IV-E, reimbursement is limited to three areas: maintenance, administration, and training. Maintenance is the room and board payment made to licensed foster parents, group homes, and residential childcare facilities that house IV-E eligible children. And administration can include costs associated with the administration of the program such as referral of services, determination of eligibility, development of the case plan, and even placement. Training funds include costs of providing training at educational institutions as well as in-service training for the personnel employed by the state who administer IV-E funds. My bill is focusing on training that

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is conducted at educational institutions. It's important to note that the funds...that these funds can be drawn down for training and do not impact our current IV-E funds that we receive for training already that are administered through the Center for Children, Families, and the Law. Okay? Okay. Yeah, okay. These funds that are awarded to students pursuing degrees in social work aim to improve the quality of public child welfare services by offering financial assistance to students pursuing degrees related to social work. Title IV-E scholarship grants are awarded to and administered through individual degree-granting programs. There is an obligation for the recipients of these funds once they complete their course of study. And these new graduates must accept qualified employment at a child welfare agency within the state from which they receive the stipends. They are expected to work for one full year for each year that funds were granted to them through the program. If this is not completed, the student would be expected to pay back the funds. Last year, after introducing LB790, I was very happy to hear from several social workers and professors of social work about the importance of IV-E funds to ensuring competent and educated child welfare workers. Several who contacted me offered another way that Nebraska could be using IV-E dollars for trainings. Many states utilize IV-E funds for these types of stipends. And the importance of trained social workers in child welfare can't be overstated. For the new senators, my bias is that my mother was a social worker for 34 years. She has a master's in social work and worked in the Department of Health and Human Services for her entire tenure and so was very well-versed in IV-E and sort of the challenges of both a trained and an untrained work force and what happens when we have less experienced social workers. And I think I would refer to the Foster Care Review Office's report, page 62 and 63, which I know you don't have with you, but I'm happy to bring you copies later. I tend to ask, and you might not have noticed, about case worker turnover and consistency in case workers is really important to families finding permanency and children finding permanency. And so when we look at, in the Eastern Service Area, 36 percent of kids had more than four case workers, that's a lot of case workers in a year for a child. And that's a lot of people that they are seeing and...when they need to be able to build trust with one person. So research in this area is also very conclusive. In the child welfare profession, workers who are properly educated and trained, particularly those with social work degrees, are most likely to stay. As this committee is very well aware, ensuring consistent case management is an important piece of working toward permanency. Others behind me will most likely be able to dig into the specifics of the stipend programs. But the partnership established by this program would allow the state to access specialized federal funds for professionalizing the field of public child welfare work force, which is a lot of Ws, through recruitment, training, and retention of qualified graduates into child welfare positions. There has been a question from a committee member regarding whether or not these funds would be able to be used at private institutions as well as public institutions. And so I will be researching that before we exec on it. And I look forward to continuing the conversation with you about how best to draw down federal dollars to ensure a highly trained child welfare work force. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have. [LB199]

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SENATOR CAMPBELL: Questions from the senators on the bill? Yes, Senator Kolterman. [LB199]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: Thank you, Senator Howard. I really like this bill. I have a couple of questions about...I know we're...part of the bill is to get at some federal funds that are already allocated that we're not utilizing. And I know there is a certain amount of obligation on the part of the state of Nebraska. I'm wondering, is there any way we can tie our internship money that's already allocated into this type of a program or do we have to allocate additional funds? Just a question. [LB199]

SENATOR HOWARD: Which internship program? [LB199]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: Well, there's some internship programs available through the state right now. [LB199]

SENATOR HOWARD: Okay. I am not really aware of them. [LB199]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: So I'd like...I'd be willing to work with you on that to try and find that. [LB199]

SENATOR HOWARD: That would be amazing, thank you, because those are not programs that I'm very familiar with. But, yes, any help is appreciated. [LB199]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: And then again, you know, I'm interested in seeing if we can get our private institutions included because they do produce a lot of good social workers in this state. [LB199]

SENATOR HOWARD: Certainly. [LB199]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: And I'd really like the idea that, if we can get our young people to participate, we can keep them here and not ship them off into the surrounding states or farther out. [LB199]

SENATOR HOWARD: Absolutely. [LB199]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: So thank you for carrying the bill. [LB199]

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SENATOR HOWARD: Thank you, Senator Kolterman. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Any other questions? Thank you, Senator Howard, and I'm sure you're going to be here. [LB199]

SENATOR HOWARD: I will, I promise. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: All right. We'll take the first proponent. [LB199]

TERRY WERNER: (Exhibits 1, 2) Good afternoon, Senator Campbell and the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Terry Werner, spelled T-e-r-r-y W-e-r-n-e-r. And I'm the executive director for the Nebraska chapter of the National Association of Social Workers. And before I get started, I would just like, for the record, to say that I'm also passing out a letter of support for the...from the Nebraska Association for Marriage and Family Therapists (sic). I commend Senator Howard in her attempt to draw down as much federal Title IV-E funding as possible. Title IV-E is a federal program administered by the state and local child welfare agencies to help children. It provides states with funds for maintenance, administration, and training of child welfare programs. Nebraska's current child welfare system has been unable to access certain Title IV-E funds as it has failed to partner with accredited social work departments at state universities to recruit, train, and hire the most qualified work force into the child welfare services. Moreover, the current system is less than desirable as it hires graduates who lack the aptitude as well as the academic and professional preparation to assist our most vulnerable children and families in their time of need. The new hires are provided with state-funded training for the first few weeks of their employment with the department. And due to a lack of preparedness for the field, end up resigning within a few months. This high turnover impacts children and families the most as they end up with multiple workers and an ever-changing intervention strategy. Rather than continue to spend money on computer systems, training modules, checklists, and other tools that have proven ineffective, the time has come for Nebraska to put children and families first and seek partnerships that guarantee best practices in recruiting, training, and hiring of a professional work force. In an ideal world, we would only hire highly trained social workers to our child welfare system as Kansas and many other states have done. Social work students spend time studying family systems and challenges, researching complex policy issues, advocating for responsive practices while gaining values and practice skills to support families. This academic study is capped off with practicums at human service agencies. This extensive educational preparation provides a high level of skills and abilities demanded by child welfare positions. Social workers are passionate about serving children and families and are prepared to do so. Research shows that hiring social work graduates reduces worker burnout and turnover, increases morale and, most importantly, ensures proper care for our children and families. LB199 promotes partnerships with social work departments and provides students with

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an educational stipend to support their commitment to child welfare. A majority of states in the nation utilize these funds for partnerships and stipends. This funnels well-trained people into our child welfare system which improves the current situation. This commonsense use of Title IV-E funding is something that NASW and schools of social work in Nebraska have worked on for years but have not achieved success to date. In January of 2009, there was a memorandum of understanding signed between UNO, UNK, the department, and the Center for Children, Family, and the Law, to pursue agreement...an agreement establishing a partnership for the purpose of increasing professionalism in the child welfare system. In July of 2009, a three-year agreement was drafted but unsigned due to budget concerns. Efforts were stymied due to the privatization of the system. It should be noted that Title IV-E funding to promote the partnership initiatives and the student stipends come from different Title IV-E provisions and is not the same money that would be utilized for the required training by the state by the state and has not been accessed by the state previously. Senators, this is a commonsense legislation and I urge you to advance LB199 to the full body for the sake of Nebraska's children and families. And I would like just to add, the first question about whether it could be accessed by private institutions, yes, it can be. And the intent is, it has to be administered by the state institutions. But Creighton and Union College and Wesleyan would all be able to access those funds. I'd also like to mention, on the fiscal note, it looks like a very conservative fiscal note which we always like. And it calculated things at 50 percent. I believe a large portion of the fiscal note would be at 75 percent federal match and 25 percent state. And additionally, it is my understanding that some of the state funding, the 25 percent, can be paid for with in-kind services. So for example, if it's administered at a university, the faculty member...their salary could in fact be in kind. So I don't think it's a staggering fiscal note but I think it's probably, in reality, going to be much less. So I'd be happy to answer any questions. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Questions for Mr. Werner? One of the questions that I have is, a couple years ago, you know, when we were in the midst of all the child welfare and looking at it, one of the questions that we discussed with some of the folks at the program at UNO was whether we had enough spots, you know, the availability of students to get in the program in order to start moving to that. And there was some concern that we didn't. Now, have we done some kind of a survey to ensure that we have enough spots in the educational institutions to move to a more professional work force? And that's really a larger question. [LB199]

TERRY WERNER: Yeah. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: But you posed it in your letter and I thought we should talk about it. [LB199]

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TERRY WERNER: Right. Exactly. You know, there was a time where we tried to get a bill that required the department to hire social workers. And at that time, I do not think we could have produced enough social workers. And I'm uncertain whether we can even now. What we could do, though, certainly they could put it in their policy to give preference to social workers because when you hire somebody that has a degree in Latin and you ask them to go work with our vulnerable families, after a couple weeks' training, it seems illogical and it's pretty obvious they're not going to last and probably not going to do justice to serving the families and children. So I don't think that we could provide enough at this point. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Okay. [LB199]

TERRY WERNER: But we're getting close, you know? We're...UNK actually graduates the most bachelor's level students and now are graduating MSWs. So we've made a lot of progress in the last several years. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: One of the issues that we also looked at, and this came from one of the noted professors at UNO, and that was the whole idea that not only would we look at this as an entry point for a social work requirement but that we would require supervisors to have an MSW. And a number of states have gone to that because they see that as one of the key steps to improving their child welfare system. [LB199]

TERRY WERNER: And you know what? Doctor Younes from UNK and Susan Feyen are both going to testify. And they can talk probably better about the supervision issues. But I'm pretty sure that they do have to be supervised by an MSW. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Okay. Other questions? Senator Baker. [LB199]

SENATOR BAKER: Mr. Werner, do you happen to know what a college graduate in social work...what a starting salary might be? [LB199]

TERRY WERNER: Oh, you...I think we could probably...I can defer that question to some of the professors from the institutions. But I do know it's not enough. (Laughter) But on the other hand, one of the things I chide professors for when I speak to classes is, sometimes I'll hear them say, oh, you didn't get into this for the money. And in fact, when NASW did a nationwide survey, they found that many social workers were very, very happy with their salaries. And as you'll see, I think, some testimony here today, if you look around the state, many of the agencies are run by social workers. And so you can make money as a social worker and I tell my students they must make money as a social worker, so. [LB199]

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SENATOR CAMPBELL: Any other questions? Thank you, Mr. Werner. [LB199]

TERRY WERNER: Thank you. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Our next proponent? [LB199]

MAHA YOUNES: Hello. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Hello. [LB199]

MAHA YOUNES: My name is Maha Younes. And I'm social work professor at the University of Nebraska at Kearney. And I am also the department chair. And I cannot tell you how privileged and thrilled I am to be here and to talk about this legislation. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: We're going to stop you because we do need you to spell your name. [LB199]

MAHA YOUNES: Oh, yes. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: I'm sure the transcribers are not going to be... [LB199]

MAHA YOUNES: No problem. M-a-h-a, my last name is Y-o-u-n-e-s. S as in Sam...a lot of times with my accent it sounds like an F so we have to be careful. But I'm going to try not to repeat a lot of what's been said. But this legislation will improve the recruitment, training, retention, and quality of the child welfare work force in Nebraska. We know that for sure. My support for this legislation is based on a lot of knowledge and experience that I have gained in more than 30 years...30-some years of work with children and families, providers and agencies. I have also had the opportunity to collaborate directly with the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. And I led the consortium of the schools of social work including private institutions. So we can establish this very same partnership program with the department. Unfortunately, after--I can tell you--nine years, if not more, of direct work with the department, bureaucratic shifts in leadership, budget concerns, and the privatization efforts kind of led to the stalling and eventually the freezing of this whole initiative. LB199 will most definitely benefit every county in the state, every legislative district. It will benefit children and families throughout the state, no question about it. It ensures that you have the most well-trained professional work force. This collaboration is not new. It has taken place in over 40 states throughout the country. It has...it basically uses federal funds that the states are not...that our state is not currently seeking or utilizing. They are getting part of the pot but...and not...because

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these...this fund specifically for partnerships with social work education programs that are accredited at four-year institutions. So while the state may be getting some money for training, this is a different pot. This partnership will create a win-win situation where accredited programs can use their gatekeeping practices, which we must have as part of our accreditation, to basically create very specialized curriculum and training that also meets accreditation to recruit the most qualified students who are passionate about child welfare work. And basically, it ensures that they do internships with the state wherever they are needed throughout the state and that they have a job when they graduate. Social work education programs here will work very closely with the state. That's an expectation. They will supervise internships. And when...the beauty of this legislation is that when the student graduates, they are ready to hit the ground running. They will be able to assume responsibilities right away with minimal training. Some of the training they made need is, like, computer systems which is very special to the state. Right now, we have a lot of the graduates having to repeat training that they've already spent two to four years taking. In return, the states are provided with professional social workers who are fully prepared, again, as I told you. Please note, as Mr. Werner noted and as Senator Howard noted, that there is plenty of research to prove the effectiveness of these partnerships. They work. Recruiting qualified social workers for work with Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services has been a challenge for a number of reasons. Number one, this is very stressful work. It's very, very stressful. A lot of times, people are on call. There is a high level of accountability and responsibility. There...supervision can be deficient and sometimes lacking when it comes to the supports that workers need. Also, because of the reputation of the department and the struggles that it has encountered, frankly a lot of social work students would prefer to work somewhere less troublesome, less stressful, where they maybe make even more money. So while a lot of our graduates may enter, seek our degrees saying, I want to work with children and families--and trust me when I tell you, I see a lot of prospective students and I have had a lot of students--hundreds--and about 75 percent to 80 percent say, I entered this profession because I want to work with children and families. By the time they are ready to graduate, the percentage has dropped greatly. So funding this is very, very important. Since funding is crucial to consider, it is important to note that these are unkept funds. There's no limit on them. They are there to...they provide a lot of funds for...that the state needs for training. And they require little expense on the part of the state. I'm not going to repeat what Mr. Werner said, but there is a match. And I'm sorry, I think I'm out of time. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: I just want to make sure that we have time for questions if the senators have questions for the professor. [LB199]

MAHA YOUNES: Sure. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Could you answer Senator Kolterman's question? [LB199]

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SENATOR KOLTERMAN: No...go...you have a question. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: No, that's fine. I...my question is the same as yours, sir. [LB199]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: All right. Well, my question...and first of all thanks for coming from...you live in Kearney? [LB199]

MAHA YOUNES: Yes. [LB199]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: And you teach there? [LB199]

MAHA YOUNES: Yes. [LB199]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: Have you worked with interns like this in the past? [LB199]

MAHA YOUNES: Yes. [LB199]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: For, you said, 30 years? [LB199]

MAHA YOUNES: I've been at UNK since 1989. In 1990 I went full-time and before that just as a supervisor in the field. [LB199]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: So the process then is, I assume that these are juniors and seniors that are probably going into these internship types of programs with the idea that they get their feet wet, they kind of get an idea...who actually works with them? Are there people in the field that are currently employed by the state of Nebraska? Are they social workers that are working for the not-for-profits? How does that play out? [LB199]

MAHA YOUNES: Yes. Well, as part of this program, we would bring students out in their junior year probably. And they would have to make a commitment to work with the state in child welfare. We have specialized curriculum that's agreed upon by the state and the school. Then when it comes time to do an internship, that's usually done in the last semester or the last year of the student's education. And then we have, as part of our accreditation, field coordinators that work very directly with field supervisors or instructors to ensure that the students are basically getting not only their feet wet but they are treated like any other worker basically. And so the students through that internship period, which is 400 hours and then there's a seminar that's about

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100 hours, so through that have a lot of training and direct experience with the department. Did I answer your question? [LB199]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: Yes, you did. So...can I keep going? [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Sure. [LB199]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: So in essence, the analogy that I'm thinking of, it's very similar to, like, a student teacher. [LB199]

MAHA YOUNES: Yes, very much. [LB199]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: Would that be a good analogy? [LB199]

MAHA YOUNES: That's great. [LB199]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: So you say that there's unlimited amounts of...there's no cap on the amounts of money we can get from the federal government... [LB199]

MAHA YOUNES: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. [LB199]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: ...for programs like this? [LB199]

MAHA YOUNES: Yes. And the things is, you know, every school...there is a nationwide and statewide shortage of social workers. Kansas, for example, has privatization efforts that require social work degrees for anybody wanting to work in child welfare. And because of that, they recruit a lot of our workers to Kansas and they offer them salaries in the mid-\$30,000s starting out. In Nebraska, the salaries are in the high \$20,000s to low \$30,000s for child welfare workers. I believe Nebraska Families Collaborative, Mr. David Newell, will be speaking and he will tell you where they start out for his agency. [LB199]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: Okay. Hey, thank you very much. [LB199]

MAHA YOUNES: Oh, you're welcome. I'm...I apologize. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Senator Riepe. [LB199]

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SENATOR RIEPE: I have a question...excuse me, I just start out talking and sometimes it doesn't come out. (Laughter) My question is, how long has your program been in existence, and have you seen a retention as opposed to all of your graduates then migrating to the urban market? I mean, are some of you then staying distributed into all parts of our state? [LB199]

MAHA YOUNES: You know, that's the beauty of this program is it does keep students, you know, where they are educated. We have...last year we graduated 43 students. That's a lot. We are the largest undergraduate program in this state because of our location and the center. And so we do have students that come. I mean, this semester we have students in Sidney, we have students in Scottsbluff. We have students all over. And so they come to us for the education. And as part of this program, I don't see why we cannot reach out to Chadron as well because, you know, that's another part of the state's that's very underserved. And so the beauty of this program is it does allow us to compel students to serve those areas. And the incentive for them is the stipend program. And the way the program was designed, or we had hoped, is that it would cover part of their tuition. So it's a great incentive for them. [LB199]

SENATOR RIEPE: As part of--excuse me again--as part of being in a social work program, do they also have a...do they subspecialize in mental health, because it's one of our areas that is a real challenge. [LB199]

MAHA YOUNES: It's a real challenge. On an undergraduate level, it's generalist preparation. That means we have to provide social workers who are ready to assume any position in the state at different levels. So you may see baccalaureate level social workers running programs in some parts of the state. In the last few years, we have been able to advocate successfully and to bring the UNO master's of social work program to Kearney. And that has enabled us to provide for the behavioral health shortage that we encounter in central and western Nebraska. And I'm sure you know that outside of Lincoln and Omaha, the rest of the state is considered a federal shortage area for behavioral health. And so social workers are crucial. This is very, very important. It touches all of us. That's why I say, it doesn't matter what legislative district or party or area. It doesn't really matter. This is going to cover everybody in the end. [LB199]

SENATOR RIEPE: Thank you. [LB199]

MAHA YOUNES: Yeah. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Any other questions? I do want to come back to a portion of Senator Riepe's question. How many of the students stay in greater Nebraska rather than gravitating to the metropolitan areas? And I think that was part of your question, Senator. [LB199]

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SENATOR RIEPE: Yes, thank you. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Can you enlighten us with that? Do they stay there? [LB199]

MAHA YOUNES: Yes. I will tell you something: One of our students, actually maybe 2, 3 in the last year, went to Nebraska Families Collaborative because they offer--and Mr. Newell will talk about that--paid internships. Students are poor. And so if you offer them the money to get...to incentivize their education, to support them, they will go there. When we were talking to the state about this, we had more than enough students who stepped forward saying, we want to do this and we would be willing to go to Lexington, North Platte, wherever we're needed. So the money does work. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Do you run a study on the percentage of the students...I understand they're willing to do that, the internship wherever. [LB199]

MAHA YOUNES: Yes, yes. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: But what's the long term of, did they stay in Scottsbluff and North Platte and Lexington and McCook? I think that's part of the question here. [LB199]

MAHA YOUNES: Yes. Well, and I can tell you, I serve on the...on BHECN, the Behavioral Health Education Center board for Nebraska. And one of the things we talked about is, when you provide training to people in the areas where they live, they stay. The majority of people want to stay and serve their community. But when you expect somebody from North Platte to drive to Omaha and live in Omaha so they can get a graduate degree, you lose their ability to serve their county. And most often they don't return. So the best way to provide it is to allow them to earn their education and serve their communities. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Okay. Senator Riepe. [LB199]

SENATOR RIEPE: Have you considered a dating service (laughter) so that you try to match them up with someone local and sort of get them some roots there? [LB199]

MAHA YOUNES: I would not be very successful at that. (Laughter) [LB199]

SENATOR RIEPE: Just trying to be creative. [LB199]

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MAHA YOUNES: But we can try. We can try, we can try. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Senator Kolterman. [LB199]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: Yeah. Wow, that's a hard one to top. I think you indicated that once they take this internship...so let's say they do an internship in Grand Island. [LB199]

MAHA YOUNES: Yes. [LB199]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: Is it my understanding...did I hear you correctly that they have to serve a year there... [LB199]

MAHA YOUNES: Yes. [LB199]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: ...after they graduate? [LB199]

MAHA YOUNES: Yes. [LB199]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: So that could be part of the incentive to stay there long term and... [LB199]

MAHA YOUNES: This is why this is beautiful. [LB199]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: And the other thing...and one of the reasons that I...when I studied this bill before we came today, one of the reasons I visited with Senator Howard was because, if you look at the private institutions throughout the state, there are...a lot of them are already in the small rural areas. [LB199]

MAHA YOUNES: Yes. [LB199]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: And if we could somehow tie everybody together in this, we might be able to fulfill some of that need and keep them in the rural areas, so. [LB199]

MAHA YOUNES: We are with you, Senator. And I want you to know that when I talked about the consortium, and some of the people here will testify to this, it involved all the private institutions. [LB199]

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SENATOR KOLTERMAN: Okay. [LB199]

MAHA YOUNES: We had Union, we had Wesleyan, we had Creighton, we had a school called Dana. We had even Dana. [LB199]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: Which is now Midland. [LB199]

MAHA YOUNES: And the federal funds actually specify that the contract has to be between the state and a state public institution like University of Nebraska at Kearney or Omaha. However, all the private entities can subcontract with us. And that was the plan. And we even had a specific number. So the program said, this is how many students I can provide you on an annual basis. And that's how they were involved. And they would tell you the same thing. [LB199]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: Great. Thank you again, Maha. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Senators, I'm going to go on because we have a number of people who want to testify. Thank you, Professor. [LB199]

MAHA YOUNES: Thank you very much. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: While the next proponent is coming forward, Senators, this is going to have to...transcribers will take this off of the video because they...our machine is not working. So please do not sit back in your chair--sorry, Senator Baker--and speak as close...closer to the microphone than you normally would, because that's how they'll pick it up. So when you're speaking, try to speak loudly into the microphone. Good afternoon. Go right ahead. [LB199]

SUSAN FEYEN-REAY: (Exhibit 3) Good afternoon. Hello, Senators. My name is Susan Feyen-Reay. It's S-u-s-a-n, last name F-e-y-e-n-, dash, R-e-a-y. And I am a licensed independent clinical social worker. And I also work at the UNO Grace Abbott School of Social Work. The School of Social Work program at UNO is the only program in the state that offers master's of social work degrees. And before I start what I've prepared for my testimony, just to answer some of the questions you've brought up already, is that the University of Nebraska at Omaha has seen the need for master's level social workers statewide and has started a master's program that...housed at the University of Nebraska at Kearney campus. And that's been going on for quite a few years now and we are able to graduate master's level social workers to start in those jobs in their community. Our goal and what we see and the needs of the citizens--the consumers as well as the individuals wanting degrees--is they want to work where they live. They don't want to have to move to Lincoln and Omaha for their degree. I was out for graduation for the master's

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level students in the summertime and we had ten master's level graduates. And all of them already had jobs and all of them were staying in their area. I will be doing practicum advisement for the students in the Kearney area here on the 27th of February and I have 22 master's level social workers that will be doing internships in and around the Kearney and greater Nebraska area. We really have a...the students are interested. The agencies are interested. We have places for those students to go to be able to do their internships, to be able to take advantage of this program. I want to thank the senators for supporting this and bringing this legislation forward. I'm also one of the students who could have benefitted from this program with the IV-E funds as I'm a graduate of the bachelor's and master's level program at UNO. I graduated with my bachelor's in the mid-'90s and immediately went to work at Child Protective Services in Omaha. My mom was a secretary at Child Protective Services for 30 years and so when I was a kid, I would always go in there and see how cool it looked to play with all these kids and people running around looking so important all the time. Well, I soon learned that it was a little different than I had thought. But I was very, very happy to do the job and I cannot imagine doing this work and being a social worker for as long as I have without having that really important social work training that I received at the University. The work of a child protective service worker is hard. Oftentimes these are young professionals working--as was I--with just trying to figure out your life and your place in the world and your professional career. And I'm very thankful for the degree that I had and the support that I had by the Health and Human Services, by the social workers and the staff that were there, to be able to help me to become the social worker that I am today. The Grace Abbott School of Social Work has well-established partnerships with community members, agencies, Health and Human Services, and other universities offering social work degrees. And these partnerships will help facilitate the application process to make this IV-E funds in this legislation work well. We have the capacity to serve bachelor's and master's level students that are eligible for this IV-E funds program from the federal government. We are...have hired lots of new staff. We have a new faculty who is actually here today with me, Claudette Grinnell-Davis, who has been...come to Nebraska specifically to work on child welfare issues. We have grown the program and we intend to continue to do so. We've doubled our enrollment and we continue to increase the number of social workers that we're graduating because we see the need. Our plan is to place at least half of the MSW students that are receiving the IV-E stipends in the areas of the state where they are most needed particularly in that mid-Nebraska area of Kearney, Hastings, Grand Island, where those students are living so that they can stay and support their community there. As you all know, protecting children is the utmost importance. And having well-trained and supportive staff is the key to making this happen. I'm very, very excited about this. And I have one more thing I want to add is it goes along very well with a federal grant that we just received for \$1.3 million to support children and individuals with dual diagnosis. So we have done a lot in this area and will continue to do so. Thank you. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Thank you. Questions from the senators? Senator Riepe. [LB199]

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SENATOR RIEPE: I'll try to get this one out. [LB199]

SUSAN FEYEN-REAY: Okay. [LB199]

SENATOR RIEPE: One of the primary roles in mental health for a psychiatrist is to write prescriptions. Do you see some future role where medical...or social workers trained with some mental health background could partner with, you know, much higher trained pharmacists than we had 20 years ago? And with, you know, enabling legislation, I'm just trying to look for some new model that would be able to get better, more effective mental health services spread out into areas where psychiatrists don't reside. [LB199]

SUSAN FEYEN-REAY: Absolutely, thank you, Senator. That's a really good point and a really good question. And that is something that...part of the grant that we've received--it's a \$1.3 million federal grant--is to have social workers in multidisciplinary settings in rural areas. And we see that need and we want those social workers to be there. The thing about being a social worker, particularly when you're doing home-based work like I have done, is you are going to the client. They don't have transportation. They live in rural areas. Psychiatrists are often not going to be out there with you. So you have to be able to have the support and the foundation and the understanding of that mental health background and people supporting you to be able to deliver that service. I think that those things are happening and are going to continue to happen more with telehealth and the other recent developments we've had in that area. [LB199]

SENATOR RIEPE: But you also need to have medication sometimes... [LB199]

SUSAN FEYEN-REAY: Yes. [LB199]

SENATOR RIEPE: ...which a pharmacist, if we gave enabling legislation, could write the script as opposed to a physician. [LB199]

SUSAN FEYEN-REAY: Yes, that's...yes. [LB199]

SENATOR RIEPE: A little out there, but... [LB199]

SUSAN FEYEN-REAY: Yep, I agree, thank you. [LB199]

SENATOR RIEPE: Okay. Thank you. [LB199]

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SENATOR CAMPBELL: That might be a scope of practice issue. (Laughter) [LB199]

SUSAN FEYEN-REAY: It might be. [LB199]

SENATOR RIEPE: It would be, it would be. (Inaudible). [LB199]

SUSAN FEYEN-REAY: It might be. I'm... [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: I'm watching the faces in the audience and they're going, oh, I don't know... [LB199]

SUSAN FEYEN-REAY: I think in some states, social workers write scripts but that certainly isn't something on the agenda that I've seen in Nebraska as of yet nor do I think that we have the scope of practice to support that, but hey, you know, it's a big, big world. We're all about solving problems. That's what social workers do. [LB199]

SENATOR RIEPE: That's right. That's why they have legislators. [LB199]

SUSAN FEYEN-REAY: Yes. (Laugh) [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Any other questions? Thank you very much. [LB199]

SUSAN FEYEN-REAY: You bet. Thank you so much. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Our next proponent? Anyone else? Anyone else? While the gentleman is coming forward, are there people who wish to testify in opposition to the bill? Those in a neutral position? You have one person in a neutral position? [LB199]

TERRY WERNER: No, I think Dave Newell is planning to testify on this. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Oh, all right. I couldn't see his hand. Sorry. Sir, go ahead. Go right ahead. [LB199]

JAY SEARS: Thank you. Madam Chair and members of the committee, for the record, I am Jay Sears, J-a-y S-e-a-r-s, and I represent the education members of the Nebraska State Education Association. NSEA is in support of LB199. One of the three top areas for our members as they

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talked about issues in education is the mental health issues. And so we see this legislation getting some federal dollars to do the internships as increasing the number of social workers in the state and the support system that all of us need for our children and families. So we encourage you to pass on the legislation. And thank you for the first time from the education side to come and testify in front of you this year. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Absolutely. [LB199]

JAY SEARS: So I'll be back though. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Good. Any other questions from the senators? Thanks. [LB199]

JAY SEARS: Thank you. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: It's important to have the education at the table, so I appreciate your testimony. [LB199]

JAY SEARS: Thank you. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: We'll now go to the neutral and a...oh, I'm sorry. Are you testifying in proponents? [LB199]

JENNIFER SEDIVY: Yes. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Okay, would you come forward? I think today what we're going to do is, we're going to ask people who are going to testify to come up and fill these first seats because it will save on time and we'll be able to see you. So if you want to come back there...come up front and then you'll be ready to go. Good afternoon. [LB199]

DAVID NEWELL: (Exhibit 4) Good afternoon. Senator Campbell and committee, my name is David Newell, D-a-v-i-d N-e-w-e-l-l. I am president and CEO of Nebraska Families Collaborative. And I am also a licensed social worker in the state of Nebraska. And I am testifying in support of LB199. I'd like to thank Senator Howard for introducing this legislation. I won't read to you my testimony, but I think I'll just highlight a few things based on the questions that you've had. I'd just like to reemphasize that research and my own professional experience has suggested that social work is the best profession to provide child protective services in this state and others. There is a national shortage of social workers as already mentioned. And so as a

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result of that, Nebraska Families Collaborative, we have to do national recruitment. Quite simply, there isn't sufficient work force in the state so we have to go nationally. The state of Kansas does require its child protective work forces to be licensed as social workers. And that process, my understanding, took approximately about ten years to get there because currently we are not generating enough social workers in the state to meet demand. But I do...would encourage the committee to be thinking about that as a long-term strategy for the state. I wanted to share with you, too, based on some of the questions that you had, is that I graduated from a social work program in Alaska and spent the bulk of my career in Alaska. And Alaska and Nebraska have very similar challenges as far as our rural population are concerned. And the research does show that if you train students who are from the areas that you're trying to recruit for, basically that work force is more likely to go to those rural areas and to stay in those areas. And that was certainly my experience in Alaska with many of my friends that I graduated with. And they've benefitted from the stipend program as well. NFC does do paid student social work internships. Currently we have four social work students from UNO, one from UNK, and one from Creighton. And those are paid positions. What's different between that and what would be with this stipend is that, first of all, then we would be able to draw IV-E funds for this and that would include people who would work at NFC. And it would also require an obligation for that student to work in the field for a period of time after graduation. And so our current student interns are not required to work with us after that time. Another question that I heard from the group is around supervision. NFC does require our social work case managers to be supervised by a master's person so we're nationally accredited. We're the only nationally accredited child welfare service provider as far as child protection in the state of Nebraska. And we do require master's degrees. We would love to do social workers in that. We do preference for social work hire. But there aren't sufficient social workers for us to require it at this time. Starting salaries for NFC range between \$33,000 and \$34,000 approximately which is competitive with neighboring states. But as Terry Werner testified earlier, we would certainly like to see those wages even higher. This is very challenging work. But right now, kind of a competitive salary ranges in the \$33,000 to \$34,000 range. And with that, if there are any other questions... [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Questions? Senator Kolterman. [LB199]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Newell. When you talk about entry-level jobs, you're talking \$34,000, \$35,000. Does that include benefits or is that above and beyond? [LB199]

DAVID NEWELL: So that's salary with benefits. And NFC actually has an excellent benefits package. So we have benefits on top of that. [LB199]

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SENATOR KOLTERMAN: Okay. And then my second part of the question would be, as you...you indicate that you hire master level people in this arena, correct? [LB199]

DAVID NEWELL: For supervisors, yes. [LB199]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: For supervisors. So do you have any kind of a program that trains them while they're...they've got their undergraduate, they're working on their master's, or would this be a place where something like this could be helpful? [LB199]

DAVID NEWELL: Right now, we have a leadership program that we're doing. But this...something like this would definitely be helpful for people to get their MSWs. That would be a huge help. [LB199]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: And do you know how many institutions in the state offer, like, a MSW type of degree? [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Two. [LB199]

DAVID NEWELL: I believe it's only UNO. [LB199]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: UNO? [LB199]

DAVID NEWELL: Yeah. [LB199]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: Okay. Thank you. [LB199]

DAVID NEWELL: Okay. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: And they have a program beginning at UNK. [LB199]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: Yeah. [LB199]

DAVID NEWELL: Yes. [LB199]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: That's part of the UNO, I think, isn't it? [LB199]

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_____: With what? [LB199]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: The UNK program is part of UNO. [LB199]

_____: Yeah, it's going to be...(inaudible). [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: I'm sorry, we can't answer from the audience because they can't hear you. [LB199]

DAVID NEWELL: Yeah, yeah. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: But they are taking that program out there. Mr. Newell, do you know, has Kansas...did Kansas start out raising the salary at the same time that...you know, you said it took them ten years. How did they approach the salary part of that? Do you know? [LB199]

DAVID NEWELL: Well, I think what normally happens in other states--and I was also in California which has a lot of licensing requirements too--and so generally what you see over time is, as licensure takes effect, it just has an impact on wages. And because it is, it becomes more competitive, then wages do go up. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: So they're really setting that as a certified or licensed credential person too, because part of the thing that...the research that we did on LR37 and you're--I know you know that backwards and forwards (laughter)--but that we looked at was trying to move into a professional work force and that you do some certification or licensing of that in order to see those credentials there. [LB199]

DAVID NEWELL: Absolutely. So another option that you have, especially for rural areas, is some sort of social work certification process which is another option that you could explore at some point. And sometimes, in California, for example, we had waiver criteria where, if you couldn't find a person who met that licensure criteria, if certain criteria were met, you could waive in a certain number of individuals. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: It's very interesting because someday I'm sure we will reach that and look at it because there's enough people now who are really interested in those questions. And the Children's Commission is starting to look into that issue. And when we get to that point, we can all look back. Speaker Flood, at that point, it was what he advocated for, was that we should be able to credential or...some way to create a professional force. So it will be interesting to see how we get there. [LB199]

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DAVID NEWELL: Okay. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Thank you, Mr. Newell, very much for your testimony today. [LB199]

DAVID NEWELL: Thank you. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Okay. Now we will go to the next proponent. Good afternoon.
[LB199]

JENNIFER SEDIVY: (Exhibit 5) Good afternoon. My name is Jennifer Sedivy, J-e-n-n-i-f-e-r S-e-d-i-v-y. I speak to you today as a former public child welfare worker in the state of Nebraska, as a current MSW student at UNO, and as a future social worker. I am here today to offer my support for LB199. My undergraduate degree in psychology coupled with a variety of social services experiences enabled me to secure a position as a public child welfare worker in this state. I underwent a substantial amount of training when I started my important work serving children, youth, and families connected to reports of abuse and neglect. The trainings were informative and I eventually became skilled at a majority of my duties. I was dedicated to my families. I wanted to help them succeed. I worked hard, oftentimes working past hours, on weekends, and off the clock. I visited my families more often than what was required of me and I worked desperately to help them meet their needs. Many of the professionals I worked with during that time shared that I was one of the best workers they had ever worked with. This is concerning to me. This is concerning to me because despite my undergraduate education in psychology, prior social experiences, and substantial job training, I was not an effective worker. Sure, I excelled at making monthly contacts, composing court reports, testifying, completing assessments, keeping team members involved in resource brokering. This, however, did not make me an effective child welfare worker. Feeling overworked, underpaid, underskilled, and ineffective, I left the agency after only seven months. My families were transferred to a new worker when I left just as they had been transferred to me when the worker before me left and to that worker when the worker before her left. Since resigning from my position as a public child welfare worker, I have been working to earn a master's degree in social work at UNO. Though I am only in my second semester as an MSW student, I have learned that an effective child welfare worker must be able to do more than perform one's primary duties. One must also possess an eclectic knowledge base, professional values, and a wide range of practice skills. Additionally, one must be able to demonstrate a wide range of professional roles and engage in critical thinking, research-informed practice, and planned change. My courses have and continue to impart training, skills, and knowledge that will lead to me becoming a highly qualified and effective social worker in the future. I, however, do not see myself seeking out employment as a child welfare worker at that time due to the debt I have and will continue to accrue to finance my education. Child welfare agencies struggle with recruitment and retention of highly trained,

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skilled, and knowledgeable workers. The struggle to recruit and retain quality workers compromises the effectiveness, efficiency, and quality of services provided to children, youth, and families. This hurts families and results in longer involvement with the child welfare system. The children, youth, and families of our state deserve better. They deserve to work with competent, quality workers that will serve to help, not hinder, their efforts to change. In short, typical child welfare workers are too unskilled to be successful in their work. But to gain the required education imposes such a debt burden that a child welfare job becomes unfeasible to support. This bill provides an opportunity to overcome this. In turn, I encourage your support for this bill, future child welfare workers, and the children, youth, and families who are served by the state's child welfare system. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Questions? We wish you the best of luck in your studies and we hope you stay in Nebraska. [LB199]

JENNIFER SEDIVY: Thank you. That's the plan. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Good, good. Our next proponent? [LB199]

PATRICE McSHANE-JEWELL: (Exhibit 6) Good afternoon. My name is Patrice McShane-Jewell. That's spelled P-a-t-r-i-c-e, last name is hyphenated, M-c-S-h-a-n-e, hyphen, J-e-w-e-l-l. And I'm also a master's student of social work at the University of Nebraska in Omaha. Today I come to speak in support of LB199, in support of social work education stipends, and in support of nontraditional lower-income social work students. I belong to this population of students who have historically been excluded from higher education but whose specific contributions are invaluable to the profession of social work. Low-income students are crucial to the field of social work. They contribute a unique perspective. Low-income students are intimately familiar with the experiences of those vulnerable populations that we serve. Their knowledge serves to educate their more privileged colleagues. Low-income students have a special zeal and drive to improve the social conditions that held them back and they have a firsthand knowledge of the social service delivery system and can help address its weaknesses. But the distressed economic background which seasons the low-income person's perspective can also preclude her from pursuing a social work education and career. Unlike most low-income students, I hail from a privileged middle-class background. I had the privilege of earning a bachelor's degree at a fine liberal arts college and I was pursuing a doctorate at a prestigious program at the University of Michigan. I decided for various reasons to leave the humanities to the Great Lakes and return to be of service to my dear native Nebraska. I am a first-year graduate student at UNO. My husband works for a small nonprofit organization in Lincoln. His salary barely covers the expenses for our small family of three. We both have advanced degrees and substantial student loan debt. We all three lived in my mother's basement for over a year to save up for my first year of social work

graduate school. It's been hard to make ends meet. Coming from a doctoral humanities background I was, perhaps naively, shocked to discover that precious little financial aid is available to MSW students in Nebraska. In the more academia-bound disciplines, graduate programs tend to offer financial packages to accepted students with the understanding that the future professor's salary can't support a crippling student debt burden. The same rationale certainly applies to the future social worker and yet the University of Nebraska MSW students must go largely unfunded. Incoming graduate students receive no financial assistance beyond a handful of private scholarships and unsubsidized federal loans which begin accruing interest immediately. The university doesn't provide very many social work assistantships or any health insurance entailed thereby. Many students must work full-time jobs, sometimes multiple jobs, in addition to their full-time coursework. Furthermore, accreditation requires the student to complete one to two internships, many of which go unpaid. In addition to tuition, student fees, and expensive textbooks, the nontraditional student may pay for childcare and the commuter must pay for the cost of gas. I want to point out here that these financial conditions are not unique to Nebraska students obviously. But in other states, the difficulties are offset by the Title IV-E stipends. If I were young and free of financial obligations, I might have pursued my social work degree at one of the neighboring states that does provide an educational stipend. My family is struggling. But I know that my privileged background provides the crucial safety net that most low-income students do not enjoy. I know that I have the financial and emotional support of my family if we ever run into real trouble. However, my low-income colleagues at the university are struggling with the decision to either quit one of their jobs or to drop out of school. The low-income student is precious to the field of social work and needs help. But this bill is not asking for a free handout. In exchange for a subsidized education, the child welfare social worker provides the community with an invaluable service as protector of our most valuable little citizens. And they do so for very little compensation. Recipients of stipends will not be getting something for nothing. LB199 allows us to harness and nourish the natural talent and experience of our native Nebraskans regardless of their economic stratum. Let's draw them in and keep them here. Thank you. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Thank you for your testimony. Questions from the senators? Senator Riepe. [LB199]

SENATOR RIEPE: I have...excuse me. You noted in here crippling student debt. What do you consider that to be? It's just a curiosity question. [LB199]

PATRICE McSHANE-JEWELL: I'm sorry, I didn't quite hear you. [LB199]

SENATOR RIEPE: I don't blame you. [LB199]

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SENATOR CAMPBELL: Would you like me to translate, Senator, save your voice? [LB199]

SENATOR RIEPE: Just...I can struggle through it. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Okay. [LB199]

SENATOR RIEPE: And I hope you can understand. My question was about the crippling student debt burden. You know, is it \$20,000? Is it \$50,000? I mean what...I know it would vary by student, so I'm just trying to get some idea... [LB199]

PATRICE McSHANE-JEWELL Sure. [LB199]

SENATOR RIEPE ...of what the typical... [LB199]

PATRICE McSHANE-JEWELL Sure. [LB199]

SENATOR RIEPE I mean, it's like a teacher, it's not something you're going to get rich at. [LB199]

PATRICE McSHANE-JEWELL Right, no, that's not the point. [LB199]

SENATOR RIEPE So how much debt can you tolerate? [LB199]

PATRICE McSHANE-JEWELL: Absolutely. So I'm in a...well, I was in a humanities program. I was in a doctoral program of anthropology at the University of Michigan. And I did get a full ride, as I pointed out, because that tends to be the habit. So I don't have student debt. But my husband, who did a more professional kind of degree, he has...I think at this point we're down to \$75,000. And that was for his master's and his ongoing doctorate. It's substantial. (Laugh) [LB199]

SENATOR RIEPE: Yeah. Thank you. [LB199]

PATRICE McSHANE-JEWELL: You're welcome. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Any other questions? Thank you for your testimony and good luck, too, with your studies. [LB199]

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PATRICE McSHANE-JEWELL: Thank you. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: And we want you to stay. [LB199]

PATRICE McSHANE-JEWELL: Thank you. I'm...we're here. We're sticking around. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: All right. Any other proponents for this bill? Okay. Anyone who wishes to oppose the bill? Anyone in a neutral position? Hey, Senator Howard, would you like to close on your bill? [LB199]

SENATOR HOWARD: I would love to. What I hope you've heard today on LB199 is compelling testimony about how wonderful this bill is. I promised it would be the best bill ever and I believe that I have delivered. (Laughter) My hope is that LB199 would help us ensure that we have a continued, competent work force in the social work field specifically to address our high turnover rate among our foster care youth. I love the fact that it will keep individuals in Nebraska but not just in our urban areas but also in our rural areas as well. And when we talk about student loan debt, for those of you who have worked with me previously, that is an issue that is very near to my heart having graduated from law school with just below \$200,000 in student loan debt. Anything we can do to help our young people become more financially stable while they're still in school makes a huge difference. And so I think this bill could have more, wider-reaching impacts than I can even imagine. So I appreciate your time and attention. I would be happy to answer any final questions you may have. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Any other questions? Senator Howard, and I tried to look through it and I might have missed it... [LB199]

SENATOR HOWARD: Sure. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: How much would the stipend be per student? [LB199]

SENATOR HOWARD: You know, I don't know. I'd need to look at that a little closer because it does depend on how many students are eligible... [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Okay. [LB199]

SENATOR HOWARD: ...and then how much in-kind we're able to get to offset the match. [LB199]

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SENATOR CAMPBELL: So it's not like, first come, first served. It's like we look at the total and then determine how much we can give each? [LB199]

SENATOR HOWARD: Exactly. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Okay. Any other questions? Thank you, Senator Howard. [LB199]

SENATOR HOWARD: Thank you, Senator Campbell. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Letters for the record? [LB199]

BRENNEN MILLER: (Exhibits 7, 8) Senator, letters of support from Children and Family Coalition of Nebraska and the Office of the Inspector General of Child Welfare. [LB199]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Okay. That concludes our hearing for LB199. If you're going to leave, please try to leave as quietly as you can because we're going to be moving on to the next bill. Okay. If you're going to testify on LB296, you might want to come forward...yes, already in the front row. That is terrific. And then it'll be easier and faster for us to go. All right. The next bill in front of us is LB296, Senator Kolterman's bill, which would require the Department of Health and Human Services to provide notification after removal of a child. Senator Kolterman, start out. [LB199]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: Thank you, Senator Campbell and members of the committee. I haven't done this very often, so I'm getting better at it, but... [LB296]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: You might just want to spell your name for the record just to make sure it... [LB296]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: All right. My name is Mark, M-a-r-k K-o-l-t-e-r-m-a-n. [LB296]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Thank you. [LB296]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: I'm here today to introduce LB296 which will really just amend Nebraska state statute 43-1311.01 and 43-1311.02 to reflect required changes per Public Law 113-183 which the President signed on September 29, 2014. I would also...as we get into this, later on I'm going to request that the committee consider AM447, an amendment which just ensures...it just inserts an operative date of July 1, 2015. What this bill really does, and you're

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going to hear testimony here in a minute, it clarifies some of the language in federal guidelines and it's really necessary that we do this because, if we don't do it, we could possess a problem of about \$144 million that we might not acquire. It's far-reaching effects if we don't pass this type of legislation. So I'm going to let the people behind me follow and talk about that some and unless you have some questions, I'd prefer to just turn it over to them. [LB296]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Questions? We know that Senator Kolterman is going to be here at least for a bit... [LB296]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: I will be here. [LB296]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: ...because you have to open on another bill, Senator, so... [LB296]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: No. [LB296]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Oh, I thought you had to leave. [LB296]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: No, I have another meeting at 4:00, but... [LB296]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Okay. All right. Thank you, Senator, very much for opening on the bill. And we'll proceed to proponents. Good afternoon. [LB296]

TONY GREEN: (Exhibit 9) Good afternoon, Senator Campbell and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. I'm Tony Green, T-o-n-y G-r-e-e-n. I am the acting director of the Division of Children and Family Services for the Department of Health and Human Services. And I'm here to testify in support of LB296. And I'd also like to thank Senator Kolterman for introducing this bill. As you've heard previously, the department of children and family services does receive federal funding pursuant to Title IV-E of the Social Security Act. On September 29, 2014, President Obama signed Public Law 113-183 which amended the Title IV-E of the Social Security Act. In order to comply with this amended requirement of Title IV-E, changes to Nebraska statute are required, specifically statutes that Senator Kolterman identified: 43-1311.01 and 43-1311.02. LB296 does reflect these changes. Basically, when it becomes necessary to remove a child from his or her home because of safety concerns, the department is required to identify, locate, and provide written notification to adult relatives of that child within 30 days. Currently, this includes any noncustodial parent. LB296 expands notification...be made to parents who have legal custody of a sibling of a child and all adult siblings. LB296 further defines sibling to include an individual who is considered by Nebraska law to be a sibling or who would have been considered a sibling under law but for termination of parental rights or

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disruption of parental rights such as death of a parent. Passing LB296 as proposed will bring Nebraska statutes into conformity with federal requirements of the Title IV-E of the Social Security Act. Failure to adopt such language would result in noncompliance with Title IV-E and subsequently subject us to a potential loss of federal funding. Also, I would point out, as Senator Kolterman made reference to the amendment that you would be considering potentially later, we would support that with an operative date of July 1, 2015, as that is the deadline that we are currently under to have this in place. And I'd be happy to answer any questions that you have. [LB296]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Questions for Mr. Green? Okay. The Fostering Connections, the federal as well as the Nebraska, required us to notify the other parent, maybe, or...I can't remember. I thought there was some notification in the Fostering Connections but this and the... [LB296]

TONY GREEN: Of the noncustodial parent? [LB296]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Yes. But this amplifies that. [LB296]

TONY GREEN: Correct. This further expands it and provides a definition of siblings and it gets complicated as you, you know, have different dynamics of families. But this makes it clear that, specific to that sibling connection, that we notify those parents as well. [LB296]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Okay. Any other questions? Thanks, Mr. Green. [LB296]

TONY GREEN: You're welcome. [LB296]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Our next proponent? [LB296]

SARAH HELVEY: (Exhibit 10) Good afternoon. My name is Sarah Helvey. That's S-a-r-a-h, last name H-e-l-v-e-y. And I'm a staff attorney and director of the child welfare program at Nebraska Appleseed. We support LB296 because it brings Nebraska into compliance with recent federal law and is good policy. In 2011, Nebraska Appleseed filed an amicus curiae brief in a case before the Nebraska Supreme Court called, In re Interest of Meridian H. The Meridian H. case involved two siblings who, by and through their adoptive parents in Minnesota, intervened in a Nebraska juvenile court case seeking to have placement of their...with their sibling, Meridian, who was in Nebraska's foster care system, to have her placed with them and their adopted parents. The siblings had had visitation with Meridian and had a relationship with the maternal grandparents who also lived near them in Minnesota and had also intervened in the case. The

Nebraska Supreme Court ultimately held that the siblings lacked standing for the appeal because they did not have rights impacted by the placement decision. And as a result, Meridian and her siblings were denied the opportunity to grow up together. However, this...I think...I believe it was actually the same week that that case came down, LB177, which was introduced by Senator Campbell, was signed into law which, in addition to other provisions, placed the sibling replacement provision of the Fostering Connections Act into Nebraska statute. The sibling placement provision requires the state to make reasonable efforts to place children with their siblings unless such placement is contrary to the safety or wellbeing of any of the siblings. The LB177 clarified this provision applies to a broad range of siblings and specifically defined the term siblings as biological and legal siblings including but not limited to half siblings and step siblings. LB177 also placed the relative notice provision of the Fostering Connections Act into state statute which requires the state to identify, locate, and provide notice to relatives upon a child's removal from the home, as Senator Campbell was mentioning. LB296 takes the next important step to protect the rights of all siblings by further clarifying that the relative notice provision applies to parents who have legal custody of a sibling of a child. And that sibling includes those who would have been considered a sibling but for a termination of parental rights and those considered a sibling under Nebraska law. It also clarifies that, for the purpose of the federal foster care program, the same definition of sibling applies. Together, these changes mean that the state and federal laws intended to prioritize sibling placement and contact would explicitly apply to children like Meridian and her siblings. And as others have said, this is in accordance with the new Prevent Sex Trafficking and Protecting Families Act. We strongly support that new federal law and...in that in particular, it now specifically recognizes that the sibling relationship does not end when parental rights are terminated and that sibling relationships are critically important and must be protected for children. This is well supported by existing research and best practice. Among other things, siblings can provide natural support to each other over the course of their lifetime, a sense of stability and belonging, and can help children maintain a positive sense of identity and knowledge of their cultural, personal, and family histories. We also want to note that our support generally for the new federal Strengthening Families Act...there are additional provisions of that new federal act that we think it will be important to look at in terms of implementation in Nebraska and particularly related to normalcy, trafficking, and transition planning. So I've attached kind of a lengthy fact sheet to my testimony today from some national partners that outline some of the other provisions of the new federal Strengthening Families Act with attention to state implementation and some time lines. But we're very supportive of this bill and we want to thank Senator Kolterman and the committee for your ongoing efforts around child welfare and respectfully request that you vote to advance the bill. [LB296]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Questions for Ms. Helvey? It's sort of like, this is your preview to potential future legislation. (Laughter) [LB296]

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SARAH HELVEY: Just a little preview. [LB296]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: You know, I think I have to say that some of the saddest testimony that I've heard in front of this committee--and we hear, you know, a number of emotional stories--was the foster youth who said, I have no idea where my siblings are. It was just heart-wrenching to hear that. [LB296]

SARAH HELVEY: Absolutely, and we hear that from people... [LB296]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Absolutely. [LB296]

SARAH HELVEY: ...that that relationship is so important because it can last a lifetime. [LB296]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Critical. [LB296]

SARAH HELVEY: So thank you. [LB296]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Okay. Thank you, Ms. Helvey. Our next proponent? [LB296]

JULIA TSE: (Exhibit 11) Good afternoon, Chairwoman Campbell and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Julia Tse, J-u-l-i-a T-s-e. And I am the child welfare policy associate at Voices for Children in Nebraska. We support LB296 because it is a piece of a comprehensive response to child maltreatment. In order to ensure that our system is thoughtful and family focused, we should maximize all available resources to minimize the trauma that children and families experience in the child welfare system. This includes seeking engagement and support from the widest pool of family resources. The importance of family centered measures in Nebraska's child welfare system has recently taken the spotlight, most notably in legislation that has sought to improve kinship care placements. And research shows that children in care do much better when they are with relatives or close family friends because it provides the best possible source of stability and continuity throughout an otherwise tumultuous time in their lives. The percentage of children in care who are placed in a kinship home has increased in recent years but there remains a large portion of foster children who could stand to benefit from the intent of this bill. Last year, 17 percent of out-of-home placements were in a congregate setting where it can be difficult for children to have stable and meaningful relationships with trusted adults. LB296 would be another step forward for our child welfare system in recognizing that social capital and support is an invaluable piece of ensuring that children are best protected through a very traumatic time in their lives. And when possible and appropriate, notifying more trusted adults upon removal can ensure that we swiftly identify

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individuals who are best situated to support and care for a child. Additionally, maintaining sibling ties can be just as crucial to maintaining some semblance of normalcy during an emotional turmoil...the emotional turmoil of removal. We want to thank Senator Kolterman for bringing this issue forward and respectfully ask the committee to advance LB296 forward for consideration by the full Legislature. Thank you. [LB296]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Questions that you have? Thanks for the testimony. [LB296]

JULIA TSE: Thank you. [LB296]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Our next proponent? Those who wish to oppose the bill? Those in a neutral position? Senator Kolterman, we're back to you. [LB296]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: Bear with me a little. [LB296]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: I will. [LB296]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: This is an important piece of legislation. I have five nieces and nephews who came through this system. And I know what it's like to tear them apart. And so I'd encourage you to support this. Any questions? [LB296]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Thank you, Senator. Okay. With that, it closes the hearing. If you are leaving, sort of like those things that they say at the football game, isn't it? If you're...oh, letters for the record. Sorry, forgot. [LB296]

BRENNEN MILLER: (Exhibit 12) Thank you, Senator. A letter in support from the National Association of Social Workers, Nebraska Chapter. That's all I have. Thank you. [LB296]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: I thought I was getting better and I'm not. (Laughter) I know, I know. Do we...would you like to take a small break? I don't think Senator Bolz is here, is she? Okay, let's take a five-minute break and we'll try to find Senator Bolz. [LB296]

BREAK

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Okay, everyone, we will resume the hearings this afternoon and we will continue with LB243 which is to create a pilot project relating to family finding services. So as Senator Bolz is making her way up to the front, I've asked the clerk...we're going to read the

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letters for the record at the beginning because we have a great number of them and want to make sure they're in the record, so. [LB243]

BRENNEN MILLER: (Exhibits 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29) Thank you. Letters in support from: Children and Family Coalition of Nebraska; Nebraska Children and Families Foundation; Child Saving Institute; Shirley Hayes; Ron and Brenda Pierce; Alton and Brenda (sic) Uhlig; Tracy Popp; Taunya Plater; Connie Matson; Ayesha Shinall; Randy Null; Julie Null; Boys Town; Center for People in Need. In a neutral capacity the Department of Health and Human Services. In support the Office of Inspector General of Child Welfare and Lutheran Family Services. Than you. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Okay. Thank you. I'm just going to make the reminders once again for those who have just come in for this that if you are planning to testify today...how many people are planning to testify on this one? Okay. What you might want to do is work your way to the front--we've got some seats in the front--so that we can just kind of move. If you're a testifier that's sitting way in the back, we can then move more people more quickly, because we have four bills this afternoon. So we're moving along. Senator Bolz, welcome, and you can go right ahead and start. [LB243]

SENATOR BOLZ: (Exhibit 30) Very good. Well, today is a really good day for me because today I get to talk to you about a program that I think really has the potential to move the dial for kids and families in Nebraska. So this is the kind of bill that is the reason I ran for office. So I'm really pleased to bring it to you today. Research tells us that there are two important things about children in the child welfare system that rise to the top as it relates to this piece of legislation. One is that kids in the child welfare system are negatively impacted by long-term, out-of-home placement and instability. And two, extended networks of family support are really a game changer in creating positive outcomes for kids who have experiences with the child welfare system. LB243 establishes a pilot initiative and builds on work that is already being done by an organization called Christian Heritage in southeast Nebraska. This work, referred to as family finding, creates extended networks of support for children and addresses the two findings grounded in research. So before I tell you more about family finding, I think it's important to note that, as you know, the stated purpose of the Division of Children and Family Services is to make sure that abused and neglected dependent or delinquent populations are safe from harm or maltreatment, that they have a stable family, that they're helped to heal from harm. And I think that that focus on health and safety is appropriate. And they are making progress. You know the progress that they have been making and the progress that they still have to make more than any other committee in the body. But I think that there are still foundational problems that exist in the child welfare system. First, according to the Foster Care Review Board, and as you may already know, neglect continues to be the most prevalent reason for children to be removed from the home. For children on their first removal from the home, neglect was involved in 74 percent

of the cases. To me, this illustrates the need for a stronger network of support systems for families. Second, one in four children have spent 50 percent of their lives or more in out-of-home placement and the same was true in 2012 and 2011. So...and additionally, 32 percent of wards in out-of-home care have been removed from their home more than once. So this need for family support and stability is clear. According to the Office of the Child Welfare Inspector General, improved kinship care could be achieved by contacting potential family members sooner and in a more engaging way. However, both the Office of the Inspector General and the Legislative Ombudsman's Office both report frequent complaints from family members who seek custody of out-of-state wards...of state wards and feel they are not given a fair opportunity to do so. Family finding is a complementary approach to some of the current systems of health and safety priorities in the child welfare system and the approach uses evidence-based practices to develop better outcomes for kids. This practice is a process of engagement, searching, preparation, planning, decision making, lifetime network creation, healing, and permanency in order to identify family members, to gain commitments from family members to support children, and to achieve a safe, permanent legal home or a lifelong connection for the children. The pilot initiative in the Southeast Service Area has already experienced positive outcomes for kids including developing extended family networks with an average of 48 family members identified--which I think is impressive--linking children with fathers and siblings and in a number of cases achieving permanent placements and connections for kids. You'll hear from some of these young people and family members today. One of the most compelling statistics for me is that the average amount of time taken to identify and engage family members is less than three months. So when we think about the kids who are in placement and the time that they languish in out-of-home placement, three months is a pretty good turnaround time. So the bill itself establishes a pilot initiative in each of the regions. There is a strong evaluation component to be completed by an academic institution after the end of the pilot project and it does include some factors that I think are important in terms of maintaining fidelity to the national evidence-based model and using child placing agencies that have the expertise in this kind of work in order to protect children as we do family finding services. I'll just very quickly point to two of the things from the Department of Health and Human Services letter--and you can follow up with any other questions--that they've noted here for you today. But we do think that the child-placing agencies are an appropriate partner in this work because they already have the expertise and the training to do so appropriately and make sure that the best interests of the child are protected. So I continue to defend that choice in the legislation. And then the department makes some references to the difference between promising practices and evidence-based practices. If you...if we want to articulate this initiative as a promising practice versus an evidence-based practice, I think that's a little bit of semantics. But I have brought for you just a couple of examples of that evidence base. One is a report from the state of Hawaii. It's their final evaluation report. And the other is an academic report about promising practices in increasing family adoptions. There is much, much more where that came from, but I thought maybe I'd start by sharing these two pieces with the committee and let you go from there. So with all of that

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said, that is the initiative in a nutshell. There are lots of folks here who can tell you all the details but I'm happy to answer any questions at this time. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Are there any questions? Senator Crawford. [LB243]

SENATOR CRAWFORD: Thank you, Chairwoman Campbell, and thank you, Senator Bolz. I was just reading through the bill quickly and I noticed in Section 5 it talks about...so there will be portion of cases for children or are wards of the state in our Bridge to Independence Program who will be selected for this. I don't know if you have any intent you'd like to share with us about how that portion is picked or if you've had any discussion about what that portion means to you? [LB243]

SENATOR BOLZ: Right. Right, and that's a great question. Considering the...our approach to this as a pilot, we didn't want to limit the children that were engaged in this initiative to one particular population or one particular approach. We wanted the folks who apply for the RFP to have some flexibility to serve specific populations to either populations that they have expertise with or populations that have specific need in their geographical area. [LB243]

SENATOR CRAWFORD: Excellent. Thank you. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Other questions? Senator Bolz, how does this proposal differ from the NFC? NFC had a grant, I think, \$1.3 million? Am I saying that right? I'm not sure. How does this proposal differ from what's going to happen with that proposal? [LB243]

SENATOR BOLZ: It's a good question. There are some folks from NFC who can answer in more detail. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Oh, okay. [LB243]

SENATOR BOLZ: But the quick answer is that they're very complimentary. The time frame for the NFC proposal is time limited and so in terms of continuing on, they would look forward to that structure. And forgive me, I didn't mean to overlook NFC. The difference, as I understand it, is that the NFC initiative is federally funded and the Christian Heritage initiative is funded in a partnership with the state. And so when we were looking at how it would work here, that's where we looked first. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Excellent. Thank you. Senator Howard. [LB243]

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SENATOR HOWARD: Thank you, Senator Campbell. I was hoping you might take a minute to clarify the fiscal note and talk a little bit about your intent in regards to the allocation as well as where the cost for evaluation and data collection might come from. [LB243]

SENATOR BOLZ: Sure. When we originally discussed the costs of the bill and what this whole initiative might look like, the folks who are already doing this work and have some interest in this work put together a fiscal model which I would be happy to share with you. That fiscal model came down to a bottom line which was an estimate of how much it might cost per kid. So when we put together the bill, we looked at how much the total cost would be and then we had an estimate of how much we might be able to draw down in IV-E dollars. This committee knows better than anyone that that's a tricky situation given the information that we've learned in the past few weeks. So our fiscal approach sort of shifted underneath us because we no longer think that it makes sense to assume that some IV-E dollars would be able to be pulled down. And we can have a further discussion about that. But the safest approach would probably be to assume that the \$3 million in the bill is the total cost of the bill. And it was never my intention that that \$3 million wouldn't include the evidence-based evaluation or any operations component. So if that's something we need to clarify, we can certainly clarify that piece. I hope I didn't make it more confusing rather than less confusing. (Laughter) But that's a little bit of where we've been in terms of looking at the dollar amounts. [LB243]

SENATOR HOWARD: And just to clarify, so IV-E administration funds could not be used for family finding. [LB243]

SENATOR BOLZ: IV-E administrative funds could be used for family finding. [LB243]

SENATOR HOWARD: That's what I thought. [LB243]

SENATOR BOLZ: But it is my understand, and Liz Hruska can clarify more, that we may have reached a cap in being able to pull down those dollars. And because of that, I don't want to make any assumptions moving forward that I can't count on. [LB243]

SENATOR HOWARD: Certainly. Thank you. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Any other questions, Senators? Senator Kolterman. [LB243]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: Senator Bolz, thank you. I just want to make sure I'm understanding this correctly. So your proposal really involves a not-for-profit working with the Department of

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Health and Human Services and really just expanding the practice that you've already...or the trial that you've already done. Is that not correct? [LB243]

SENATOR BOLZ: That's right. [LB243]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: And the long-term effects of this are obviously keeping the children with their biological family or their extended family? [LB243]

SENATOR BOLZ: That's right. [LB243]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: Thank you very much. [LB243]

SENATOR BOLZ: Sure. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Okay. Any other questions? Thank you, Senator Bolz. [LB243]

SENATOR BOLZ: Thank you. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: We know you're staying because you have the next bill (laughter) so you're captive here. [LB243]

SENATOR BOLZ: Yeah, I'll be around. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Our first proponent has a plane to catch and so whoever that person is, please come forward. We want to make sure that you make that flight. [LB243]

RON UHLIG: And, Senators, good afternoon. It's an honor to come and be able to talk to you this afternoon. I am a Nebraskan. I did move to Colorado last spring. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: And I've got to stop--I'm sorry--because you probably didn't hear the instructions and we'll go through them. When you come forward, we do need the orange sheet, but we need you to state your name and spell it for the record. [LB243]

RON UHLIG: My name is Ron Uhlig, R-o-n U-h-l-i-g. And I'm here to offer my support for LB243. I'm a foster dad to a distant cousin thanks to family finding and I'm here to provide the perspective of a family member who was contacted by Christian Heritage and asked to get

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involved. And I believe I represent many Nebraskans who, when asked for help, are happy to provide it especially when there are children involved who are family members. I'd like to share our story and some reasons why I think you should support this effort. This bill has the potential to help students...or children and young adults find extended family, a safe place to live, long-term stability, support, and encouragement that brothers, sisters, aunts and uncles, and grandparents can provide. My grandfather's sister had a baby back in the '40s and adoption seemed like the best option. She was not married. Unfortunately, the placement was not successful and a branch of our family tree grew unsuccessfully out of sight of the rest of us. My grandfather was one of six kids, so my mom's generation consisted of a group of cousins that's reasonably large and most still live in Nebraska. They're responsible for that long list of letters actually. Fast-forward to my generation and you will find a woman who has had six kids. Five of them have been in the foster system. My foster daughter is the oldest and she was taken away from her mom when she was five. Her immediate family was unable to care for her so she ended up in foster care and eventually at Boys Town. When we found out about her, our hearts broke. Fifteen people from that network of cousins dropped everything and started to drive to Lincoln to meet with and discuss how we could be involved in helping a 15-year-old girl who would soon age out of the system. We asked a lot of questions, but my favorite was actually asked by an in-law who said, why didn't you look for us ten years ago? She moved in with us in May of last year and my wife and I had often talked about fostering children. We were busy with four of our own and had never really gone the rest of the way through the process. We have four...or I have a 20-year-old and some other teenagers in the house, so Maddie (phonetic) fit well into our situation. But it's not been easy. She came to our house with a history of varied living situations and a lot of baggage that came with it. She has had difficulty trusting us, establishing deep connections with us, and allowing us to be the authority in her life. She is very independent. These issues are not surprising to anyone who has worked with children who have spent time in foster care. The earlier a child can be placed in a permanent, loving home, the easier it would be to avoid some of these potential issues. Maddie now has connections with brothers and sisters that will last a lifetime. Those connections link to aunts, uncles, grandparents who have come along our family in loving her and will continue to provide anchors for her as she goes through the next several transformational years. She has our experiences to draw on and our encouragement. She will also have accountability of adults in her life who are willing to step in and help her make better choices. She will have a place to belong at Thanksgiving and Christmas. This bill can give a child or a young adult all the benefits of having an extended family. That family may live just across town but not currently know that that child exists. Many families have skeletons or a black sheep or two, but many families also have others with the means and the desire to help if they're called upon. As a cousin and now a dad of a young woman who lacked these things I have mentioned but has since been blessed by the process of family finding, I ask that you remember her situation when you vote. Thank you. [LB243]

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SENATOR CAMPBELL: Thank you for your testimony and certainly for taking in the young woman into your family. That's just excellent. So we appreciate that. [LB243]

RON UHLIG: Thank you. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Questions from the senators? Senator Kolterman. Okay. Anyone else? Thank you for coming and I hope you make the plane. [LB243]

RON UHLIG: Thank you. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Okay. Our next proponent? [LB243]

JONI RAMSEY: (Exhibit 31) Good afternoon, Senators. My name is Joni Ramsey, J-o-n-i R-a-m-s-e-y. I speak to you today as the supervisor of family finding at Christian Heritage and as a proud member of a skilled team of...skilled and passionate team that is working hard to improve the lives of Nebraska's most vulnerable children. I'm also a licensed independent mental health practitioner. Gregg and Lisa Nicklas, cofounders of Christian Heritage, had a vision to see families restored and children filled with hope. They, along with DHHS administrator, Lindy Bryceson, brought Kevin Campbell and family finding to the Southeast Service Area of Nebraska two years ago. And what we've learned, Senators, is that this is not just another program. It's a game changer for children and youth in care. It's a movement that puts family back at the center of social work practice. Today I want to convey my strongest support for LB243 for the following reasons: Number one, family finding offers the restoration of dignity to both the children and their families; number two, family finding develops lifetime networks of support that creates continuity of key connections in a child's life; and third, family finding creates opportunities for permanency making it fiscally favorable. Over the past two years, I have supervised the cases of 95 children from 60 families. Through the work of family finding, I've seen the stories of these children go from heart wrenching to heartwarming. Take, for example, the case of a 16-year-old female referred to us who had an infant son. As a result of family finding, we were able to locate 53 relatives with six offers of permanency in less than two months. And just last weekend, one of those relatives flew here from Florida to pick up the infant and take him home where he will be raised with his relatives. As soon as his mother is able to be supported to go home, they will reunite and be raised in the love and care of their family. That is what we're doing here. We're finding and returning these souls to their people. That's the restoration of dignity: good folks with the DNA, the genetic code that binds them to care for and mentor family, to tap into that part of the brain that makes a parent bond at the first sight or tiny touch of a child's hand, that innate love for your kin, an interest that makes even distant cousins reach out through Facebook or even on a family tree. The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative brief states that it costs taxpayers and communities \$300,000 per youth aged out of the

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system in their lifetime. The Nebraska Children and Families Foundation states that Nebraska averages over 260 youth per year aging out of the system; 260 times \$300,000 is \$78 million. That's a big price tag for our state. What if the 260 youth who will age out of Nebraska's foster care system this year had been given the service of family finding when they first came into care? How many families like those of the 16-year-old and her son are out there that we don't know about? How many families like Ron's whose testimony you just heard are out there begging us to start this process sooner? With the passage of LB243, Nebraska's counties could begin to look like Jackson and Coos County, Oregon who, because of family finding, were able to get every teen out of foster or residential care. Like these counties in Oregon, we must get a vision that shifts the historic belief systems that sees children and youth in care as orphans who must be cared for by society. Family finding changes the practice tradition that sees these youth as having no one but the care worker and...the case worker and a care provider to protect and support them. It embraces the belief that every child has a family and community members who love them and will become a lifetime network of support for them. As a professional who has seen the power of relationship in helping children and youth heal, I ask you when voting to remember your own connections to your network of family and friends and think about how different your lives would look if tomorrow they all went away. Thank you again for the opportunity to share my views. I'd be happy to answer any questions. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Questions from the senators? Senator Howard. [LB243]

SENATOR HOWARD: Thank you, Senator Campbell. Thank you for your testimony today, Ms. Ramsey. I'm not very familiar with Christian Heritage. Could you tell me how many people you have working there, maybe what your budget is, and then how many families you get to permanency annually or how many families you connect annually? [LB243]

JONI RAMSEY: Yeah, the family finding team...right now we have four family finding specialists along with myself who are working. In the last two years, as I said, we've worked through 60 families...95 children from 60 families. We have about...right...we have a 100 percent success rate of building lifetime networks of support for each of the children that we're referred and about 70 percent of our cases we have at least one offer of permanency. Permanency completed where the children have been placed in the home we are just over 20 percent right now. I might also add that at the beginning...at this pilot...when this pilot began, the department referred to us their most difficult, long-standing cases. These were what Kevin Campbell lovingly refers to as the cold cases. So these were children that had spent an average of anywhere from 7 to some of them 14/15 years in the system. [LB243]

SENATOR HOWARD: That is the budget for your organization? [LB243]

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JONI RAMSEY: You know, I don't know right offhand. I can get that information to you. [LB243]

SENATOR HOWARD: That would be great. Thank you. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Questions? Ms. Ramsey, I'm going to sort of follow up on Senator Howard's questions here. This program has been in existence for the last two years... [LB243]

JONI RAMSEY: Correct. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: ...with Christian Heritage. And in those two years...in each of those two years, did the department provide money for the pilot? [LB243]

JONI RAMSEY: Yes. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Do you have them... [LB243]

JONI RAMSEY: Well, yes, through contract, right. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Right, through a contract. [LB243]

JONI RAMSEY: Yes. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Do you happen to know how much each year that was? [LB243]

JONI RAMSEY: Well, it was...gosh, let me think about that. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: And you can get back to us with the figures. [LB243]

JONI RAMSEY: Yeah, I'll get back to you, because I want to make sure that I give you the accurate figures. I can tell you that the cost is--for each family--is \$5,500. And that...the projected time span is six months on these very long-standing cases. And because we were new at this--I mean, it was very new to all of us--and so, of course, we had to work our way through processes and barriers. Many of these cases, you know, extended on well past the six months contracted time. [LB243]

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SENATOR CAMPBELL: And I believe in the second year the department cut some of the funding from this program and I can't remember how much that cut was. [LB243]

JONI RAMSEY: Yes, they did cut some of the funding but then we just received another contract for them for working with the front-end cases for these children and they did find some federal dollars to support that. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Okay. And how much will the department provide for that effort? And you can get back to us. [LB243]

JONI RAMSEY: Again, I don't know. Sorry. I didn't just didn't come with those figures in front of me. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: That would be great. And I can ask Senator Bolz this, because I know she's going to know the answer to this one, but has the department in its budget for the next biennium put money in for family finding? Do you know for future contracts? [LB243]

JONI RAMSEY: I don't know. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Okay. [LB243]

JONI RAMSEY: My understanding is that the current contract that we have is...would all be federal dollars that are...that they found but with the stipulation that we work with children who are six months or less in foster care. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: So they're using a whole different access to some federal funds to try to get... [LB243]

JONI RAMSEY: Right. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: ...that program but not necessarily for family finding. [LB243]

JONI RAMSEY: Right. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: And I know Senator Bolz will know the answer to that sitting on Appropriations. Any other questions? Senator Kolterman. [LB243]

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SENATOR KOLTERMAN: Yeah, thank you. When you talk about up-front funding, are you talking about people that are now just new in the system not the 15-year veterans of the system so to speak? [LB243]

JONI RAMSEY: Yes, yes. [LB243]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: So you're getting a chance to work with newbies into the system that you really are...they're just getting started so you're...it's easier probably to try and find these families? [LB243]

JONI RAMSEY: Yes, that's correct. The longer these kids are in care, it's not that we can't find their families. I mean, these kids that have been in care, you know, 10, 12, 13 years, we can find their families. It's a greater challenge to reengage the families and to build relationships with these kids because some of them have not seen their families since they were six months old when they were taken away, you know, for whatever reasons parents relinquish or termination of parental rights. So yes, the cases that...we have had some cases that are more what we would refer to as the front-end cases. And we're...we've been successful in every one of those cases in finding families, finding relatives, close family friends to step in and take these kids. [LB243]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: And so, you'll be providing this financial information, success ratios, and things like that? [LB243]

JONI RAMSEY: Yes. [LB243]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: I think that would be very helpful. Thank you very much. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Okay, Ms. Ramsey, my last question is...and I think all of us opened the packet so we have...so are these folks who shared their story in the packet with these or should...are each one of these people testifying? [LB243]

JONI RAMSEY: No, not each of those people are testifying... [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Oh, okay. [LB243]

JONI RAMSEY: ...just, yeah. For us, just the...Payne is going to testify next... [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Okay. [LB243]

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JONI RAMSEY: ...and Ron who you just heard first. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Okay. [LB243]

JONI RAMSEY: But there were many letters from families... [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Absolutely. [LB243]

JONI RAMSEY: ...that have been impacted positively and some of them by kids that have also had this service done for them that wished to write a letter. So we included those in the packet. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Absolutely. We just wanted to know exactly how we should use the packet. [LB243]

JONI RAMSEY: Okay. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: So thank you, Ms. Ramsey. [LB243]

JONI RAMSEY: Yes. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Our next proponent? Good afternoon. [LB243]

PAYNE ACKERMAN: Good afternoon. My name is Payne Ackerman, P-a-y-n-e, last name A-c-k-e-r-m-a-n. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak on the behalf of LB243. I will speak as a supporter and as a former foster ward. I'm here to provide a perspective as a young adult who aged out, thus one who would be directly impacted by LB243. I was released August 3, 2013 from foster care after entering care at the age of 14. Since being released, I have had numerous legal issues, struggled with fulfilling my basic needs, employment issues, and have had to start and finish college on bad standards. According to statistics, one in five young adults will become homeless after the age of 18 and one in four will be directly involved in the justice system within two years after leaving the foster care system. And that's based on the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. I would like to share with you two reasons why I support the passing of LB243. This bill will help young adults like me to learn their story and have a lifetime support network. First, LB243 will allow young adults to learn their life story. By participating in family finding services through Christian Heritage, I have had the opportunity to find my father, grandma, and aunt that I've never known. I've also learned that I have a half-brother. As I develop

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a relationship with my paternal family, I'm also learning more about my family history. I'm also connecting with my maternal family such as my uncle who was also a foster care youth. Through my uncle's experiences, he is providing support and counsel on adulthood and the curve balls life throws at us. Second, LB243 builds a lifetime support network around the younger person. My lifetime support network has eight team members that consist of my family, teachers, friends, and past staff members. My team provides unconditional support, helps me cope and process crises, provides resources, and helps me process life decisions. As we have concluded, LB243 provides a sense of belongingness, unconditional support followed by a lifetime of supporting networks. As a young adult who did not know of or who his paternal family was or is, family finding helped me fill that gap along with the gap of a support team and a sense of support and love from past and current relationships. I hereby ask that you consider my story and remember those youth who have not had this opportunity when you consider passing LB243. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to share. It means a lot to me. I will be glad to answer any of your questions. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Thank you, Mr. Ackerman. Questions? Mr. Ackerman, are you now in school? [LB243]

PAYNE ACKERMAN: No, I'm not in school, ma'am. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Okay. And you want to go back to school? [LB243]

PAYNE ACKERMAN: I do want to go back. Do...the bad standards with leaving the school was just being in the...with legal problems and having housing. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Sure. [LB243]

PAYNE ACKERMAN: And housing has come with, you know, me losing jobs and stuff like that, so it's been a struggle. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Are you a part of the Bridge to Independence Program? [LB243]

PAYNE ACKERMAN: No, I'm not. I don't think I'm eligible for it. I'm not quite sure. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Were you a state ward when you aged out? [LB243]

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PAYNE ACKERMAN: No, I was...my birthday is November 28. They actually released me on August 3, 2013, so... [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: So close. [LB243]

SENATOR CRAWFORD: So you were 18? [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Okay, well... [LB243]

PAYNE ACKERMAN: Yeah, I was 18 at the time but now I'm 20. [LB243]

SENATOR CRAWFORD: And... [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Senator Crawford can answer this question... [LB243]

SENATOR CRAWFORD: That's right. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: ...far better than anybody (laughter) because she's had the bill on Bridge to Independence or clarifying it. Do you want to respond? [LB243]

SENATOR CRAWFORD: Well, that's...so in terms of Medicaid coverage, at least, you still qualify if you were 18 still when you aged out. [LB243]

PAYNE ACKERMAN: Yeah, I'm struggling with that trying to Medicaid and stuff, so... [LB243]

SENATOR CRAWFORD: Yeah. So you should let us know if you're having trouble with that. [LB243]

PAYNE ACKERMAN: Okay. Thank you. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Yes. We've been trying to follow up if we've had youth testify here in terms of what they might be eligible for and the Medicaid. And so do contact... [LB243]

PAYNE ACKERMAN: Senator Crawford? [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: ...Senator Crawford's office... [LB243]

PAYNE ACKERMAN: Okay. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: ...if you have questions. She and her staff have done a great job to help people. So thank you for answering those questions... [LB243]

PAYNE ACKERMAN: You're welcome. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: ...and for your testimony. [LB243]

PAYNE ACKERMAN: Okay. Thank you. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Our next proponent? [LB243]

JULIA TSE: (Exhibit 32) Hello again. Thank you, Chairwoman Campbell and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Julia Tse, J-u-l-i-a T-s-e, and I am the child welfare policy associate at Voices For Children in Nebraska. I'm really excited to be talking about families again today this afternoon. We are in strong support of LB243 to establish a family finding project because we believe that all children deserve to have loving and permanent social support especially as they transition into adulthood. It's important that we ensure that all children in our state foster care system have access to the supports and services that they need. But it is equally important that we ensure that they have people around them who can love and care for them into adulthood. This is absolutely essential while they are in care which can be particularly stressful for any child. But it's just as essential well after they've left state care. Research shows that social support can both mediate and buffer the stressful experience of maltreatment and placement. Foster youth who have stronger sources of support from family and trusted adults demonstrate much better outcomes in mental and psychological health. Other studies on kinship care which better allow for the maintenance of familial and cultural ties show similarly improved outcomes. And one aspect of this bill that we're really excited about is that it includes fictive kin. As many of you probably know, families are really complicated and blood is not always the best indicator of a strong relationship. Family finding programs across the country have shown positive effects on legal and emotional permanency and whether for the purposes of securing a placement or just someone to be there later on down the road. This is particularly important for older youth or those who are considered hard to place. Last year, we had 260 Nebraska youth age out of the system without a family to love and protect them with an overwhelming majority of them having languished in care for years prior to exiting. We have made considerable progress in our state foster care system in recent years thanks to the hard work of this committee and the Legislature, but the data shows that there is always more work that we can do to ensure that all foster youth have access to trusted adults who can offer legal

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and emotional permanency. We want to thank Senator Bolz for bringing this bill forward and respectfully urge the committee to advance it. Thank you. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Questions, Senators? Okay. Thank you for your testimony. [LB243]

JULIA TSE: Thank you. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Our next proponent? [LB243]

KIM HAWEKOTTE: (Exhibit 33) I had to get the glasses on. (Laughter) Good afternoon, Senator Campbell and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Kim Hawekotte, K-i-m H-a-w-e-k-o-t-t-e, and I'm the executive director of the Foster Care Review Office. I would be remiss if I don't talk about some of the data that we do collect as part of our oversight and this is one of the data areas that we are very concerned about, the location of relatives in a case. In any given year, the Foster Care Review Office does complete a case file review process on over 4,400 youth in out-of-home care. One of the data sets that we do look at is whether or not the department or any case management entity has looked for or tried to locate relatives. So...and we know it is HHS policy to quickly identify parents and relatives to determine their suitability, but through our case file review process, this doesn't always appear to be a consistent practice across the state or occur at the timely removal from the home. What our data showed in our annual report in December 2014 was that family search occurred in 74 percent with maternal relatives but only 53 percent with paternal relatives. And we don't feel this is an acceptable level. But what we do not know is that just means they've located a relative. That does not mean that they have actively engaged that relative or gone those extra steps. We feel LB243 would really require that those extra steps are taken over and above just locating the relatives but also engaging them and determining their level of commitment. Another data set that we felt was important in our annual report was with regards to paternity. What we found was that while in 85 percent of the cases paternity had been established, which is very good and a great improvement for the past years, only 40...40 percent of those fathers were not included in the case plan or involved in the action. National research has found that children whose nonresident fathers were contacted by child welfare had shorter time periods of care in the child welfare system compared to fathers who were not contacted or brought into the action. So LB243, we feel, would require that active efforts are made to ensure that fathers, whether part of the court action or not, are involved in the welfare of their children and including the relatives of these fathers. As an oversight entity for children in out-of-home care, we would strongly advocate that LB243 contain language that the family finding process needs to begin immediately at the time of removal from the parental home. Through an early identification of relative or kin or noncustodial parent, it is our opinion that the number of placement moves a child had would decrease. What that means is it would also lessen the number and severity of

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traumatic events in the life of that child. What we often see in the cases we review is that an active family finding process has not occurred and usually doesn't occur until after the mother's parental rights are terminated. And in many of these cases, the children are in a nonrelative placement that's interested or willing to provide permanency through adoption but then family finding occurs and we locate relatives which is wonderful for the child. But what it sets up within the court system is really, who has then priority, the family that has cared for this child for two to three years or the relative that does have and should have the right to those children? So what our position is is that that's not fair to anybody. It's not fair to the foster parents. It's not fair to the relatives. It's not fair to the children. And this is an easy, fixable, systemic issue, in our opinion, by requiring family finding at the time that that child is initially removed so those relatives are aware of it, involved with it, and can actively provide and be part of that child's life. So I thank Senator Bolz for bringing this forward and I thank you for your time and consideration and I'm available for any questions. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Questions? Senator Kolterman. [LB243]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: Yeah. Thank you for your testimony. And you probably can't answer this right off the top of your head, but do you know how many children are in the system at the present time? We've heard several say that 243 graduated out last year. [LB243]

KIM HAWEKOTTE: Those would be the number that had aged out due to reaching 19. [LB243]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: Okay. [LB243]

KIM HAWEKOTTE: Currently the number of children in out-of-home care is a little bit over 3,000. [LB243]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: Wow. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Okay. [LB243]

KIM HAWEKOTTE: And that is not including children that are part of the system that are placed at home with their parents. We strictly look at children in out-of-home care. [LB243]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: Thank you. [LB243]

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SENATOR CAMPBELL: Ms. Hawekotte, I want to ask you a question. My understanding on the federal Fostering Connections and then the...what we put into the Nebraska statutes does require the department to look for relatives. [LB243]

KIM HAWEKOTTE: Correct. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: And I think they have a period of time that they have to do that. How would...how do you think we should strengthen that so that it happens at the very beginning? I mean, we've got that in place but obviously from your perspective we need to strengthen it and put more criteria. [LB243]

KIM HAWEKOTTE: This is one of the areas that in the past year, when we look at the data, has greatly improved. Part of the reason that I want to make sure that we give HHS credit for this is they made some major changes to the N-FOCUS system which now has a place to document the location of relatives that's in one common part of the system instead of in many different parts of it. FOCUS was making it difficult to find. We feel the numbers are much better now because of that and it will only continue to improve... [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Okay. [LB243]

KIM HAWEKOTTE: ...because now we have effective documentation. Now, we as an agency can start looking at, well, what have you done now that you know that Aunt Mary is out there? Have you contacted of, have you talked to them? This was step one as far as locating and now I think, Senator, we will improve. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: And Senator Cook, I'm going to get you. [LB243]

SENATOR COOK: Okay. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: I'm just going to follow up. It would appear that the department is trying to go in that direction because of the new grant that they're offering to Christian Heritage. Did you pick that up? I mean, now they want Christian Heritage to start at the beginning. And your point may be that the beginning needs to be even more beginning. (Laugh) And so it may be that we probably should take a look at that. I mean, we've got enough expertise probably sitting in this room in terms of whether there should be something added to this. And you can think about it. [LB243]

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KIM HAWEKOTTE: Don't...and that would just be our position that...and I was really happy to hear that the department is moving forward with Christian Heritage to do it at the time of removal, because if we really want placement stability, relatives, kinship... [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Right. [LB243]

KIM HAWEKOTTE: ...people that these children know is less traumatic for that child than going to stranger, nonrelative foster care which...they could be wonderful people but they are still a stranger to that child, so. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Right. Senator Cook, you've been very patient. Thank you. [LB243]

SENATOR COOK: No, I just had a question about the process. So the family finding process in terms of the pilot goes on. Is the agency there at the time of the initial introduction or is it, here you go, this is the name of your relative or relatives that we found through our search, good luck and goodbye. How does it work the first time? [LB243]

KIM HAWEKOTTE: The first time, at the time of the removal, it is usually HHS case managers that are doing that process. They are locating the relatives. What needs to happen at that point, Senator, that we don't know if it always happens, is are they going that next step? They are contacting them, but are you really trying to engage them which is many times a different process... [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Yes. [LB243]

KIM HAWEKOTTE: ...than just letting somebody know their niece or nephew is in the system? [LB243]

SENATOR COOK: Right. [LB243]

KIM HAWEKOTTE: But are they actually engaging them and meeting with them and seeing what the needs of that child are? Family finding that I was aware came in more for those hard-to-place children where usually...and a lot of times parental rights had been already terminated but you were looking for permanent placement for this child and there was just nobody to adopt these children or nobody willing to. And that's why Christian Heritage has done a wonderful job in finding for those hard-to-place children potential relatives which also has to be done, Senator. We just also feel it also needs to also be done on the front end. [LB243]

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SENATOR COOK: Okay. Thank you. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Senator Cook, I...and we may want to recall Ms. Ramsey to come back up and talk, but from the discussion that Christian Heritage had with me this summer, they do a lot. I mean, they contact the people. They talk them through this. And in fact, in some cases, they have flown to that relative that they find and talk to them. And they do a lot of talking with that person before that person is introduced to the child. [LB243]

SENATOR COOK: All right. Okay. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: And so that allayed my fear that what you were saying...you know, here's the name, there's the phone number, good luck, you know. That is not the way Christian Heritage has worked this. And so either that or at the end of the hearing you we may want to... [LB243]

SENATOR COOK: All right. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: ...you may want to visit with Ms. Ramsey, because they'll tell you a lot more than I'm telling you. [LB243]

SENATOR COOK: All right. Thank you. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Senator (Kolterman)...oh, thank you, Senator Cook. Senator Kolterman. [LB243]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: Yeah, thank you, Senator Campbell. I guess I have a question and I...not having the experience and knowing what's transpired in the past, we're looking at a model here where we're incorporating the private sector, a not-for-profit, with the Department of Health and Human Service. As a long...I assuming you're a longtime worker at Health and Human Services. That's kind of what I gathered from your information here. Do you think that Health and Human Services looks at that as a threat or do you think they look at that as a partnership and are you open to the idea of continued partnership with the private sector? [LB243]

KIM HAWEKOTTE: I would think HHS looks at it as a partnership, because there are many services and...that are needed for these children and family we deal with that are contracted or partnered with between the department and nonprofit agencies that are extremely successful. And this, to me, would be a prime example of an area that it would require the nonprofit entities to come in to assist in this. But this is a little bit above and beyond what a case manager maybe

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has time to do in meeting the other needs of the family. This would provide some extra resources to that family through a nonprofit agency, Senator. [LB243]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: And this...thank you. And the second part of my question, it's somewhat philosophical, I think. But when we're working in an area of this magnitude where we're dealing with young peoples' lives, is it fair to assume that it might be easier for a faith-based organization to go to people and ask them to do this than to have the state of Nebraska call them up and say, hey, we have this child. We want to place them, you know...you see where I'm going with that? I'm not... [LB243]

KIM HAWEKOTTE: Partially, Senator. I think the portion that I would agree with is that I think your nonprofit and your service providers in the state have the ability and the expertise to come at things from a different angle and to bring a different type of professionalism in working with some of these external families and relatives than necessarily the state does. I don't care how we want to say it. I work for the state. I mean, when you work for the state it does bring a different level to it because you are the state of Nebraska instead of some other type of entity. So I don't know if that answers your question but that's my philosophical opinion. [LB243]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: Well, I appreciate that, but...and I guess my question really came from the perspective of, as I listen to the testimony of the pilot project, so to speak, and I heard that they were given the hardest and the toughest and they were successful, it almost made me wonder, why didn't we just start this from the ground level and...just, that's just the... [LB243]

KIM HAWEKOTTE: I think you and I are saying the same thing, Senator... [LB243]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: Okay. [LB243]

KIM HAWEKOTTE: ...because that's why our push is, this needs to start from the day of removal not later. We're playing catch-up for not having done this for many years. [LB243]

SENATOR KOLTERMAN: Okay. Thank you very much. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: I think to some extent, Senator Kolterman, your questions are right on target. What we've seen here is that we had so many things to take care of after the privatization that this committee delved in and we tried to do that. Now what is great is seeing senators come back with programs that now we can build upon that. And in many cases the department has been receptive to creating those partnerships to...let's really start working on some parts that

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we've kind of let go. So your questions are right on target. Any other questions? Thank you, Ms. Hawekotte. [LB243]

KIM HAWEKOTTE: Thank you. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Our next proponent? How many other proponents do we have? One. Am I counting...two? Proponents, raise them high so we can know where you are. Okay, you may want to come forward and take a seat in the front so we're all ready to go. Are there people in the hearing room to testify in opposition to the bill? Okay. Anyone in a neutral position? One? Oh, they were pointing. Oh, they were pointing to Senator Kolterman. Ah. Anyone who is in a neutral position? Okay. Thank you. Go right ahead. [LB243]

CRISTEN WHITE: (Exhibit 34) Thank you, Senator Campbell, Senator Bolz, and members of the committee. My name is Cristen White. That's C-r-i-s-t-e-n W-h-i-t-e. I am the operations program manager for Nebraska Families Collaborative in Omaha and I currently oversee our adoption and family finding unit. Nebraska Families Collaborative is in support of LB243 for the following reasons: Children want, need, and deserve connections with adults who care about them. Research has shown that the primary indicator for positive wellbeing outcomes of children and youth in foster care is having at least one positive adult connection. Children in out-of-home care do best when they are surrounded by those they love and trust. Approximately 650 children in foster care in the Eastern Service Area are currently not placed with a relative or person known to them. Many of these children feel isolated and lonely as they have lost connections to their birth families. NFC began family finding efforts in March 2013 under the permanency contracts NFC has with Child Saving Institute, Lutheran Family Services of Nebraska, and Nebraska Children's Home Society in an effort to provide intensive child-specific adoption recruitment services for children available for adoption or with a concurrent plan of adoption but who have no identified adoptive home. The majority of the children and youth being served by these contracts have historically lingered in foster care due the high levels of care needed. All three agencies were trained in Kevin Campbell's evidence-based family finding model. Under these contract services, 36 percent of adoptions finalized were by a relative or kinship home and 46 percent of children have established or reestablished relative and kinship connections. NFC using family finding when children first enter foster care. In August 2013, NFC hired and trained three family finding specialists in Kevin Campbell's evidence-based family finding model. Upon referral, the specialists immediately began searching for relatives and other adults familiar with the child who can provide short- or long-term care and support. Once relatives and others have been identified, the specialists then help engage them in the child's life. Oftentimes these individuals commit to serve as part of a lifetime network for the child by providing ongoing support such as supervision, transportation, and respite which would otherwise be provided by a contracted agency and someone not familiar to the child. By implementing family finding early in the process, we can reduce or eliminate the amount of time a child spends in traditional foster

care as well as reduce possible trauma from being separated from their family and other familiar adults. To date, of the 254 children who have had family finding services through NFC, more than 4,700 family members have been discovered and 341 of those have established emotional connections with these children. NFC is piloting Kevin Campbell's newly revised family finding model. Under a federal grant from the Children's Bureau, NFC and its three permanency contract partner agencies, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the UNL STEPS program have come together to create, implement, and evaluate the Nebraska Adoption Project. The project aims to enhance current intensive, child-focused adoptive parent recruitment efforts for children and youth who are the hardest to match due to their age, sibling group status, or special needs. Kevin Campbell has provided training to all NFC and partner agency staff on his family finding model revisions and is providing ongoing consultation to the project which is scheduled to end in February of 2016. More than half of all children in out-of-home care are living in kinship homes due to family finding efforts. Since initiating a specialized family finding practice in the Eastern Service Area, there has been a significant increase in the rate of children in out-of-home care who are living with a relative or kin. As of December 2014, 55.2 percent of children in out-of-home care are living in a kinship home compared to 40 percent in June of 2013. If family finding was implemented statewide, many more children and families could benefit from this service, helping keep children connected with their families or origin and reducing trauma that often accompanies separation. Thank you once again, Senator Bolz, Senator Campbell, and members of the committee. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Questions? Senator Crawford. [LB243]

SENATOR CRAWFORD: Thank you, Chairwoman Campbell. And thank you for your testimony and for your work here. So it sounds like your approach at NFC--and maybe that was because of the grant that you got--was to really focus on those hardest cases. So I guess I'd ask you from that experience and from your other expertise and experience if you think that the model would be even better if it were applied more broadly or if you think it really is a model for those hard cases? [LB243]

CRISTEN WHITE: We are actually currently implementing both... [LB243]

SENATOR CRAWFORD: Okay. [LB243]

CRISTEN WHITE: ...at the front end and then also at the back end with those hardest-to-place or hardest-to-match children. As my testimony had indicated, we have three family finders. At the beginning, when we first started out in 2013, we did some...you know, a lot of the referrals we received were for the kids that had been in care for some time. But we have--probably in the

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last six to nine months--have shifted gears and we are now prioritizing the referrals that are coming right into the system. [LB243]

SENATOR CRAWFORD: And how has that experience been with those just coming into the system? [LB243]

CRISTEN WHITE: It's been great. What we have found is, because the children are new into the system, those connections are still there. And so it's very easy to continue to engage those family members in the process and get them to those meetings, those lifetime network meetings. [LB243]

SENATOR CRAWFORD: Thank you. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Other questions? I have a couple questions. We've heard that the department had contracted with Christian Heritage for the last two years to do this and had it in the budget. Did they provide any funding then to NFC for those two years or how did you pay for the 2013 and 2014? [LB243]

CRISTEN WHITE: There has been no additional funding. It's just out of...strictly out of our budget... [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Okay. [LB243]

CRISTEN WHITE: ...that we hired the three family finders. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Okay. So the federal grant then came into play. And is the expectation of the federal grant that you build on what you've done or do it differently or model it? What are you required to do out of the federal grant? [LB243]

CRISTEN WHITE: We are trying to enhance the services that are currently being provided through our permanency contracts with Lutheran Family Services, Children...CSI, and Nebraska Children's Home Society. So we're looking at different models that we are using which is the family finding model, Wendy's Wonderful Kids child focus recruitment model, and then the 3-5-7 Model combining all of them. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Okay. And they're all slightly different? Is that what you're saying? [LB243]

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CRISTEN WHITE: That's correct. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: So the federal government is putting federal funds in here to find out from you which of those models works the best? [LB243]

CRISTEN WHITE: Yes. We are...we have two agencies that will be enhancing their services and they are going through training and ongoing consultation with Kevin Campbell's family finding model and then the 3-5-7 Model. And then we have another agency that has enhanced training with the Wendy's Wonderful Kids child focus recruitment model and then we will compare. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Interesting. In the federal funds that you've been given, are there any funds in which you would take this broader than the Eastern Service Area? [LB243]

CRISTEN WHITE: This particular project, the Nebraska Adoption Project, is just for Douglas and Sarpy County. And it's scheduled to end in February of 2016. So it's just a little over a year. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: And has...have...the federal government, do they have subsequent follow-up programs or are they just trying to see which model works best and there's really not another program that you could apply for additional federal funds? Your federal funds will end and there is no other way to access federal funds? [LB243]

CRISTEN WHITE: I'm sure that there are additional grant opportunities that would probably be available. But as far as...you know, I hope...I think we are hopeful that we will have really good outcomes and that could lead to additional federal funding in the future. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Right. It's just that some federal grants have then the next program and then the next program and you kind of know that going into it that if you're, you know, proving it you can then apply. That's all that I was going for was to see if there was that kind of step program that you looked into. [LB243]

CRISTEN WHITE: And I am not aware of that.... [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Okay. [LB243]

CRISTEN WHITE: ...in relation to this. [LB243]

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SENATOR CAMPBELL: Okay. That helps us a lot. So thank you very much for your testimony. I'm sorry, no other questions. Thanks for coming today. [LB243]

CRISTEN WHITE: All right. Thank you. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Our next proponent? Good afternoon. [LB243]

MARY BOSTIC: Good afternoon, Senators. I want to thank you for the opportunity. And first of all I want to thank Amy Zook with the NFC staffing for giving me this chance to speak for the NFC. First of all... [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: And your (name)... [LB243]

MARY BOSTIC: I'm sorry. My name is Mary, M-a-r-y. My last name is Bostic, B-o-s-t-i-c. I have been a mother as long as I can remember. My oldest son was born 30 years ago, so an experience with all ages and stages of life is sometimes...if something I have gained in my times. I am a mother of three total, two boys and one daughter. Every scrape, tear, hardship, and troubles I have been there to guide them, let them learn and flourish into the people they are today. Mothering is not easy task. But when it comes from your heart and your soul, it's the most rewarding feeling in the entire world. My children are grown now and have small children of their own. Yes, I am a grandmother of seven grandchildren to be exact. The love I have for my family is greater than...it never wavers, no matter how many...no matter what may come our ways. I recently found out I had an opportunity to share my home with my niece I have never met. Her name is Christina (phonetic). I instantly wanted to do whatever I can do to help complete our family. My niece, Christina, has had a very rough and trying life which saddened my heart. No child deserves that. I know I cannot change what had happened in the past, but I'm hoping that we can build up a wonderful future together of a relationship and happiness. I think of all the children with the opportunity to be placed with available relative is a best option for everyone involved...for the children of loving homes and foster parents, an opportunity to become a good influence of loving, a role model for that child. We want to welcome Christina into our home with open arms. I'm sure mistakes will be made. We won't always choose the perfect ways of doing things. But we will make it work every day. The love and faith we will have to help us...will us overcome the obstacle we have faced. I truly believe this is where Christina belongs. If it wasn't for Amy Zook with the NFC, I would never have met my niece. I just met my niece in December. I met my nephew last Saturday. They were never in our lives and if it hadn't been for them looking me up, calling me and explaining who she was and that they were looking for...they wanted me to meet Christina and then it went down the line to see if I would take her as a foster child. I said yes. She's my niece. She's my family. And I took her. So I'm grateful that the NFC gave me a chance to be a foster parent. So I thank you. [LB243]

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SENATOR CAMPBELL: Ms. Bostic, that's a great story. And thank you for just saying, of course I will help this young person...and neat that you've finally gotten to meet them as a part of your family. Questions from the senators? Thank you very much for coming today and telling your story. [LB243]

MARY BOSTIC: Thank you. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Those are tough. [LB243]

MARY BOSTIC: I guess. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Good afternoon. [LB243]

KIM ARKFELD: (Exhibit 35) Good afternoon. My name is Kim Arkfeld, K-i-m A-r-k-f-e-l-d. I'm a permanency services supervisor with the Nebraska Children's Home Society and I represent NCHS today. I would like to thank Senator Bolz for introducing this bill and the members of this committee for all the work you've done on behalf of the children and families in Nebraska. For...the Nebraska Children's Home Society has provided child welfare services across the state of Nebraska for over 121 years. NCHS has 11 offices throughout the state and is an active partner in local, state, and national coalitions with a focus on child welfare, juvenile justice, and community building. In 2014, NCHS touched more than 10,789 lives with its services and outreach to communities across Nebraska. I am here in support of LB243. The Nebraska Children's Home has been providing family finding services through a contract with NFC since July 16, 2012. Since that time, we have helped 54 children and youth build connections with family and find forever families. We have been very impressed with the power of this model. We have the capacity to collaborate with DHHS and other agencies to replicate family finding in other NCHS offices throughout the state. I am here to tell you the story of Jose. I want to share this story using very personal information about Jose and his family members. Jose's aunt and legal guardian has signed a release and she is supportive of their story being used to positively impact other families facing similar circumstances. We think Jose's story illustrates the power of family finding and how it can transform families and create better outcomes for not just families but our state as a whole. Included in the handouts is a time line entitled "The Story of Jose." This gives a brief time line of Jose's time as a state ward. Jose entered the foster care system in April of 2009. And between that time and the time we received the referral for permanency services, Jose had six placements, four of which were treatment facilities. After extensive searching, we were able to locate Jose's paternal relatives at the end of June in 2013. They stated that they did not know that Jose was in foster care and they were very interested in learning more about what they could do for him including legal permanency. Family finding meetings were held in Dallas, Texas, in July of 2013. In November 2013, we received approval

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for Jose to visit these relatives in Dallas. Between that visit and March of 2014, Jose visited his relatives four more times. When he came back to Nebraska after spring break in 2014, Jose visited his relatives...or, I'm sorry. In spring break of 2014 he had to be placed in a shelter as there were no homes that were willing to have him. He stayed there for almost three months before we received approval to place him with his aunt in Dallas. Jose moved to Dallas on June 18, 2014. After being placed with his aunt for six months, his guardianship was finalized. Jose went from having 1 life connection to 26 due to family finding. The other handout provided is entitled "Jose by the Numbers." We feel that the numbers depict the tremendous amount of work that goes into family finding efforts. There are many significant details listed. However, 877 family finding hours works stands out considerably, also the number of miles that were traveled to make this possible. Also of significance is the potential cost of Jose's care had he remained a state ward until he aged out at the age of 19. In addition to the handout, you have been provided a DVD copy of Jose's story. I encourage you to view it and get a glimpse of the reasons we feel that family finding is such a powerful and necessary service to provide to our youth. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Thank you for your testimony. Questions, Senators? In your...oh, sorry, Senator Crawford. [LB243]

SENATOR CRAWFORD: That's all right, that's all right. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: I'll go ahead and take my question. [LB243]

SENATOR CRAWFORD: Go ahead. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: On the second page of your testimony, you talk about the fact that your agency has the capacity to replicate this across the state. And offhand, how many offices does your agency cover across the state? [LB243]

KIM ARKFELD: We currently have 11 offices throughout the state of Nebraska across. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: And I think you go almost border to border with those 11. [LB243]

KIM ARKFELD: Yes. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Okay. I might come back to that. Senator Crawford. [LB243]

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SENATOR CRAWFORD: Thank you. I just wondered, we've talked quite a bit about the connection in terms of a placement. But when you mentioned that there are 26 connections, so...and I think people have alluded to a broader network. But maybe you would talk a bit about--and whether it's Jose's case specifically or more generally--what those other connections mean. [LB243]

KIM ARKFELD: Other connections could be people that were important in their lives in the past. It could be a neighbor. It could be an old teacher that they had that they really connected with, a day care provider, anybody that wants to step up and remain connected to that child and be a support in their life. [LB243]

SENATOR CRAWFORD: And so, we talked through a bit the fact that if you're placing someone it's not just, here's their name. (Laugh) But so what does that process look like for those other family connection people who are not people you are expecting to place the child with but people that you think are important for that network? [LB243]

KIM ARKFELD: Well, in this situation we were never expecting Jose's family to be able to take placement of him. It...from the beginning, you know, after making contact with them, within three weeks I was in Dallas, Texas, holding the family finding meetings under the...Kevin Campbell's model. And at that time, the family made the decision that they would do whatever they needed to do to provide him with legal permanence. So then over the course of the next...it was almost a year or a little over year. It consisted of me taking Jose down to visit relatives, making sure that he's okay, making sure that that interaction is appropriate, seeing how they bond, seeing how they're able to deal with him and his considerable behaviors. And so that went on for several months as well. [LB243]

SENATOR CRAWFORD: But those other 20...is it all 26 are there in Texas, you mean, or... [LB243]

KIM ARKFELD: Well, the aunt that took guardianship of him actually lives next door to who her sister who has a husband, two kids, and the...this part of the family all lives together. They'd never met Jose before. [LB243]

SENATOR CRAWFORD: All right. Okay. Thank you. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Any other questions? I have one follow-up question and that is, in the time that you've been working on this--and this really helps to answer Senator Cook's question,

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and I appreciate the handouts--at any time that you've been working on this, have you interacted with the staff at Christian Heritage? [LB243]

KIM ARKFELD: No. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Okay. So in other words, that project was sort of self contained and yours was self contained. Would that be accurate? [LB243]

KIM ARKFELD: Right. We're contracted with NFC in the Eastern Service Area. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Okay. Right. All right. Any other questions, Senators? Thank you so much for your testimony today. [LB243]

KIM ARKFELD: You're welcome. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Our next proponent? [LB243]

SARAH HELVEY: (Exhibit 36) Good afternoon. My name is Sarah Helvey, S-a-r-a-h, last name H-e-l-v-e-y. And I'm a staff attorney and director of the child welfare program at Nebraska Appleseed. We support LB243 because we know that connecting children in foster care with family members for placement, support, and connection is good for children and good for families. In particular, making connections to supportive adults is especially critical for older youth in care and those transitioning from foster care to adulthood. And for those reasons we are especially supportive of the provisions of LB243 that permit family finding to be utilized in Bridge to Independence cases. There were some questions about the process and I just wanted to point out in the bill on page 3, Section 3, starting at line 11, there is a kind of nice description of the process in terms of point (1) search for and identify family members and engage them in planning; (2) gain commitments; and then (3) achieve a safe, permanent legal home or lifelong connection. And so I really would echo the comments of Ms. Hawekotte about the value of the law that currently requires identification notice. I think that that's been particularly effective, but it's important that we do those second steps as well. And so I think this model really fits in well in terms of helping to really identify those lifelong connections and do that work. We want to raise two particular points that we think are important. First, we think it's important that the interests and wellbeing of children, young adults, and families in pursuing relationships with other family members is always considered and that their input and consent is obtained. I don't raise that as a...we know that that's a part of good family finding models. We just think that's particularly important when working with young adults in the Bridge to Independence Program consistent with the young adult driven focus of that program and the act. Second, we just want to

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know...we think it's important that family members identified through the process are given adequate support. Family members wanting to become placements and support for children often need assistance and support themselves in order to care for and assist children, so we think it's important that those needs are recognized and supported. And that's...and we think that's very consistent with LB243. Finally, we want to note that we also strongly support the provision of the bill that requires independent evaluation. And we think that piece will be really helpful for the state to carefully plan for using this great model going forward beyond the pilot. So we want to thank Senator Bolz and the committee for your commitment to a strong child welfare system and urge the committee to advance this bill. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Any questions for Ms. Helvey? Thank you very much. Our next proponent? I think we have everybody. Any opposed to the bill? Any in a neutral position? Senator Bolz, do you wish to close? [LB243]

SENATOR BOLZ: Thank you for your attention this afternoon. I just want to maybe answer a couple of questions that have come up in the course of the hearing. The first, just to clarify: I think you've heard that NFC is funded through a federal grant that ends in February of 2016. Christian Heritage is also funded through a federal grant that is a pass-through from the state that ends September 30 of this year. And then there was a small number of kids including Payne, your testifier today, who were funded by a grant from the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation. So part of that...making that point is that none of the funds currently provided for family finding are sustainable. There was not a request specifically for family finding in the HHS budget. I think, given some of their other circumstances, they--I can't speak for them specifically--but they were focused on the heart and soul (laugh) and maybe not in a place where they felt they wanted to ask for innovation funds. And I think that's what this is. So hopefully that clarifies some of the funding questions. I wanted to just touch on some of the components of the family finding model and to say that the three steps in the bill are only the tip of the iceberg. And if anybody is really interested, I can give you the more in-depth overview or training materials that family finding offers that talks through the multiple face-to-face contacts, the expectations for cultural competency, the follow-up activities that happen after finding, discovery, and engagement. It's pretty in-depth and the bill does require training activities to occur to maintain fidelity with that model. And the last piece I just wanted to touch on that I heard come up was this...the question around other family connections or other connections of support and what roles do those folks play. I think you heard about how different family members can play different roles in peoples' lives. But I will point out quickly that Christian Heritage has had success in connecting kids with their siblings which I think is a positive thing in terms of growth and development. But perhaps more concretely, Christian Heritage has had some real success in connecting kids to their fathers. And I think when you connect a kid to a parent who hasn't previously been in that child's life, not only do you have another system of support, but you potentially have another person who is providing financial support and may

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even be able to provide child support if the family...if the child returns to the biological family...lots of benefits there. So I'm going to quit. (Laugh) I'll let it lie and see if you have any last questions, but just wanted to pull those threads through. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Any last-minute questions from the senators? Seeing none, thank you, Senator Bolz... [LB243]

SENATOR BOLZ: Thank you. [LB243]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: ...which closes the hearing this afternoon on LB243. If you are leaving...usual, leave as quietly as you can. And we will proceed to Senator Bolz's second bill this afternoon which is LB441 which is to change provisions relating to the Bridge to Independence Program. So, Senator Bolz, why don't we give them a minute so that...because we're having to do this on video rather than transcribing because we had a machine yesterday...I'm taking this opportunity because if we have an Appropriations member here... (Laughter) We had problems yesterday with our machine and so we were given a new machine today and now the new machine doesn't work at all either. So we are...the transcribers are going to have to watch the video to transcribe this. So that's why you see senators leaning into the mike and, you know, all kinds of things like that. [LB243]

SENATOR BOLZ: Duly noted. [LB441]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Duly noted. I know...well, we had Senator Mello yesterday. So we're just putting our little plugs in everywhere we can. (Laughter) Okay, Senator Bolz, go right ahead when you're ready. [LB441]

SENATOR BOLZ: Good afternoon. I'm pleased today to bring you LB441, a bill that offers technical changes and improvements to the Young Adult Bridge to Independence Act. As you know, this is Nebraska's program that offers supports and services to youth in the child welfare system until age 21 to help young people transition into adulthood and lifelong stability. Just to briefly review, perhaps, for some of the new members, the Young Adult Bridge to Independence Act was established in 2013 and updated in 2014. There are two key pieces. One is the Bridge to Independence program which offers voluntary supports and services to youth in out-of-home placement or discharged to independent living who is also found by the courts to be in certain circumstances such as in a homeless situation or lacking a parent or guardian. The second key piece is the extended adoption and guardianship assistance program which is offered to youth between 19 and 21 years of age and who entered guardianship...into an adoption or guardianship after the age of 16. So these programs have both rights and responsibilities. Benefits include access to case management, housing assistance, medical assistance. Responsibilities include

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cooperation and participation in the education, work, and other activities designed to help the young people become independent. So I know that there are committee members who have worked hard on this initiative and I appreciate the work and support in those efforts. I think this is a program that has real value for young people in Nebraska. LB441 is really a technical cleanup bill. It offers several technical improvements related to a few key ideas: choice and independence, fairness, and sound fiscal management. So related to choice and independence, the bill now offers youth the choice between the Bridge to Independence program or the extended guardianship assistance program. Young people would be able to choose the option that works best for them while keeping their ties to the people who support them without giving up their independence or forgoing certain supports. LB441 also establishes an independence hearing where a young person is able to formally review their circumstances, learn about their opportunities to participate, and understand the drawbacks of nonparticipation. Related to fairness, LB441 clarifies that participation and access to medical assistance to the full population of youth the bill intended to cover originally, clarifying the inclusion of tribal youth and ensuring that young people who enter extended guardianship or adoption after the age of 16 can access medical coverage through the Young Adult Bridge to Independence Act. Finally, the bill clarifies and ensures that we draw down the maximum amount of federal funds and makes other minor adjustments such as using the term child rather than juvenile to make sure we're referring to anyone who hasn't achieved the age of 21. So in large part, this is a technical cleanup bill, but it does further, sort of, these ideas of choice, independence, options, and fairness for people who do participate in these foster care to 21 programs. I want to spend just one minute referencing the fiscal note. I...my thanks to Liz Hruska who was able to work with us and change the fiscal note this morning. There was maybe a little bit of a misreading or a different understanding of the intention of the bill. And the bill doesn't...covers kids who enter the extended guardianship after the age of 16. So the original fiscal note, I think, was covering the costs of all kids starting at age 0 to 16 and so there was a significant decrease in the fiscal note that hopefully you have in front of you. I've got copies if you don't. But the fiscal note is significantly different if you looked at it yesterday as compared to today. So that's what I've got. There are at least one technical expert in the room who will answer any of your additional questions but I'm happy to try to respond to anything that's on your mind right now. [LB441]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Questions? Senator Crawford. [LB441]

SENATOR CRAWFORD: Thank you, Chairwoman Campbell. And thank you, Senator Bolz. I just have one question for me to understand the difference between the hearing that's required in the bill and what the process is that a youth would go through now. [LB441]

SENATOR BOLZ: And that's a good question. I know Sarah Helvey is here and she can talk to you from deeper experience. But the main purpose of that is to make it more clear that this is your final hearing...your hearing that helps you transition and make sure that they get provided

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all of the information in the choice that they need to make as they make that transition. So I'm sure she'll provide deeper information. [LB441]

SENATOR CRAWFORD: So they're already supposed to be providing that information but maybe this is a setting and a formality to that, perhaps, is that... [LB441]

SENATOR BOLZ: I think that's fair. Again, I think someone who... [LB441]

SENATOR CRAWFORD: Okay. Sure. [LB441]

SENATOR BOLZ: ...understands how it worked previously can answer your question with more clarity. [LB441]

SENATOR CRAWFORD: Sure. Thank you. [LB441]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Other questions? Senator Bolz, I have to tell you, I want to know the trick how you go from a \$1.6 million to \$226,000. (Laughter) I'm looking at Liz and she's laughing. I don't really mean that seriously, but wow. That is a difference and we need to pay attention to that revision because that's significant, so... [LB441]

SENATOR BOLZ: Well, I appreciate all the cooperation from everybody to...you know, they're tricky programs and so I think we got there. I appreciate that. [LB441]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Absolutely. Will you be staying to close, Senator Bolz? [LB441]

SENATOR BOLZ: Um-hum. [LB441]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Okay. Our first proponent? [LB441]

SARAH HELVEY: (Exhibit 37) Good afternoon. My name is Sarah Helvey, S-a-r-a-h, last name H-e-l-v-e-y. And I'm a staff attorney and director of the child welfare program at Nebraska Appleseed. In 2013 and 2014, former Senator Amanda McGill introduced and this committee prioritized LB216 and LB853 to establish and then refine the Bridge to Independence program. LB216 also created the Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee to make recommendations regarding the initial and ongoing implementation of the program. And I just want to note for the record that I serve on that advisory committee but I am testifying today on behalf of Nebraska Appleseed. As a supplement to our testimony, we've attached two fact sheets, one with some

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more background on the program and another about LB441. After a delayed implementation, federal approval was received for the program and it launched on October 1, 2014. And since that time, we've heard many positive stories about the impact of the program on young people and so we really commend the department and their team of case workers called independence coordinators and supervisors for all of their efforts. We believe this program is on track to remove barriers, improve outcomes, and prevent further reliance on adult systems. However, in the first few months of implementation, several statutory changes have been identified that are needed. And so, as Senator Bolz said, this is a...really a technical...largely a technical and cleanup bill. Specifically, LB441 implements recommendations from the advisory committee and input from stakeholders, provides clarity on certain pieces of implementation, and makes some technical changes. First, LB441 gives young people who were "guardianshiped" from foster care at age 16 or older the option to choose to participate in the Bridge to Independence Program or the extended guardianship assistance program. Our understanding is that currently there are no guardianship youth who have opted into that extended guardianship program and so this new option will give those young people the choice to access the services and the support they need to successfully transition into adulthood while maintaining their relationships with their guardian. This will address some concerns raised by the advisory committee about the existing program including that in the existing program, the stipend goes directly to the guardian rather than to the young person and that there's no supportive case management available to those young people in that program. So it gives them the option for what works best for them. Second, LB441 clarifies the intent of LB216 that young people in the program are eligible for medical assistance. So this bill addresses some unintended gaps there for a few young people. And we strongly support that provision because access to healthcare, we know, is critical for young people to successfully transition to adulthood. That provision also importantly addresses a disincentive to permanency. We know that some young people have chosen not to pursue adoption or guardianship because they need the healthcare coverage. And so we think all children deserve loving, permanent families even if they are adopted or "guardianshiped" at age 16 or older. Third, the bill reduces time lines and minimizes disruption for young people as they age out. Because of the relatively short period of time that young people are in the program, just 19 to 21, stakeholders recommended that a couple of existing time lines be reduced to ensure that services and support are in place as quickly as possible and that also there are no interruptions in services for young people who choose to participate in the program directly from aging out. Fourth, the bill implements other stakeholder recommendations including tribally...to include tribally adjudicated youth to strengthen that transition hearing and to protect confidentiality. I won't go into detail. I'm using my verbal testimony to provide some lengthy written testimony if you're interested. But we definitely support those provisions. And then finally, the bill includes a requirement intended to maximize the federal matching funds for this program and importantly reduce General Fund costs. In conclusion, LB441 is important because it incorporates many of the lessons learned and needed changes identified in the initial months of implementation and the numerous stakeholders who are so invested in ensuring that this program

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is successful. So we really want to thank Senator Bolz for her...for bringing the bill and the committee for all your work and respectfully request that you vote to advance the bill out of committee. [LB441]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Questions from the senators? Senator Riepe. [LB441]

SENATOR RIEPE: I have a question if I can get it stated. Is that a 50/50 federal match? [LB441]

SARAH HELVEY: Approximately, that's correct, for eligible young people. [LB441]

SENATOR RIEPE: Okay, no more questions. [LB441]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Other questions from the senators? I have to say, Ms. Helvey was probably there from the beginning of the Bridge to Independence and did an enormous amount of work in getting that ready to go. So it's nice to see that you're still involved with the program. Thanks for your testimony today. Did you want to say anything? [LB441]

SARAH HELVEY: Well, I... [LB441]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Oh, Senator Crawford, I'm sorry. [LB441]

SENATOR CRAWFORD: That's all right, that's all right, that's all right, that's all right. [LB441]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Going to have to...(inaudible). [LB441]

SARAH HELVEY: I could address the... [LB441]

SENATOR CRAWFORD: I was just going to repeat the question that I asked to Senator Bolz that you may want to answer. [LB441]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Oh, okay. [LB441]

SENATOR CRAWFORD: I see in your written testimony, it says it's using the already existing last court hearing. So maybe you can go ahead and answer that question however you'd like to answer it about the difference. [LB441]

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SARAH HELVEY: Sure. So that was feedback from stakeholders, from judges on the advisory committee and attorneys. And they're...it's not a new hearing. It's that already existing hearing. It's the last court hearing before young people exit the system. And it's really just trying to use that already existing hearing as kind of...for young people who are likely to go into the program directly from aging out, it's an opportunity for the judge to talk to them about the program, to advise them of their rights in the program, and sort of a welcome hearing, a bridge hearing, so to speak. Some judges were wondering, you know, court...there's court hearings that are required once a year as part of this program. And some judges wanted to hold hearings right away just to say, now you're in the Bridge to Independence program. What's this going to be and what are your rights? And so this is an opportunity to use that last court hearing to address some of those issues, for the judge to give an advisement of rights, and to sort of help young people that are going directly into the program to transition. [LB441]

SENATOR CRAWFORD: Thank you. [LB441]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Thank you, Senator Crawford, for getting my attention. Ms. Helvey was pointing over there and I couldn't figure it out that something... [LB441]

SARAH HELVEY: I'm sorry I didn't incorporate it into my testimony. I was worried about time. [LB441]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: That was very subtle. [LB441]

SARAH HELVEY: Yes. (Laugh). [LB441]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Okay. Thank you very much. [LB441]

SARAH HELVEY: Thank you. [LB441]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Our next proponent? Good afternoon. [LB441]

KAYLA BAILEY: (Exhibit 38) Good afternoon. My name is Kayla Bailey, K-a-y-l-a B-a-i-l-e-y. I'm 19 years old. I aged out of the foster care system April 18, 2014. In October of 2014, I was approved for the Bridge to Independence. There are four points to LB441 that I, as a former youth, would like to touch on. One, making sure all youth have a support team by the age of 16 for when they age out is important. At 16, I didn't know what I had for a support team. By the time I was 17, 18, almost pregnant, I didn't believe I had anyone. I had two friends that helped me finish high school and maintain two part-time jobs. A few months before my daughter was

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born, my grandparents and I reconnected. Now they help me out. There are many youth that don't have biological family to help them. Some age out and feel like they have no one. Those youth only know a world of people and constant...new people and constant disruption in their lives. Youth need people to help them be stable and consistent. Two, youth with an independent living plan will have one created with their input. This is created so that youth can set their own long-term goals with people to help them achieve them. I think every young person needs one of these, system involved or not, but system-involved youth need them the most. It's the only way they feel that there is a reason to become a grown-up. Mine was to finish high school then go to SCC, Southeast Community College, make sure I have a stable place to live, keep my home clean, etcetera. I followed it. And my current worker has helped me update and change things to make sure I am meeting goals and still have decent expectations for myself. I am an example of how putting a supported independent living plan in place for a young person can work. Three, for the department to start providing services under the Bridge to Independence 15 days after signed agreement: By October of 2014, I had all my paperwork turned in, filled out, signed. Also, I had met my new independence worker. It took until the middle of November to start to see my stipends which was really difficult since I had just moved to my grandparents, I didn't have a job, and I was trying to support my daughter. Then on October 14, my family and I had a kitchen fire. Everyone and the animals were okay. At that moment in time, I wish I had that little bit of money to help with food, little extra things we needed. If I only had to wait 15 days I wouldn't have had to feel so stuck and useless. Forty-five days is a long time to wait for health insurance or just a little bit of money to help with expenses especially for young people that don't have family to help them. Four, there shouldn't be any disruption of foster care maintenance payments and medical coverage as a youth transitions to Bridge to Independence. I was already out of my last placement after the program had started. But my insurance had a few minor bumps. I had to reapply twice before I started getting help from the department. My daughter was always sick. She was in and out of the doctor's office several times and there were moments where I, as a parent, was embarrassed when the ladies in the office would tell me our Medicaid wasn't working. I would be on the phone with them for hours trying to figure out what was going on. Eventually, it would work itself out but I still had to apply and make sure that they would still cover her most recent appointments. I had to cancel appointments for myself or move them. Some of my appointments were very important. I have low-grade cervical cancer on my cervix and I had...I didn't have the money to pay for my appointments. I had to reschedule them two to three weeks just so I could straighten things out with Medicaid. Shortening the wait period could lower the change that youth will go without important basic needs being met especially since they're...since transitioning is one of the most challenging strains of life. These four main points of LB441 are the ones that I have experienced. There are several other things this bill can offer and change that are just as important. I am so thankful for the Bridge to Independence program. It has allowed me two extra years to figure my life. It has given me time to find a support network and set goals for myself which every youth in the system involved could use. LB441

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expands and betters the program. I hope you all remember my story and will vote to pass LB441. Thank you for the opportunity to share. [LB441]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Any questions, Senators? Tell me, are you still at SCC? [LB441]

KAYLA BAILEY: I am working on classes. I was doing the computer aided drafting program and I have started looking into social work instead. [LB441]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Were you here for the earlier hearing? (Laughter) [LB441]

KAYLA BAILEY: Yes. [LB441]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Have we got a deal for you. (Laughter) [LB441]

KAYLA BAILEY: Yes, I've been here the whole time. [LB441]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Good, good. And your daughter is doing well? [LB441]

KAYLA BAILEY: Yes, my daughter is two years old. She had chronic infection in her adenoids and they...it started about the time she was six weeks old and they weren't caught until this January. So she had to have surgery to have them removed. [LB441]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: That's a long time for a little person to suffer through that. [LB441]

KAYLA BAILEY: My little person is a very happy little person until she's sick. (Laughter) And I swear, she'd go a month being miserable and a week being happy and a month being miserable and now she's in day care and she's got a cold and back to being miserable. [LB441]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Well, I'm sure I speak for all of us. We wish you the very best in your studies and we hope you stay in Nebraska and work in Nebraska because if you have an education, why, that will make all the difference for you, I'm sure. But thanks a lot. It's always hard to tell your personal story and particularly having been a foster kid who's aged out, that's really hard sometimes to tell that, so. [LB441]

KAYLA BAILEY: Yeah, I do this a lot. I actually speak in front of foster parents with Project Everlast... [LB441]

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SENATOR CAMPBELL: Good. [LB441]

KAYLA BAILEY: ...on their panels and things like that. I just spoke in front of...a few months ago in front of a group of professionals about my story and things. So this is different though. (Laughter) [LB441]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Whole new line of work for you, huh? [LB441]

KAYLA BAILEY: Yes. [LB441]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Anyway, thank you for coming today and telling us your story. [LB441]

KAYLA BAILEY: Yes, thank you. [LB441]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Our next proponent? Good afternoon again. [LB441]

KIM HAWEKOTTE: (Exhibit 39) Good afternoon. Senator Campbell and members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Kim Hawekotte, K-i-m H-a-w-e-k-o-t-t-e. By the end of the day, you can actually spell it too. (Laughter) And I am the executive director at the Foster Care Review Office. Under the Bridge to Independence program, there is a requirement that an independent entity every six months look at and review these cases of the young adults that are in this program and that is...the Foster Care Review Office is the entity doing that. I do detail in my testimony--and I won't go through it--the process that we are doing with regards to doing these. We did begin our case file review process in February and meeting with the young adults in February. We will complete 19 cases that we've identified and reviewed, 10 in Omaha, 9 from Lincoln, and in March we're going to do 12 cases. To date, we have seen no concerns with how HHS is implementing the program. In my opinion, this has been one of the most collaborative processes involving many stakeholders. Everybody has been included in education from the very beginning. We know there's going to be growing pains but the bill that Senator Bolz has put before you is extremely necessary to correct some of the issues that we've found. The only one I want to bring up that hasn't been mentioned that is part of LB441 deals with court files and pleadings. One of the issues that did come up is, being the young adults in this case are of legal age, the juvenile confidentiality statutes may or may not apply to these situations which means all those pleadings, files, documents, reports might be available to the public just like in district court. This clarifies under LB441 that all of those do remain confidential. It does still give the Foster Care Review Office access to all of them which I feel is an important piece. But I just think, from a legal standpoint, confidentiality has to be key in these

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cases. So I thank you for your time and to Senator Bolz for bringing this forward. I don't have any other questions or issues unless you do and I'm available. [LB441]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: I'm really glad you're following this. This is excellent because at least then we can get the data to see what's happening and what are the changes. I have to say for the two new senators, before we went into the Bridge to Independence, I worked for a child welfare agency and one of the foster kids that was aging out of the system was told by his case worker, well, your transition plan is, go to the People's City Mission. And I think how far we have come with this program from that advice. It's great. [LB441]

KIM HAWEKOTTE: Thank you. [LB441]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Our next proponent? Good afternoon again. [LB441]

JULIA TSE: (Exhibit 40) Good afternoon. My name is Julia Tse, J-u-l-i-a, last name T-s-e. And I am the child welfare policy associate at Voices for Children in Nebraska. We support LB441 and I don't want to belabor the facts because I think a lot of the previous testimony has sort of given you an idea of how important this bill is. But we believe that all young adults transitioning from our child welfare system deserve adequate supports as they navigate their way into adulthood. And this program specifically targets youth who have left the system without a forever family. And I think this afternoon has been a good opportunity to sort of see all of the little moving pieces of our system and to see where we can continue to improve. Permanent family support is an important factor in proper development through childhood. But for those who age out of the system, the lack of permanency often means poorer outcomes in educational attainment, economic wellbeing, criminal justice involvement, and mental and physical health. Our rate of youth aging out of the system has been...has seen an increase in recent years, so it's important that the services and supports that young people can access through the Bridge to Independence program best meets their needs. LB441 accomplishes this by making necessary technical changes. And the Bridge to Independence program is a significant piece of a comprehensive child welfare system that ensures that our young people have the opportunity to be healthier, better educated, more employable, and less involved in the justice system. We want to thank Senator Bolz for her work on this issue and respectfully urge the committee to advance this bill forward. Thank you. [LB441]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Questions? Thank you for your testimony this afternoon. [LB441]

JULIA TSE: Thank you. [LB441]

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SENATOR CAMPBELL: Our next proponent? Good afternoon again. [LB441]

JAY SEARS: Good afternoon, Madam Chair. I'm back. For the record, I am Jay Sears, J-a-y S-e-a-r-s, and I represent the Nebraska State Education Association. It's been great just to listen in on the Health and Human Services Committee's hearings. I've been education so much in a whole transition process that goes outside of but is also supportive of the educational process. And so NSEA is in support of LB441. We know it's technical but it's exciting also to see that when you pass legislation, you come back and you make tweaks to it to make it even better. And so thank you, Senator Bolz and the committee, for looking at this. Two specific interests from NSEA's viewpoint is making sure that there's access to healthcare. As you've already heard, when there's gaps in healthcare it causes lots of other problems for you in the transition process. And one of those transition processes is also, when we're talking 16- to 19-year-olds, where do I go after high school? Or how do I stay in high school? How do I graduate? And then how do I get into a community college or a four-year college or what am I going to do for the rest of my life? So again, thank you very much for the opportunity for me to learn and for me to take that back to my members. [LB441]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Excellent. Thanks for your testimony today. Any questions, Senators? Okay. Thank you. Our next proponent? Okay. Anyone opposed to the bill? Anyone in a neutral position? Senator Bolz, we are...come full circle here. [LB441]

SENATOR BOLZ: I don't have anything to add. I don't want to belabor the committee hearing. But I just wanted to offer, if any technicalities come up, my staff is happy to chase them down. And if there are any final questions, I'm happy to...(inaudible). [LB441]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Senator Crawford, do you want to... [LB441]

SENATOR CRAWFORD: Yes, I do have one question. And I'm sorry I didn't of this when you were up here before. One of the things that we learned in our interim study on the foster youth coverage for Medicaid this interim was that more of our youth are leaving at 18 than 19. So that's just the way it works. That's when they're often leaving. And so when we're aiming things only for those kids that are leaving at 19, we're leaving out more kids than we're catching, is what we learned. So I'd encourage you to think about whether this bill fixing that may want to address that. The young gentleman who just...who is not here now but who spoke to us earlier is one example of the kids who are leaving at 18 instead of 19. [LB441]

SENATOR BOLZ: I appreciate that. And I'll share with the committee that Liz Hruska and I sat down with folks from the Department of Health and Human Services to have a conversation about how to maximize Title IV-E funds in this program. And I know you all have followed this

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closely as well. And there may be some opportunities about when we catch kids, how early we catch them, and maximizing all those opportunities. [LB441]

SENATOR CRAWFORD: Good. Thank you. [LB441]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: (See also exhibits 41, 42, 43, 44) Okay. Any other questions? Thank you, Senator Bolz. This concludes our hearings for the day. I would ask that you leave quietly because the committee will be in...going into Executive Session. [LB441]