

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Appropriations Committee March 3, 2023

CLEMENTS: Welcome to the Appropriations Committee. My name is Rob Clements. I'm from Elmwood. I represent Legislative District 2, which is Cass County and eastern Lancaster County. I serve as Chair of this committee. We will start off by having members do self-introductions, starting with my right.

WISHART: Anna--

LIPPINCOTT: Loren Lippincott, District 34.

VARGAS: Sorry. Tony Vargas, District 7.

WISHART: Anna Wishart, District 27, west Lincoln and Lancaster County.

McDONNELL: Mike O'Donnell, LD 5, south Omaha.

DORN: Myron Dorn, District 30.

CLEMENTS: We may have senators that are coming and going with other obligations with bills, and so that will have no reflection on our proceedings today. Assisting the committee today is Tamara Hunt, our committee clerk. To my left is our fiscal analyst, Suzanne Houlden. And our pages today are Malcolm from Omaha, a UNL student; and Kait from Kansas, a UNL student. At each entrance, you'll find green testifier sheets. If you are planning on testifying today, please fill out a green testifier sheet and hand it to the committee clerk when you come up to testify. If you will not be testifying but want to go on record as having a position on a bill being heard today, there are white sign-in sheets at each entrance where you may leave your name and other pertinent information. These sign-in sheets will become exhibits in the permanent record after today's hearing. To better facilitate today's proceeding, I ask that you abide by the following procedures. Please silent your cell phones and electronic devices. Move to the front chairs when you come up and testify. The order of testimony will be introducer, proponents, opponents, neutral, and closing regarding bills. When we hear testimony regarding agencies, we will first hear from a representative of the agency. Then we will hear testimony from anyone who wishes to speak on the agency's budget request. When you come to testify, spell your first and last name for the record before you testify. Be concise. We request that you limit your testimony to five minutes or less. Written materials may be distributed to the committee as exhibits only while testimony is being offered. Hand them to the page for distribution when you come up to testify. If you have written testimony but do not have 12 copies, please raise your hand now so the page can make copies for you. Now we

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will begin today's hearing with Agency 48 Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education. Welcome.

[AGENCY HEARINGS]

CLEMENTS: We're going to switch to bills. First up will be Senator Vargas but we'll need to-- the committee needs to switch notebooks. Looks like the committee is ready. We'll open the hearing for LB273. Welcome, Senator Vargas.

VARGAS: Good afternoon, Chairman Clements and fellow members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Tony Vargas, T-o-n-y V-a-r-g-a-s, and I have the pleasure of representing District 7 in the communities of downtown and south Omaha in the Nebraska Legislature. LB273 is pretty straightforward. Basically, we would be appropriating an additional \$7.5 million to the Coordinating Commission on Postsecondary Education for the Nebraska Opportunity Grant program. Now my goal here is simple, it is to increase postsecondary education opportunities for more low-income students. Two handouts that you have in front of you, one is a one pager in regards to this, this legislation. And the second is, which will look familiar, is a little bit more of the information that the director of the Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education also handed out. Currently, NOG is the only state-based aid award for students from low-income families. It's funded through General Fund appropriations as well as lottery dollars. Now, currently, to be eligible for Nebraska Opportunity Grant awards, students must apply for the FAFSA and have an expected contribution of 110 percent of the maximum expected family contribution to qualify for a Federal Pell Grant. During the 2018-2019 school year roughly 13,000 students were Nebraska Opportunity Grant recipients, but over 22,000 students qualified for this grant and did not receive any support due to a gap between the award eligibility and the available funds, which again is because General Fund appropriations haven't increased in more than ten years, or not to the level that is needed to actually meet the unmet need. Now, what you heard earlier is the most recent data that we have compiled had us around 35th in the country for the amount of state-provided, need-based financial aid on a per student basis. Colleagues, if we are serious about growing our workforce needs and I think what we heard from, for one example, from the university system and from some students and also from the chamber, we need to make sure that we're meeting our future needs in our economy. We have to get serious about taking measures like this one that will accomplish those goals. LB273 begins to address the funding issues for these students, which are often the students who are first in their family [RECORDER

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MALFUNCTION] college. Those who are fighting to break out of a cycle of poverty and want to make a difference for themselves, their families, and their communities and for Nebraska. Some of you know this, I've experienced these feelings for myself. This bill is, is very personal for me. I am a first-generation American citizen. I'm the first in my family's generation to go to college and graduate from college. And I will tell you that this was possible because I received a Pell Grant, which is the federal side of the grant in terms of need-based grant at the federal level. But I also received a state-based financial aid like NOG. Actually, the amount that I received was in the amount of \$5,000 a year. If it had not been for this, along with a variety of private scholarships and my work study to make sure that I can actually afford higher education, I don't know if I would be here. It's one of the reasons why I was able to achieve my bachelor's degree and get my master's degree. And I can tell you from my own experience that every single dollar makes a difference in achieving these goals. And the more that we can do to potentially increase the award amount by better targeting the limited dollars that we have for NOG awards, the more impactful it will be for these students. I looked forward to this conversation today. And like I said, it's personal for me because for the last-- my entire time in this Legislature, the last six years, I've really looked towards what are the grant programs that we do have available at the state level, and this is the only one, and what are some of the financial based aid or merit based, like career scholarships, programs that are trying to make it easier for students to go and receive higher education, both public and private and all different types across the state. It's getting to be more expensive. It is getting to be something that is more out of reach for more students. And as we heard, we have more jobs that are available right now that actually pay a very good wage. But if one of the barriers for people getting into these positions is their ability to afford higher education and/or not have to work more during that time so that it can actually balance what it is. I can tell you as a first-generation student myself, the balancing act that you need to make to be able to manage both classes and everything that you're doing, and in addition, being able to pay and afford higher education is a lot, and we want people to graduate at a minimum at a six-year graduation rate from four-year colleges. We want to increase the four-year graduation rate. We want to make sure that they can go to any private or public school in this area in Nebraska and also be able to afford some of the other, well, community college and trade schools that are also eligible for this grant. This is an opportunity for us to meet that unmet need, that gap that exists. And my real hope is, and I won't be here, many of us won't be here in the future, we

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could look to a time where NOG is actually meeting the demands of all the need-based aid for students that are eligible and we are growing our workforce. With that, I'm happy to answer your questions.

CLEMENTS: Are there questions from the committee? Senator Dover.

DOVER: What can you do with \$1,721?

VARGAS: Well, so there's two things. So \$1,700 is what's currently provided to those that receive NOG. There are still thousands of people that don't receive any funds. On average, when you look across this country, we have states even in the surrounding area, the Midwest, that are providing more than \$1,700 per student and they're providing a larger amount of funding to all students, upwards of \$2,000 and in some places, \$3,000, \$4,000. I think the, the real intent is the \$1,700 is part of a larger package of funds that people receive, private scholarships from merit-based scholarships, both from the university or some, you know, from the community or, or national scholarships. But the more need-based aid that we can provide in terms of grant aid from our state, the easier it is for people to have predictability with the funds that they're getting every single year and the more likely that they can actually plan out. And what we're also doing is leveling the playing field for a lot of those that really can't afford this that, as you can imagine in the conversations people usually have is I have to work 20 hours or more a week just to be able to afford and, and make my tuition or I have to talk to my parents about getting a second mortgage out to be able to afford this. So \$1,700 is on average is a really significant deal for many different families when you're talking about the larger aid package, and my hope is that we increase that amount so it's more sustainable for families and first-generation students.

DOVER: I guess the reason I ask is I just I-- are you better-- wouldn't it be better to get more-- give more of a grant than \$1,700? I mean, what--

VARGAS: If, if you are making a motion to make this more money, Senator Dover, I am, I am all ears. And I'll tell you, like again, my experience, and this was-- it was years ago, I received \$5,000 a year of a grant, in addition with my federal Pell Grant, and inflation's only risen. And that's still-- that was a, that's a big deal and, and, and, and I'm sure-- well, I didn't get to answer this, but for Senator Armendariz, programs like the Goodrich Scholarship are leveraging some of these grant-based aid dollars and it's not enough, they're not even anywhere at scale. I mean, maybe we've reached 2,000 students over the

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last 40, 50 years in the Goodrich program, and that's a drop in the bucket. We can do more to make sure people finish and graduate and we can fill those 40,000, 50,000 jobs that we have that are high-wage jobs. So every little bit is going to help. And I appreciate your help with that.

DOVER: Is there any requirement for academic requirements, grades to get them receive the money or continue to receive the money?

VARGAS: So there are merit-based scholarships and programs that provide a mixture of merit and need based, but this is solely based off of, this is solely based off of need.

DOVER: OK. Well, I was the first in my family to graduate. I went out and worked three and a half years and "roughnecking" in Montana and North Dakota, because I could afford school and I did use Pell Grants also, so I can really appreciate the need.

VARGAS: Thank you.

CLEMENTS: Other questions from the committee? Seeing none, we will invite proponents for LB273. Welcome.

ROGER HUGHES: Thank you. Good afternoon, Chairperson Clements and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Roger Hughes, R-o-g-e-r H-u-g-h-e-s, and I'm the President of Doane University. Doane is a member of the Council of Independent Nebraska Colleges. And I appreciate the opportunity to join you today in support of LB273. Increasing funding for the Nebraska Opportunity Grant will help in three ways. One, it will make a college education more affordable for more Nebraska students. Two, it will increase student retention. And three, it will help Nebraska compete economically. According to the data from the Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education, in 2021, 15,000 Nebraska students qualified for the Nebraska Opportunity Grant. However, only 13,000 students actually received awards with a lack, a lack of NOG funding. LB273 can help us close this gap so that we aren't leaving out about 2,000 students who qualify for the NOG funding. The average NOG award is near \$2,000, which makes it an important contribution toward a student's college education. Even so, Nebraska's recently, was recently ranked 35th in the United States for the amount of state-provided, need-based financial aid on a per student basis. I know you've heard a lot of these statistics before. I think it illustrates the importance of this, of this matter. In front of us, we have the opportunity to, to do better than 35th by closing this gap. Our students at Doane and other private and public

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universities and colleges across the state are counting on us to improve access to higher education, especially for our low- and middle-income families where every dollar counts. I hear directly from our students that the college affordability must be a priority if we seek to make a positive difference in our communities. Increasing financial support for our, our in-state students by investing in the NOG will also strengthen student retention. And by retention, I not only mean retention to complete their degrees, but I also mean retaining them to join the workforce of Nebraska. Simply put, NOG keeps Nebraska students in Nebraska. We know that financial support helps our students not only enroll, but also to graduate and launch their careers. We know that when students struggle to pay for college, they may be forced to drop out, pause their education until they can raise more money or take on excessive debt. Financial, financial stresses are real and can negatively affect our, our students' academics and mental health. We heard from Governor Pillen that our children and our youth are Nebraska's future. LB273 invests in their education and incentivizes our students to pursue their degrees right here in the state. When we increase access to college education, those degrees improve job opportunities and elevate earning potential. And this leads to increased economic mobility, higher tax revenues, and overall economic development of our state. In meetings with our business partners, I asked them about the number one issue that they face and repeatedly and resoundingly they share that attracting talent is the clear barrier to growing their companies. A report from the Nebraska Chamber of Commerce outlines that one way to ensure Nebraska can compete globally is by expanding the funding available for students to earn a college degree, especially those in high demand, high paying like technology. On behalf of the Doane University, I want to thank Senator Vargas for bringing this bill forward, and I share my appreciation to the members of the Appropriations Committee as you consider options to invest in our students. They are our future leaders who will make our community strong and enhance the quality of life in this great state. Thank you and I'd be happy to answer any questions.

CLEMENTS: Any questions from the committee? Seeing--

DOVER: I have something.

CLEMENTS: Oh, yes.

DOVER: Yes, I, I don't have a, a perspective here, and, and I asked a question last time, but if for a student going to Doane-- and my son graduated from there it's a fantastic--

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ROGER HUGHES: Yeah. Thank you.

DOVER: --college-- for a student taking the average number of hours, what percentage would the \$2,000 pay for of those credit hours?

ROGER HUGHES: It depends on their financial aid package, because each package is need based as well as merit based as well. So when the question was asked previously, how much will \$1,700 do? It's stacked on other types of financial aid. So it can be that thing that buys all their books, pays all their lab fees, things like that. So I know I'm not answering your question because each individual situation is different based on their merit scholarship, their sch-- their academic scholarship, as well as their need-based scholarship.

DOVER: OK. I texted my LA in the discussion here to see if there is a study, but where would I access the information that would allow me to see how-- I mean, obviously you're talking, there is no standard student, there is no family income, there, there's many, many situations. But I'd like to see, is there a study out there somewhere where I can see the stacking of grants and those kind of things to get an idea about how the, how that, that everything stacked them so they can pay, you know, pay for their schooling?

ROGER HUGHES: Well, the, the, the best form of data is from [INAUDIBLE]. But the trouble is in education, that's two years old. But I'd be happy to put together what I can find for you. We can have an offline conversation about what you're looking for, and I'll find those things for you to help you find that information.

DOVER: Yeah, it's, it's, it's hard to look at one little piece, and I'm sure it's good, but if I could see the, the larger piece, that would be beneficial, I think.

ROGER HUGHES: Well, and you'd brought up something. Should we be looking at maybe increasing other scholarships? Iowa, South Dakota and Kansas all provide supplemental state aid for kids from those states who stay in that state to go to school. And a recent study by Senator Goss-- Professor Goss, indicated that those who go to the small privates in Nebraska, stay in Nebraska at a much higher rate. So I think it's a great investment for this committee to consider in the future of our students.

DOVER: Yeah, I would appreciate that information. Thank you.

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ROGER HUGHES: Yes, I'd be happy to. And I appreciate the fact with Darrin Good sitting back here, the president of Wesleyan, you tell me how great Doane is, I love it. [LAUGHTER]

CLEMENTS: All right, thank you, sir.

ROGER HUGHES: Thank you.

CLEMENTS: Other, other proponents for LB273? Welcome.

DARRIN GOOD: Chair Clements and members of the Appropriations Committee, good afternoon. Happy Friday. And first of all, thank you so much for your service and the truly important work that you do for the state. My name is Darrin Good, spelled D-a-r-r-i-n G-o-o-d. I'm the president of Nebraska Wesleyan. But also, my comments today reflect the support of the Council of Independent (Nebraska) Colleges, which is an organization comprised of all 13 independent postsecondary institutions in the state. Love to go off script a little bit because Senator Vargas' comments really resonated deeply with me. Like him, I was a Pell-eligible student, came from a low-income family. My-- one of my grandparents, only one graduated from college. And so Pell Grants and the equivalent of the NOG grant were essential for me, as well as working on farms in the summers and loading trucks at UPS at nights put me through college. And so these-- this support is really personal for me. So I'm pleased to testify today to support LB273 and thank Senator Vargas for introducing this critical piece of legislation. If passed, LB273 will increase the annual appropriation from the Nebraska Legislature by \$7.5 million annually for the Nebraska Opportunity Grant program, or NOG. The Nebraska Opportunity Grant program is state of Nebraska's only need-based financial aid program for postsecondary students, and provides crucial financial assistance to those who are struggling to pay for the significant and increasing costs associated with attending college, such as tuition, books, and room and board. According to Nebraska's Coordinating Commission for postsecondary education, the average Nebraska Opportunity Grant recipient was awarded only \$1,721 during the 2021-2022 cycle. However, I would argue that disguises the fact that, as we've heard already today, most qualified students did not receive any NOG funds. At Nebraska Wesleyan, we're greatly appreciative of the assistance that is provided to our students through the Nebraska Opportunity Grant program, as a considerable portion are eligible of our students for this funding. After all, over 80 percent of NWU students are from Nebraska, and over a quarter, close to 30 percent in any given year are Pell eligible. I should note a higher percentage than at UNL are Pell eligible. Despite the fact that many NWU students

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remain eligible for NOG funding, only a portion actually receive this assistance. This problem, as we've heard, exists at other colleges and universities across the state, as the student need for these funds far exceeds available funding provided by the state of Nebraska at this time. In 2021-22 alone, roughly 13,000 students received NOG awards. But an even greater number, over 15,000 qualified students did not receive any NOG funding. These are students from your districts and from districts throughout this state who are from low- or middle-income families. LB273 will greatly assist in bridging the substantial gap, gap in coverage under the Nebraska Opportunity Grant program and has the potential to help increase the total NOG amount provided to each respective student as well. Amid a time of rising costs, every increase in NOG assistance can make a meaningful difference for Nebraska students who are hard-pressed to make ends meet while completing their postsecondary education program. While Nebraska may lag behind many states in terms of per-student funding for postsecondary education, including, as one example, our neighboring Iowa where eligible students can receive up to \$7,500 through Iowa Tuition Grant, we greatly appreciate the foresight of the Nebraska Legislature in creating Nebraska Opportunity Grants to minimize this disparity and applaud the Appropriations Committee for considering LB273, which will make us even more competitive. As the president at Nebraska Wesleyan, I have the great privilege to travel throughout this beautiful, diverse state to engage with prospective students and their families. Through my interactions, I have met countless bright, young Nebraskans who are destined to make meaningful impacts in our communities as long as that is we can retain them and prevent them from leaving for opportunities elsewhere. Through making postsecondary education more accessible and affordable in Nebraska, we can take a solid step forward in our collective retention efforts. LB273 does exactly that. As Governor Pillen has often stated, our youth is our future. And we need to invest in them through LB273 because those who attend a Nebraska college or university are far more likely to remain in Nebraska than if they choose an out-of-state school. And off script, as Dr. Armendariz stated, we want a better success rate for Nebraska taxpayer investment. Nebraska Wesleyan graduates, as one example, have a higher percentage of students graduate on time in four years than any school except Creighton. I had somebody crunch the numbers and we actually calculated what percentage of our students were enrolled full time for eight semesters graduate on time in four years, 88 percent. And that's during COVID years when many students fell behind. So we are a great investment. So in spite of the fact that we have a higher percentage of Pell-eligible students in many of the other schools, we are a great investment, as are other independent

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colleges. So for this reason, Nebraska Wesleyan and the Council of Independent Nebraska Colleges are enthusiastically in support of LB273 and respectfully request that the Appropriations Committee advance this bill. Thank you for your consideration.

CLEMENTS: Are there any questions from the committee? Seeing none-- oh, there is.

ARMENDARIZ: Sorry, one second, since he brought it up. One, not doctor, for sure. [LAUGHTER] Do you have any special programs designed for these grant eligible students to be successful and, and to actually graduate?

DARRIN GOOD: Yeah, we have an enormous amount of investment in student success programs. We have a personal advising by, by faculty who act as advisers to the students rather than professional advisers. So they see them in class and they advise them, but they also have student peers that help advise them and a, a, a support center for academic support. Financially, we also do a lot. In fact, we made the decision for next fall that every Pell-eligible student at Nebraska Wesleyan will pay zero tuition. We're going to find a way to fill the gap. And so this sort of support helps us provide that kind of support for the highly needy students so that they hopefully don't have to work 30 hours a week while they go to college full time.

ARMENDARIZ: I appreciate that. That's part of the problem and then the programming while they're there to keep them there.

DARRIN GOOD: Exactly.

ARMENDARIZ: Combined.

DARRIN GOOD: Thank you.

ARMENDARIZ: I appreciate it.

CLEMENTS: Other questions from the committee? I have just one question. You said you're representing the 13 private colleges. How is enrollment doing among your-- is it going up?

DARRIN GOOD: No. I'd say nationwide, enrollment is a struggle. And so we, I think, are facing those enrollment headwinds. All but the very elite schools around the country are, are struggling to make their enrollment goals. And so I think we're all facing that same sort of struggle in finding ways to try to balance that budget gap that-- as we try to meet that enrollment.

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CLEMENTS: Yep, that's what we have seen with other institutions. All right. Thank you for your testimony.

DARRIN GOOD: Thank you all.

CLEMENTS: Are there any other proponents for LB273? Welcome.

JACOB DRAKE: Good afternoon, Chairman Clements and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Jacob Drake, J-a-c-o-b D-r-a-k-e, and I'm honored to serve as the student body president and student regent for the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I'm pleased to be here today on behalf of the University of Nebraska System in support of LB273, a proposal that increases the annual state funding for the Nebraska Opportunity (Grant) program or NOG. It's the state's only need-based financial aid program that provides state financial aid assistance to qualified, low-income Nebraska residents to attend the college of their choice in Nebraska. I grew up in the small town of Murray, Nebraska, in the heart of Chairman Clements' district. I'm a first-generation college student whose mother did not have the opportunity to attend college and whose father chose to enter a trade. As education costs continue to rise nationally, it has only become more difficult for students like me to pursue a college degree. The University of Nebraska System is an institution that strives to provide access to a high-quality, affordable education. From establishing the Nebraska promise, which waives tuition for students with family incomes less than \$65,000 to the recent two-year tuition freeze through the fiscal year, the NU System is committed to the mission of being accessible to all Nebraskans. However, there is still a significant amount of need among our student population. According to the CCPE, in 2022, almost 6,000 NU System students, or 46 percent of the total awardees, received support from NOG. An additional 5,000 NU students qualified for support, but could not receive an award due to lack of funding. That means that almost 50 percent of NU students who qualified for this critical assistance did not receive funding. This data reinforces the need for additional need-based funding for students, and I feel confident in representing the student body when I say that financial need should not be a barrier to pursuing higher education. On behalf of the University of Nebraska System, our nearly 50,000 students, and especially on behalf of our NOG recipients, I want to thank Senator Vargas for introducing LB273. Given growing workforce strains across the state, we urge the Legislature to continue to invest in student success, and expanding funding towards the NOG would bolster the state's commitment to making higher education accessible to Nebraska students and families. Thank you

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again for the opportunity to be here today and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

CLEMENTS: Thank you. Congratulations on being student president and regent, and thank you for representing District 2. Are there any questions from the committee? Seeing none, congratulations and best wishes to you.

JACOB DRAKE: Thank you.

CLEMENTS: Mr. Drake, were you a page?

JACOB DRAKE: Yes, I was.

CLEMENTS: Very good. Thank you for serving the Legislature.

JACOB DRAKE: You're very welcome.

CLEMENTS: Welcome. Next proponent.

LEAH BARRETT: Good afternoon, Senator Clements and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Leah Barrett, L-e-a-h B-a-r-r-e-t-t, and today I'm representing the community colleges that are part of the Nebraska Community College Association. And I would share with you that we are like the individuals who spoke before me, that maybe are no longer in the room, we are proponents of supporting the additional investment and we appreciate Senator Vargas' bill to increase the appropriation for Nebraska Opportunity scholarship. I would say I'm not going to use much of your time because what has been said by my colleagues that our presidents as well as our student body president from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln is true for us as well. This is an important program that really does support our students that have financial need and so we would appreciate your continued support.

CLEMENTS: Thank you. Other questions from the committee? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony.

LEAH BARRETT: Thank you.

CLEMENTS: Other proponents for LB273 step forward.

MIKE BAUMGARTNER: Good afternoon again, Chairman Clements, members--

CLEMENTS: Welcome with us again.

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MIKE BAUMGARTNER: --members of the committee. My name is Mike Baumgartner, M-i-k-e B-a-u-m-g-a-r-t-n-e-r. I'm the executive director of the Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education. Given my previous testimony this afternoon, I'm sure it is no surprise to you that I am supporting LB273 introduced by Senator Vargas. I'm not going to go through the minutia of the program again. I think it's been very well covered by everybody who has spoken on, on behalf of, of the program already. I will make sure that Ms. Houlden gets these to all of you. Sorry I did not hand that out today. This is a more extensive version of the report that we have there. In fact, I might just leave it to you to make copies if you'd like or--

CLEMENTS: You can leave it with our clerk.

MIKE BAUMGARTNER: OK. And also, we have, as required by statute, every two years we do the tuition fees and college affordability report that is filed with the Legislature. But it gets to some of the questions about how aid is stacked. It is oriented toward the colleges, to the state colleges, universities and community colleges. But I will get copies of that, too, and I will print that and send it over, because that's a lot of printing. But I, I think that'll help you understand as well how the different pieces of financial aid fit together, how Nebraska compares, how our tuition and fees compare, and how affordability breaks down by different income levels at the different institutions, so.

CLEMENTS: An electronic copy to our clerk would be sufficient as well.

MIKE BAUMGARTNER: Will do that. OK. OK.

CLEMENTS: Yes.

MIKE BAUMGARTNER: Again, support Senator Vargas, thank him for bringing it to you and--

CLEMENTS: Any questions from the committee? What is-- I did have one.

MIKE BAUMGARTNER: OK.

CLEMENTS: This is seeking to add \$7.5 million. What is the current-- what has been the current funding per year?

MIKE BAUMGARTNER: For the current year, it is \$24.9 million. And that has gone up a little each year.

CLEMENTS: Fiscal year '23 is \$24.9 million?

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MIKE BAUMGARTNER: Yes, \$24.9 million.

CLEMENTS: Very good. Other questions? Seeing none, thank you and thank you for that information. Are there additional proponents on LB273? Seeing none, are there any opponents regarding LB273? Seeing none, is there anyone here in the neutral capacity? Seeing none, Senator Vargas, you're welcome to close.

VARGAS: Thank you, Chairperson Clements and members of the Appropriations Committee. The committee I served on for the past six years. This is-- I just want to thank all the testifiers. I think what you're hearing and why this is not only personal to me is this is a program that works. This is public and private and independent institutions. It's community colleges. And it represents the full gamut of need for students across our state. And I think what we heard from one testifier is that Iowa is just providing more state-based grant funding and that just can't stand, right, we have to do something about that. But the truth of the matter is and we're talking about competitiveness and we're talking about what it's going to take for maintaining and retaining individuals and getting them into the workforce. We have really wonderful students graduating every single year that are making their decisions on where to go, and if there are more well-rounded financial aid packages in other states around us, and I can tell you we are not as competitive where we should be in the Midwest and across the country we're still at the 35th, 34th, that still means there's 30-plus states that are providing more on average per student and are doing more than we are. It means that they're going to make decisions to not necessarily stay here. And the more that we can do to dramatically increase that college or higher education affordability, all the different types of education that we just heard, is really, really important. And the last thing I'll say is on workforce, for those that have been on the committee for, for some time, we have consistently heard our need is one of the reasons why we, we, we funded dual enrollment, the reasons why we funded internships, the reasons why we, we focused on the Small Business Innovation Act, the reason why we focused on the, the shovel ready projects, like these, these were all done because we believe in workforce, but we haven't done a good enough job as in really addressing this gap. And what we heard is that there are students that are not receiving anything in terms of state-based aid. And we can address this this year, in a year where we really need to. And the last thing I'll sort of technically address is, and I think you heard this from the director, you know, we have also cash lottery funds that attribute to this as well. And there will be a time when those lottery funds that are being expended right now are-- that they're-- we're

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going to be having too many lottery funds made available to this and it's going to draw down and it's-- we're going to have to address it. So this is also getting ahead of general funds doing more of the lifting in this program because it's not sustainable on its own. I think the number he said is 2027, we're going to have to revisit it, which means I'm not going to be here and Chairman Clements and most of the committee, except maybe a few of you are going to be here to address that. So we need to do something and we need to do it quickly. And so I appreciate your help, hope we can include this in the budget, and thank you for your time.

CLEMENTS: Thank you, Senator Vargas. And we have-- I have position comments. I have three proponents, no opponents, and no neutral on LB273. That will conclude the hearing on LB273. We will now open the hearing for LB373. Senator Murman.

MURMAN: Good afternoon, Senator Clements and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Senator Dave Murman, D-a-v-e M-u-r-m-a-n. I'm here to introduce LB373, which would appropriate \$300,000 in fiscal year 2023-24 and fiscal year '24-25 to the Nebraska AgrAbility program. Additionally, I filed an amendment that corrects the agency to which this money will be appropriated. When we initially made this bill, the intention was to run the grant through the University of Nebraska. I'm pleased to say that the Department of Agriculture has taken on this grant and it has also been included as part of the Governor's preliminary budget in LB814. You will hear some stories today from several folks who have benefited from this program, which was part of our previous budget passed in 2021. At its core, this program is about assisting the hardest working people in our state, the farmers. In this case, farmers with a disability. This program has provided farmers with the dignity of being able to take care of their land or animals. This is a critical program. The stories will you-- you will hear following this open are touching and speak to the importance of this legislation. I am very appreciative for the committee's consideration of this bill as part of the budget, and I'm grateful to the Governor including this as part of LB814. Again, I ask you to advance this bill and welcome any questions, but others behind me may be better equipped to answer any questions you might have.

CLEMENTS: Any-- Senator Wishart.

WISHART: Thank you, Senator Clements. And thank you, Senator Murman. I remember last time you brought this legislation, I thought it was one of the best hearings that we'd had in front of us so I'm glad to see you back.

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MURMAN: Thank you.

WISHART: Just want to clarify. Previously, the Appropriations Committee supported \$300,000. Are you asking to increase that to \$600,000? Can you walk us through what your intent is for the full funding for this legislation?

MURMAN: Well, I think others behind me might be able to answer it better,--

WISHART: OK.

MURMAN: --but I think it's just the \$300,000 that was appropriated previously.

WISHART: OK. And then that's continued funding so \$300,000 per year?

MURMAN: Yes.

WISHART: Thank you.

CLEMENTS: Are there any other questions? Seeing none, we'll welcome proponents regarding LB373. Please come forward.

EMILY JACOBSON: Good afternoon, Senator Clements and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Emily Jacobson, E-m-i-l-y J-a-c-o-b-s-o-n. I am here today in support of LB373. I am the Nebraska AgrAbility program manager, but I also speak to you today as a Nebraska citizen and lifelong member of Nebraska's agricultural community. I currently live in Petersburg, Nebraska, which is in Boone County, but my husband and I's agricultural roots are in Madison County, where we both grew up and continue to be active in our agricultural world. I graduated with my master's degree in occupational therapy. Having grown up on a farm in northeast Nebraska, I was passionate about agriculture as well as safe farm practices and wanted to be able to tie my passions together. For the past eight years, I have worked for Easterseals Nebraska with the Nebraska AgrAbility program as the lead rural rehabilitation specialist primarily take-- or excuse me, recently taking over as program manager. This passion is tied together by keeping secondary injuries at bay by recommending assistive technology to overcome disabilities, injury limitations, and allowing clients to continue doing what they love every day. AgrAbility is a program of the USDA and is a part of the farm bill ag safety section. Its sole purpose is to serve farmers and ranchers with disabilities. The National AgrAbility budget is a little over \$4.2 million. That money funds program operations in 20

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states nationally and the National AgrAbility Project that is currently hosted by Purdue University. National AgrAbility is responsible for the coordination of the state projects and our training. It is important to note that no assistive technology is funded with that grant money. It is a requirement for the AgrAbility USDA grant that funding for operations be distributed through land grant universities and that each state cooperate with a disability-based organization to operate the program services. Here in Nebraska, our partners are UNL Extension and Easterseals Nebraska, a subsidiary of the Visiting Nurse Association in Omaha. The direct on-farm assessments and services are currently provided by statewide ranchers-- statewide by Easterseals staff. The assessment of the needs of a farmer or rancher is based on their individual disability and limitations. Assistive technology recommendations are made on what equipment is required to safely continue their work. Items such as person lifts or implements, modification to implement controls and shop doors, pasture and feedlot gates, shop tools, driving controls for pickups and utility vehicles for outdoor mobility. In some cases, the farmer or rancher provides his or her own funding, but in most cases, supplemental funding is required. AgrAbility has a contract with the state of Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation services, or VR, to provide them with an assessment and recommendations. VR has been the primary funder of the assistive technology since the program's inception in 1995. Since 1995, AgrAbility has served nearly 630 clients in every county in the state except Douglas County. In 2021, Nebraska AgrAbility sought out funding for clients that were unfunded through the Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation system. We received funding from the Nebraska legislator-- Legislature for two years at \$300,000 per year. For FY '21-22, the Ag AT Fund served 15 clients totaling over \$294,000. The carryover was put towards '22-23 funds. So far in this fiscal year, we have served six clients with one additional current pending paperwork for a total of \$120,312. There are at least six more clients that will potentially utilize these funds in the near future. To date, these funds have kept 21 farmers and ranchers actively engaged in their livelihood, which is priceless. This program has been creating hope, increasing independence, as well as improving the health and quality of life of farmers and ranchers in Nebraska. In addition, grant recipients are monetarily contributing to their community and state economy through increased purchases and taxes paid. There is a formalized application process for the Ag AT Fund, which includes a minimum 5 percent grantee investment in proposed items/projects. Many participants have opted to contribute at a higher cost share. The average cost share in FY '21-22 was 15 percent. Funds were requested from the Department of Agriculture five

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times in the year one: November, January, March, and twice in June. The Department of Ag initially asked that we batch requests as much as possible, but it became very difficult to wait on requesting funds after approval due to supply and demand issues with a lot of our vendors. With each invoice to the Department of Ag, Easterseals Nebraska provides a client number, description of items, price quotes, grant funding amount, and county information. I have submitted the same information for, for year one or for FY 2021-22 with my testimony. We also provide an annual report to the Department of Ag that included proof that the checks were cashed.

CLEMENTS: Your time is up, if you would wrap it up.

EMILY JACOBSON: Yep, absolutely. We continue to, to see a need for assistive technology for farmers and ranchers with disabilities, and we will continue to look forward to matching grants and organizations such as Farm Rescue to supplement funding. I will note that there were stories handed out for you guys. Those stories are of clients that were served with the Ag AT Fund. There's also a copy of the application process for you as well. So I, I thank you for the opportunity to comment on this proposal and I would be happy to answer any questions.

CLEMENTS: Are there questions from the committee? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony.

EMILY JACOBSON: Thank you.

CLEMENTS: Are there other proponents for LB373? Welcome.

AARON BOCK: Welcome. Thank you. Well, good afternoon, Chairman Clements and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Aaron Bock from Beatrice, Nebraska. I am here today in support of LB373.

CLEMENTS: Could you spell your name for us?

AARON BOCK: Again-- yep-- again, my name is Aaron Bock, A-a-r-o-n B-o-c-k. And as a stroke survivor, I encounter limitations daily. I suffer from my right-sided weakness, which does not leave me completely disabled. I do not like to use that word very often because I'm not disabled. I do not like to use that like I say. But I just-- but I do have a disability that does not make daily routine more difficult. I can typically get most jobs completed, but usually with more effort and time than without my disability. Because of past financial help and planning through AgrAbility, my workload is lessened considerably. AgrAbility funding made it possible for us to

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have a hydraulic cattle working facility along with gate latches and various tools for me to use in my daily routine. Most recently, I'm getting off my script here, but most recently AgrAbility has also helped to fund a hydraulic door for myself to use on a machine shed that I cannot use properly right now just because of heavy doors and sliding it back open and shut. So I feel this program is very helpful for farmers, as myself, who might need assistance that they otherwise could not afford. A lot of this is very, very expensive stuff, obviously. You all know that. I feel it is very important to keep every young farmer and rancher in this business as much as we can. We, we need every farmer that we can and as productive as we can keep them in the business. So thank you so much for this opportunity to comment on this very important legislation. And we do very much appreciate what you do for support and everything like that. I'm happy to answer any questions now. If you can't think of anything, I have my contact info on the bottom there, but I'm happy to answer any questions that you may have right now.

CLEMENTS: Are there questions from the committee? I was wondering, how did you find out about the AgrAbility program?

AARON BOCK: I, I-- we found out about this due to it was actually through the college down there at Beatrice. We kind of started the process there, and then they directed us through the Easterseals of Nebraska and then AgrAbility came out and assessed and we got, we got funding.

CLEMENTS: And they hand this out the application form, did you find the process easy to handle?

AARON BOCK: Yeah. Yep. Yeah, very much so.

CLEMENTS: Very good. Other questions from the committee? Thank you for your testimony.

AARON BOCK: Yes, thank you.

CLEMENTS: Other proponents for LB373? Welcome.

WILLIAM MEYER: Senator Clements and members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for having me today. My name is William Meyer, W-i-l-l-i-a-m M-e-y-e-r. I'm here today in support of LB373. I'm a client of the AgrAbility program and I have a T4 spinal cord injury, which means I have no feeling from mid chest down. Not having the use of my lower extremities, I thought I would never get back to working on my family farm or ranch, which I've been doing since I was a young

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child. But that all changed the day that Rod Peterson came and told me about the AgrAbility program. Not only did this program show me that other people with my injury are successfully and independently farming today, they also help me pay for some of the equipment that I use everyday to get back to work. Because of the AgrAbility program, I wake up every morning with a job to do and a purpose to get out of bed. Cattle eat every day, and that is one of the many jobs that I do around my farm. The special equipment that the AgrAbility program helped me get, and the main piece of equipment that I have is a man lift that is mounted in the back of my pickup bed. This lift gets, gets me into my pickup and allows me to drive to any piece of equipment, a tractor, feed truck, even a lawnmower, and getting into them to operate them completely independently. Depending on the time of year, you will find me in a feed truck feeding cattle at the feed yard. In the fall, operating a grain car helping pick corn. In the summer, in the swather mowing alfalfa. But not only, not only do I do, do-- get to do-- operate equipment around the farm, I also help ranch with the saddle that AgrAbility helped me get. This allows me to help move cattle and brand calves in the spring. There are a few other pieces of equipment that I have, but these are the main ones. Because these pieces of equipment are so specialized, not only are they hard to find, but also expensive. Without the AgrAbility program, I would not be able to afford half the equipment that I have and probably would not be doing half the labor that I do around the farm today or farming at all. This program not only gives-- give-- has not only given me a purpose to get up every day, but also makes me feel like a productive member of society and for that I am grateful. I'm here to take any questions at this time.

CLEMENTS: Are there questions from the committee? Senator Lippincott.

LIPPINCOTT: If you would have had to pay out of pocket for all this equipment that you have, what would that have been?

WILLIAM MEYER: To this day, originally when we started it was, like, \$70,000 worth of equipment and I think I have about \$140,000 worth of equipment today that I use almost every day.

CLEMENTS: And where do you live?

WILLIAM MEYER: Palmer, Nebraska.

CLEMENTS: All right.

WILLIAM MEYER: Just north of Grand Island, about 30 miles.

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CLEMENTS: Oh, all right. And did I hear you say you have equipment to get into a saddle?

WILLIAM MEYER: Yeah, is a lift that's on my, on my pickup that I use to get in the equipment, I also use that to get on my horse. And then they also got me a saddle that's specialized and it has support to my upper extremities so I don't need my legs to-- I can still ride a horse.

CLEMENTS: Riding a horse, that's great to hear.

WILLIAM MEYER: It's something I never thought I'd ever do again after my accident.

CLEMENTS: Other questions? Thank you for coming. Thank you for your testimony. Other proponents for LB373? Welcome.

TANYA MEYER: Thank you. Chairman Clements and members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Tanya Meyer, T-a-n-y-a M-e-y-e-r. I am here today in support of LB373. By the way, this is my son, William, of which we're very proud of his determination. And also let you know this next week is eight years' anniversary of his accident, March 7. My son is a client of AgrAbility. He has a T4-- he is a T4 paraplegic, meaning that he has no muscle control below his waist. Without the AgrAbility program, we or the staff at Madonna would never have had any idea where to start to get William back in the saddle, the truck, the tractor to continue farming as he does today or the resources to afford all the equipment necessary for that to be possible, for which his family and I are extremely grateful. Not only did this program get him back to work in the field of his choice that he loves and is passionate about, they also helped him remodel his home to be handicap accessible that he-- so that he can live independently. Within days of William's accident, AgrAbility program was contacted about a potential client that everyone knew to love farming and ranching. It is in his blood from generations back. Farming is not an easy career choice. It requires passion, determination, and perseverance to get the job done daily. William has that drive. He was a recent graduate of the ag program at CCC in Beatrice and has been-- had been working at Central Valley Ag as a crop scout technician and farmed with his grandfather. The time he spent in rehab at Madonna and in physical therapy gave him tools to move around but not to work in the industry that makes him thrive. The people at AgrAbility have years of experience in putting farmers back to work and the connections to know where those resources are. Something I would have never dreamed we would ever need to know and

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would have taken us forever to figure out. William has a scissor lift mounted on his pickup that extends 16 feet into the air that gets him into, into any truck, tractor, piece of equipment that has hand controls. Today, he is willing and able to feed cattle, windrow, rake and bale hay, fertilize pastures, alfalfa and cornfields, shear trees. The list is endless because of the tools and equipment and knowledge provided through this program. Can you imagine if without AgrAbility program, William might have been dependent on state and federal funds for income for the rest of his life. Instead because of AgrAbility, he is a productive member of the taxpayers of our community. For every dollar invested into this program, it has been greatly rewarded in tax revenue to the government as well as a sense of well-being for our son. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this proposal and I'd be happy to answer any questions.

CLEMENTS: Questions from the committee? Seeing none, I just thank you and I know what a mother's heart is like and great to see this success story.

TANYA MEYER: Yeah, thank you.

CLEMENTS: Thank you for coming.

TANYA MEYER: Thank you.

CLEMENTS: Other proponents?

JAY FERRIS: Well, good afternoon,--

CLEMENTS: Welcome.

JAY FERRIS: --Chairman Clements, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Jay Ferris, that's J-a-y F-e-r-r-i-s. I serve as the director of political engagement and state policy for Nebraska Farm Bureau. And today I am testifying in support of LB373 on behalf of Nebraska Farm Bureau Federation, the Nebraska Cattlemen, Nebraska Pork Producers Association, Nebraska Soybean Association, and the Nebraska State Dairy Association. Just give you a little background, you know, about this program and about myself, I've had the personal opportunity to serve on the Nebraska AgrAbility Advisory Committee since, since its inception back in the mid '90s. And through that time, I've gotten to witness firsthand many of the success stories, and you've seen a few of those today. And several years ago, one of our members was impacted by this program and came to us and said there's a funding shortage through AgrAbility, through the assistive technology. And so we have direct policy that says we want to support

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AgrAbility and the funding of the program. And so that's why we're here today. You know, two years ago we were here in front of you and you were gracious enough to put this in the budget through the Department of Agriculture. I have visited with Director Wellman or Director Vinton and also Assistant Director Maricle and so they are aware of the program. Since they're new, I wanted to make sure it wasn't going to surprise them that it was in their budget. They are aware of the program and supportive as well. But mostly I just am here to answer any questions you may have about the program. So thank you and we would thank Senator Murman for bringing this forward as well.

CLEMENTS: Any questions from the committee? I had one question. Does Farm Bureau itself contribute to this program?

JAY FERRIS: Through my time serving on the committee and then also helping get the word out about the program because, you know, early on and your question to one of the testifiers before about how did you find out about the program? And that was one of the strong challenges early on with the program, how do you get the word out that this is even available? You know, and, and the other thing was, as farmers and ranchers we're independent. We'll do it ourselves. And somebody says, I'm here to help. I'm going to do it myself. And so that was one of the early challenges. But through that time, it's kind of come to you'll be more acceptable and, and realizing through many of the rehabilitation programs that are out there, they understand that AgrAbility is there and we'll refer clients to them as well. But financially, no, we don't doing any direct support, but we're there and you know.

CLEMENTS: You help get the word out.

JAY FERRIS: We help get the word out and help advise and, you know, work in whatever we can do to support them. Yes.

CLEMENTS: All right. Any other questions? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony.

JAY FERRIS: Thank you.

CLEMENTS: Are there other proponents for LB373? Welcome.

EUGENE BOCK: Well, thank you. My name is Eugene Bock, E-u-g-e-n-e B-o-c-k. Chairman Clements and members of the Appropriations Committee, I appreciate it very much for the opportunity to, to share some thoughts with you. Some of you may already know, Aaron Bock is my son. Had a hard time with this last time too. As we farm and ranch

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together, I am very familiar with some of the daily chores that are difficult for him. I have also had some recent health issues with back surgery and shoulder operations, which has made some jobs nearly impossible for me as well as for Aaron. Through the help of AgrAbility, we were able to have a hydraulic door installed in a building that we use to store our feeding equipment. The sliding doors on the building were nearly impossible and too heavy for either of us to move. The-- this project has not only helped me, but has also helped-- has been a major help for Aaron. I am certain that with the funding, if this program is funded, they will be able to help many others who can be more productive with some assistance like we also have received, you know, and, and I just want to thank you for your time and consideration for this, for this program. I feel it's very important. I'm touched with Will's testimony. I feel that he is probably, you know, a major spokesperson for this, that, you know, ought to have a commercial in his behalf, right?

_____ : [INAUDIBLE] [LAUGHTER]

EUGENE BOCK: So anyway, I again, I appreciate it very much. And if there's any questions I can--

CLEMENTS: Any questions? Any-- anyone in the committee like to go 16 feet up in the air with William? [LAUGHTER]

WISHART: Yeah, it's got a seat belt.

CLEMENTS: We have one, we have one. Seeing none, thank you for your testimony.

EUGENE BOCK: All right. You're welcome. Thank you.

CLEMENTS: Any other proponents for LB373? Seeing none, is there anyone here in opposition? Seeing none, is there anyone here in the neutral capacity? Seeing none, you're welcome to close, Senator.

MURMAN: Well, I've got some trees around the farm. I think I know who I can look up to trim them now. But anyway, I'd appreciate if you guys would include this as part of the Governor's bill and I'd appreciate you guys doing that and the Governor also. So thanks a lot.

CLEMENTS: Any questions from the committee? Did you say you have an amendment for us?

MURMAN: Oh, yeah, I think I did. Yeah.

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CLEMENTS: All I have is the green copy.

MURMAN: Yeah, let's see.

BLAKE ASPEN: I can bring that by.

CLEMENTS: Would you get it to the clerk, please, after, after the hearing.

MURMAN: OK.

CLEMENTS: Seeing no questions, I have no position statements so we will close the hearing for LB373.

MURMAN: Thank you.

CLEMENTS: Thank you. Oh, I missed it. No, it's not highlighted on here. I need to briefly reopen LB373. There was position comments. There are eight proponents, no opponents, no neutral on LB373 and that concludes LB373. We will now move to LB802. Senator Vargas, welcome again.

VARGAS: Senator Clements, like that tie. OK, here we go.

CLEMENTS: Thank you. You're the second one today.

VARGAS: Oh, yeah. You have good taste. For one of our wonderful pages.

CLEMENTS: LB802, the back of the book.

VARGAS: On the back of the book. Good afternoon, Chairman Clements, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Senator Tony Vargas, T-o-n-y V-a-r-g-a-s, and today I am presenting LB802, a bill that would appropriate an additional \$3.2 million from the General Fund for FY 2023-24 for a total of \$5 million for pediatric cancer research at the University of Nebraska Medical Center. The increase in funding through LB802 will expand pediatric cancer research and treatment across the state of Nebraska, and ultimately reduce the disparity between pediatric and adult cancer research funding. Now it might surprise some people, it normally does, to know that Nebraska has the number one rate of childhood lymphoma in the country. It is the second highest rates of childhood brain and central nervous system tumors in the country. Cancer is the number one disease of death by disease for children in America. In Nebraska, cancer is the second leading cause of death for all ages. Nationally, there's a disparity between pediatric and adult cancer research, treatment, and support.

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Now pediatric cancer research and treatment typically receives 4 percent of national cancer research funding. For example, in the past three decades, only six new drugs have been approved exclusively for childhood cancer. In Nebraska, we are incredibly lucky to be home to the brilliant minds at UNMC. The Pediatric Cancer Research Group is a multidisciplinary team of scientists working to improve the outcomes of children diagnosed with cancer by combining the scientific infrastructure of the University of Nebraska Medical Center and the Fred and Pamela Buffett Cancer Center with the resources and clinical expertise of Children's Hospital and Medical Center. Now the Pediatric Cancer Research Group, or PCRG, is the pediatric cancer CHRI area of emphasis, and its area of efforts include: epidemiology and prevention, including extensive research into water quality as it relates to pediatric cancer rates in Nebraska and other rural areas; pathology of different cancer tumors; innovative treatments with collaborators from pharmaceutical sciences and increased infrastructure to conduct clinical trials, including augmenting data management; quality of care research such as the use of robotics and virtual reality to improve the experiences and physical therapy or decrease the need for sedation in radiology, oncology, and imaging; survivorship research in partnership with Children's Hospital and Medical Center Survivorship Clinic; developing resources and tools to benefit a wide range of cancer research, including animal models and tumor banks; and training for the next generation of researchers through fellowships and laboratory experiences. Now all this work that I just described is incredibly critical to improving outcomes for children who are diagnosed with cancer in Nebraska, and that is happening in our own backyard. There are a lot of really incredible people who are sitting behind me who will hear from-- that you'll hear from next. You're going to hear from families, physicians, advocates, and experts on why LB802 is important and can change lives for not only our young people who face these challenges, but their loved ones as well. Thank you for your attention to this important issue, and I'm happy to try to answer any questions you may have, but I think you'll probably get some of these answers-- these questions answered from the testifiers after me. I just want to thank you because, and just for clarification, this is-- and we already are providing funding towards this. So this is increasing the funding that we already are providing towards this. It's an additional \$3.2 million. So it's not additional \$5 million. It's building on the, the \$1.8 that already exists and in our budget and has been for years. And this is our opportunity to decrease that gap that currently exists. Thank you.

CLEMENTS: Questions? Senator Dorn.

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DORN: Thank you, Senator Clements. Thank you for bringing this bill. But I guess that's part of my question, the clarification on it, because in your-- the, the handout you had, it would add an additional \$3,200. So we already are appropriating 32-- excuse me, \$3.2 million. We're already in the current budget we would already do \$1.8 or where does that line up, I guess?

VARGAS: We currently appropriate \$1.8 and we have been appropriating \$1.8. This would be increasing the appropriation to \$3.2 for a total of \$5 million in funding. Knowing that we have not, we've not touched this, we've not invested more resources into this and, and it is lagging in terms of our funding that we do provide to cancer research from the state. And clearly being number one or number two in some of the leading areas for childhood cancer, there's a reason to then close that gap.

DORN: And then, I guess, one question, and I apologize if this isn't the right question. Health Care Cash Fund, has there ever been any discussion of using that for this? And I know we're very protective of that Health Care Cash Fund. Currently, the, the money doesn't come out of there? No.

VARGAS: I'm not asking for that from, from this, but it's a conversation I'm willing to have. I understand that we try to look at all different types of funds that are available.

DORN: OK. Thank you.

CLEMENTS: All right. Other questions? Seeing none, we'll welcome proponents for LB802. Good afternoon and welcome.

ALAYNA WILSON: Thank you, Chairman Clements and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Alayna Wilson, A-l-a-y-n-a W-i-l-s-o-n. Last bill of the day. Thank you for hanging in here. I'm sure it's been a very long day for all of you. So I get to serve as a Nebraska ambassador for the Childhood-- for the American Childhood Cancer Organization and I get to be the Nebraska representative, but also serve as Miss Douglas County this year. I'm here today as a proponent for LB802. LB802 is sponsored by the American Childhood Cancer Organization to increase funding for pediatric cancer research and resources in Nebraska. The \$5 million one-time fiscal fund allocated by this bill will be utilized by the Board of Regents at the University of Nebraska Medical Center to further their efforts and find a cure for this devastating disease that has taken far too many children from us. The first time I had a close encounter with

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childhood cancer was when one of my dance partners growing up, Trevor Lucky [PHONETIC], had been diagnosed. He was diagnosed with leukemia right after his 15th birthday. And I got the call and I was like, well, kids don't die from cancer. I've never heard of a kid dying from cancer, so this isn't going to be a big deal, right? Well, I really wish that were true because less than a year after his diagnosis he went to dance with the angels. Trevor was a perfect example of a child in our community that pediatric cancer took away from us. Here are a few bone-chilling statistics that we, as a community, as Nebraskans, can hopefully change by the passing of this bill. Nebraska is the highest incident rate throughout the entire Midwest for pediatric cancer, and it's the leading cause of death by disease in the entire United States. One out of every six children will not survive five, five years past their diagnosis date. There are only six drugs that are FDA approved that have been specifically designated to treat pediatric cancer compared to the over 200 approved for adult cancer treatment. Because of this, children end up having to use adult cancer chemotherapies or drugs. You wouldn't give a child Tylenol that was meant for an adult, so why would you give a child chemotherapy that was meant for an adult? This is because there are no other options. Sadly, these drugs leave negative long-term effects on children and often lead to secondary cancers later in their lives. This bill would provide expanded support to help survivors live with these chronic health issues. Pediatric cancer patients and their families living in rural Nebraska are at a significant risk for additional complications. While living in these remote areas, some families may be forced to move closer to Omaha or relocate out of our state where treatment and rehab can be conducted. It often forces one parent to be with the sick child while the other parent stays at home with the rest of their family. This not only takes a toll on the parents, but imagine fighting for your life and you cannot see one of your parents for months at a time. We, as Nebraskans need to do better for our community. This is why we need LB802 to be approved so that \$5 million can be expanded into the incredible research that is being done in our home state to help families that are facing the darkest parts of their lives. I am here because this deadly, awful disease took one of my best friends from me. Don't let it take someone from your life too. Thank you for your consideration of LB802. And I would love to answer any questions.

CLEMENTS: Are there questions from the committee? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony.

ALAYNA WILSON: Thank you.

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CLEMENTS: We'll take the next proponent for LB802.

ASHTYN SCHWARTZ: Hi, I'm Ashtyn Schwartz, A-s-h-t-y-n S-c-h-w-a-r-t-z, and I'm from Scottsbluff, Nebraska. I'm here to share my story and the importance of raising awareness and to increase funding for LB802 at the next state level for pediatric cancer research, build out resources, formulate better data collecting, and to expand the incredible work that is continuously being done in our state. On September 27, 2008, at the young age of 3, I was one of 47 kids in the U.S. that day whose parents were, were told their child had cancer. At the time I had no idea the impact this had on me and my family, but I do now. There's no medical treatment center in my rural community. I initially was life flighted to Denver, Colorado, where my three-year treatment protocol started. I spent 28 straight days in the hospital with daily pokes and infusions in efforts to achieve remission. About six months into treatment while traveling home, I had a delayed reaction to a highly potent chemotherapy. My mom had to overdose me to a highly-- oh, my mom had to overdose me with Benadryl to stop the anaphylactic shock I was experiencing until my parents could get me to our local hospital that was still an hour away. My mom still struggles with the fear of almost losing me that evening. Today, our oncologist says it was one of her scariest phone call conversations having to remain calm on the phone knowing fully what was happening and the severity of the situation. I'm now 17 years old and never imagined I would be invited to speak to you today. I do believe that you are helping me serve a much bigger purpose. You see my high school basketball team is competing this weekend in the state basketball tournament. And ironically, at the same time, I am here sharing my testimony in front of you. Basketball has been a love of mine since I can remember, and I expected to be competing with them this weekend. God had bigger plans for me as I have realized my story is meant to impact others and bring deeper meaning to my childhood cancer and why it has influenced my life. The Appropriations Committee can bring even more clarity to my cancer journey by providing the necessary funding to support the Nebraska childhood cancer community. Nebraska loses one child every month to pediatric cancer so I realize that I'm very fortunate to be standing here before you today. I am a healthy young woman living a normal life. But not all our Nebraska childhood cancer kids are as fortunate as I am. That is why your decision to allocate more funding is crucial in the fight against pediatric cancer. This money will be used to help ensure that more kids like me will live normal lives, which is what they all deserve. An increase to \$5 million for LB802 is crucial to the fight against pediatric cancer for Nebraska, the Midwest, and the rest of the U.S. Thank you for your

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time and consideration in this matter. It has truly been an honor to be here with you today and I'm open to any questions.

CLEMENTS: Any questions from the committee? I didn't catch where you're from.

ASHTYN SCHWARTZ: Scottsbluff, Nebraska.

CLEMENTS: Scottsbluff.

ASHTYN SCHWARTZ: Yep.

CLEMENTS: The team, the girls basketball team--

ASHTYN SCHWARTZ: Um-hum.

CLEMENTS: --is competing?

ASHTYN SCHWARTZ: Yep.

CLEMENTS: Very good. Seeing no questions, thank you for making the trip here. Thank you for your testimony. Next proponent.

GARY PETERS: Yes, sir.

CLEMENTS: Welcome.

GARY PETERS: Thank you. My name is Gary Peters. I'm from Aurora, Nebraska. It's G-a-r-y P-e-t-e-r-s, and I'm here today representing my son, Jacob Peters, who died fighting cancer on November 16, 2011, at the age of 17. So to touch on something that Alayna spoke about is the, the cancer, the chemo and the different drugs that have been developed for-- the lack of drugs have been developed for pediatric cancer patients. Jacob didn't die from cancer. The chemo killed him. The intense chemotherapy that he had to go through to try to get him back into remission caused him multiple organ failure and sepsis. That's what took his life. But it was the fight against cancer that kept going. Jacob's mantra was you don't have to get sick to get better. That's something that as a, as a-- I spent 18 years as a football coach and I, I was always looking for that next thing, that next model, that next thing to inspire my team. And Jacob and I came upon that, it was a coach from Montana Tech named Bob Green. And if you've never heard Bob Green's interviews, do yourself a favor and Google Bob Green, Montana Tech. He was once called the most interesting interview in college football. And I love that quote, you don't have to get sick to get better. Jacob wrapped his whole life

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around that, you know, everything he did, every day he got up, it was what am I going to do today to get better? Whether it was in the classroom, the athletic field, the weight room, whatever it was, he was going to get better that day. Once he got sick, that just took on a different meaning. Now he's sick. Now he's got cancer. Now we got to find another way to get better. Along the line, I got to hear Andy Means who used to coach at Millard South. And he had three rules for his football teams: Be where you're supposed to be, be there early, and get better. And I applied that to all of my teams that I coached, and I applied that to my other sons as well. And if you just do those three things, your life will probably be pretty good if you be where you're supposed to be. We're all supposed to be here today, be early. Everybody was here when I got here so we were early because I promise you, I was early. And the next thing is the hard part, get better. When the original funding for the Pediatric Cancer Research Group came about however many years ago, ten years ago, that \$1.8 million was the first funding spent on pediatric cancer research in the state of Nebraska. So on that day, Nebraska got better. We did something finally to research into treatment options and also the epidemiology of why. When we touch on, Dr. Thorson said Nebraska has got the seventh highest pediatric cancer rate in the nation. Alayna said was number one in the Midwest. Well, the scary thing to me is we're number seven in the nation and the other six are in the northeast. We're number one west of Pennsylvania. From Pennsylvania to California, we are the number one incidence rate for pediatric cancer in the nation. So now we haven't done enough. Incidence rates over the last 20 years are still rising. We need to do more in the state of Nebraska to find out why our kids are getting cancer and what we can do to fix that. Once we lost Jacob, I spent a lot of time wondering, now that my other boys are grown, I spent a lot of time wondering where they are and what they're doing. My son Jerod is in Nashville. I know where he's at. I know what he's doing. My son Dalton lives here in Lincoln. I know where he's at and what he's doing, but I don't know where Jacob would be since he's not with us anymore. Most days, I have no idea. But today I know where he is. He's in this room with us. He's here with me. And the reason I know that is he's buried in his football jersey and he wore number three. And number three has a tremendous meaning to our family because of that reason. And today's the third time that I have spoken to this committee and we're asking for a little over \$3 million in funding and it's the third day of the third month in the year 2023. So he's here today and he's watching us. Are we going to get better? Are we going to take an opportunity to get, as a state, to get better and to help our kids and the families of our kids fight this deadly disease? So the last thing I want to say is

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through the, the funding to start the Pediatric Cancer Research Group and all of the work, the fantastic work that they have done, one of the things that's come out of that is the Pediatric Cancer Research Symposium, and I believe it's in August. Dr. Coulter, is that correct? Yeah. And Dr. Wishart-- or Senator Wishart-- that's the second time somebody said doctor so you guys should feel honored. Senator Wishart and Senator Vargas both took place in a virtual symposium meeting that we had with senators a year or so ago, it was during COVID. But I would like to invite you all to take an opportunity to accept, accept an invitation to come to that symposium and see some of the work that these people are doing. It's an amazing amount of work that they're doing, not only in researching the treatment options, but again, finding out why. We have to do something to stop this. Stop just treating it, stop it from happening to begin with. So thank you all for your time. We appreciate it. The \$1.8 million that was originally allotted has done great things. But we need to get better. We need to increase what we're doing and do a better job. Thank you very much.

CLEMENTS: Are there questions from the committee? Senator Dorn.

DORN: Thank you, Senator Clements. Thank you for being here. How, how long did your son have cancer?

GARY PETERS: He survived 290 days. That's it. Most treatment options for pediatric cancer patients are about three years. Yeah. From the time that you start to the time that you finish, when you get through the delayed maintenance phase and all the maintenance, there's, like, five steps for most of them. Once you get through it, you're not, you're not free of it for three years. And so for, for someone like, you know, Ashtyn at three years old, by the time she was six, she knew nothing else. You know, her life was cancer treatment. And, and, and she's a huge success story. Look what, look, look what's happened, I mean, we should get more of that. We should have more of that than more of me. You know, Jacob's story needs to stop.

DORN: Thank you.

CLEMENTS: Other questions from the committee? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony.

GARY PETERS: Thank you, everyone, for your time.

CLEMENTS: Additional proponents for LB802?

DON COULTER: Good afternoon, Chairman Clements and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Dr. Don Coulter, D-o-n

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C-o-u-l-t-e-r. I am a clinical pediatric oncologist. I'm a professor of pediatrics at the University of Nebraska Medical Center. And since the Appropriations Committee funded the Pediatric Cancer Research Group, I've been honored to be the director. I'm going to go way off script because I don't think I could do anything close to the proponents that you've heard so far. I want to start by saying I was on Jacob's treatment team. I wish you got a chance to know him, and I wish you could understand how his legacy is honored by his father and his mother and the advocacy they bring to this. And that's what this is about. This is about honoring the legacy of not only the children who passed from pediatric cancer, but also the children who have to survive the intensity of the therapy that they get. We've heard a lot of statistics today. I don't want to repeat them because Senator Vargas did a great job going over all of them. I just want to be very clear, we know that Nebraska has the seventh highest incidence of pediatric cancer in the country. That comes from the CDC. We know that every other state that's in the top six or in the northeast, that statistic has been stable for years, years, years. We don't know where pediatric cancer comes from. I can only tell you two definitive things that people know. One, ionizing radiation. We know that from the bombs at Nagasaki and Hiroshima. And number two, pediatric oncologists. We give cancer because the therapies that we use that you've heard so much about cause secondary cancers. I'm on call right now at the university taking care of patients there. I'm taking care of, currently of two patients who have secondary cancers from the first cancer that they had. Childhood cancer rates have been increasing over the last several decades. That trend is particularly problematic in Nebraska. Nebraska is the 16th largest state in the country, 75,000 square miles, and there is one place that you can come for pediatric cancer care in Nebraska and it's Omaha. You've heard some data about how that can be incredibly problematic for families. There's good data out there that shows that if you live more than two hours away from the center where your child is getting treated, a third of those families lose a job, other of those families have to move closer to the center, and a third of those kids don't get back to school. We have the highest incidence of pediatric lymphoma. We have one of the highest incidence of pediatric brain tumors and we have for many, many years. As Senator Vargas said, the federal government funds pediatric cancer research at a rate of 4 percent. Pharmaceutical companies also fund a great deal of research in adults. Pharmaceutical companies do not fund research in pediatric patients for a number of reasons, all of which are honestly appropriate. But it's true, there is a massive, massive funding gap for pediatric patients. I'm not from Nebraska. I'm from Canada. I went to medical school in Arizona, did my residency and

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fellowship in North Carolina, came here, and I'm still in awe of the fact that in 2014 the Nebraska Legislature and specifically the Committee of Appropriations decided to do something about this and gave \$1.8 million as one-time funding; \$1 for every person in Nebraska to augment pediatric cancer research, which honestly wasn't happening. It just doesn't happen. And we're not the only ones. It's not a popular focus of research. Breast cancer, prostate cancer, lung cancer, all incredibly important and need to be looked at, but are the focus of most research entities. With that one-year funding, I was tasked with writing a report that went into the public record. After that report was seen, I was brought back to Appropriations and the decision was made that we're going to keep doing that \$1.8 million every year. And so every year I write a report of the activities of the Pediatric Cancer Research Group that's in the public record. I also have the symposium that Gary invited you to that I'm still honored that Senator Wishart and Senator Vargas were kind enough to come to and, and speak to our group to talk about the things that we do. What are the things that we do? Well, clinical studies. You've heard about robotic studies. It's a robotic seal that's used for Alzheimer's patients because patients that have cancer are immunosuppressed and as such they can't be near pets and therapy animals that can help them through physical therapy. We use a robotic seal because it can be cleaned and it helps these kids have something to focus on when they're going through physical therapy. It's incredible. Virtual Reality. One of the things that the Pediatric Cancer Research Group did is we looked at where our diseases are coming from in Nebraska. That's where some people talk about water quality as a potential causative agent and I have no facts about that, I'll be 100 percent honest. But we are researching that deeply. But we did geographic information system mapping to identify what would be a great secondary site to have kids seen so that these families don't travel so far. And it's Kearney, but what are the problems with these adult cancer centers taking care of kids in those places? When it comes to something like radiation therapy, a four-year-old is not going to lay still in a radiator. They're not and they shouldn't. And so they use virtual reality to make those things easier. They show them through goggles and every child can work an Xbox machine now, and it works really, really well. So I know my time is almost over. I really just want to be here to answer any questions you may have about what we've been doing with the money, what we could do with the money in the future. I would point you to those reports every year that are filed to give an idea of that. But I cannot thank you enough for the difference you make for the children and the families in Nebraska. It is the honor of my life to work with them, and we are so supported by

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the state. Augmenting these funds would allow us to get to the answers that these patients need and allow us to continue to give the hope that these families deserve. Thank you so much for your time, and I'm happy to answer any questions.

CLEMENTS: Senator Armendariz.

ARMENDARIZ: Thank you. Thank you. Can you share with us as much as you can why pharmaceutical companies don't try to develop these drugs?

DON COULTER: Yes. Senator, thank you so much for that question. It's twofold. And again, I want to be very careful what I'm saying. I'm not-- there's no accusation. But if you were going to make a drug, you would probably not make a drug for a population that was only going to be 2 percent of who would utilize that drug. And that's the truth of pediatric oncology. It is truly a rare event. That's why the epidemiology is so difficult to figure out. That's why there has to be so many resources given to it, because you don't want to go around saying what causes pediatric cancer when it is a rare event without knowing specifically what that is. So if you were going to go through all the processes of developing a drug and all the funding that goes into that and all the costs that pharmaceutical company is going to incur, you would want to make sure that a vast majority of people could take that drug. And that's why there are not a number of drugs that are developed for pediatric cancer. As a matter of fact, that's why university systems are usually the ones that are doing that. We've developed a couple of drugs through the Pediatric Cancer Research Group that are currently in pre-clinical trials, mouse trials, cell trials. But again, pharmaceutical companies are usually doing research on adult drugs because that's a better way for them to recuperate the cost. The second part, Senator, is that doing pediatric research on pediatric patients is difficult. There is another layer of responsibility for the investigators because those patients can't consent to those studies. So when you're doing early phase research like phase one and phase two research, that type of research absolutely has to be required to identify what the maximum dose can be tolerated in a patient. Those studies are incredibly difficult to do on kids because the children can't consent to that type of a study, and there really is no benefit to them in being in that study. So early phase clinical trials are usually supported by university systems and not so much pharmaceutical companies, and that's where a lot of these funding gaps come from.

ARMENDARIZ: Yeah, I appreciate you stating that out loud because I did, I used to call on a physician who had developed a drug promising

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antibiotic type drug for lung cancer, and there was just no money in it. It's a short term, cheap-- you know, pharmaceuticals just don't invest in those types of drugs. So I'm glad that you highlighted what the roadblock is there. And then it also accentuates the need of finding other funding to develop these.

DON COULTER: Yeah, I just, if I could, I just want to go back to something that Mr. Peters said, the toxicity of what these drugs do to pediatric patients. It-- I can't describe it to you and it would be unfair to. There's a patient in the hospital I'm taking care of right now who has a great many side effects from these drugs because they're developed for adult diseases. Well, pediatric diseases are just different. Think about a pediatric patient. They're young, they're growing. They have growth hormones and all these other things that are normal that make them grow. Well, that's something that a cancer cell looks at as sugar. So all the pediatric diseases are way more aggressive than adult cancers. Adult cancers, you can do surveillance, you can do screening. You can do things for prostate cancer. You can do things for breast cancer. The vast majority of pediatric cancers have absolutely no screening and they come on like a lightning bolt. Our diseases explode. They don't have sort of a set standard of this is how they march out. And a lot of that is due to the host or the pediatric patient that they're growing in. And so that's why the research is so different. But again, because there's not as much of a reimbursement or a push from pharmaceutical companies or the numbers are so low so the federal government is looking at the resources that they have and they have to put those resources towards the people that are getting the majority of the diseases. These children who don't have a voice and these families who are watching their child go through this don't have hope. And that's what makes our state so different. And so I'm greatly appreciative of the funding that you've provided.

CLEMENTS: Senator Dover.

DOVER: Two questions. One is, so when you're mapping this out, are there geographical areas in Nebraska that have a higher frequency of the cancer? And then my second question would be, if you're looking at population, obviously that would, you know, more people, more, more cases, does it seem as though-- is there any correlation between that based on population numbers like Omaha, Lincoln cities or-- so those two questions, basically population and geography.

DON COULTER: Senator Dover, that's a great question and thank you for bringing it up. First, these numbers that we will tell you that we

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have the seventh highest incidence in the country, these are age-adjusted, population-based incident rates. So it's equalized for how many people that you have available. For example, there are 1.8 million people in Nebraska; 22 percent of those are less than 19, and therefore they're available to get pediatric cancer. And Senator Dover, you're exactly right. A good majority of our pediatric cases come from places of population because that's where people are in order to get it. But about a third of our cases come from rural Nebraska. And by rural Nebraska, I'm talking about frontier counties. And in that setting, again, there's a, there's a cutoff of about an hour from the pediatric center where a child is being treated, where the vast majority of that care can be applied there. With Nebraska, the breadth of where our children come from, there are patients who have to drive on a weekly basis from four or five hours away. When we first started mapping, we mapped based on counties and we did find that there was sort of a differential incidence rate in different counties across the state and that there were certain states in the rural areas that were maybe overrepresented with, with cancer, again, population based. So we did sort of normalize it for how many people were there. That's where we started to look at the different things that can cause pediatric cancer. So we talked about radiation, we talked about pediatric oncologists. Really the only things that we know of that could be factors are environmental factors and genetic factors and the environmental factor is distinctly why pediatric cancer is at such a high rate in the northeast. The northeast industrialized before anybody else in the country did. And a lot of those byproducts of industrialization can actually be things that could be considered carcinogens. So when you're thinking about what are potentials, those are things that we wanted to look at that made Nebraska different. Because as you've heard, we're the highest incidence west of Pennsylvania, but we're the highest incidence in the Midwest. And one of the things that makes Nebraska very different is the Ogallala Aquifer, 85 percent of Nebraska groundwater is supplied by the Ogallala Aquifer. It's the largest aquifer in the world and it is naturally contaminated with heavy metals like uranium and arsenic. So is it possible that that is interplaying with maybe some other things that could be in the water that we're still researching very, very deeply, things like nitrate that we know definitively cause adult cancers, but we don't know if we have a causative answer for pediatric patients. But then the question would be there's such a latency period sometimes in pediatric cancer. We don't know if it's a problem with the mom and the dad, if it's a problem with the child, if it's a problem when the child grows. So you would have to have a certain population that would be great to study to understand that. And that

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population would be a population that stays in those areas for a long period of time. There's no better place to understand that than in Nebraska. These people live in these rural communities for generations. So if there truly was anything to the environment, which I don't know that there is, that is answering why some of these counties have a higher incidence over a long period of time, Senator, I'm not talking about five years, we did research over 23 years and those numbers are stable in some of these counties. It would be because these same generations are living there and being exposed to it over and over again. This is something that the Department of Health and Human Services can help us with, and that's also something that we want to work more with. The Department of Health and Human Services has a lot of statistics that at times are slow to get to the experts in epidemiology to be able to utilize them because those-- that data has to be protected. And I completely understand that. But we think with this increase in funding, we may be able to get to those types of data points that would help us to better understand are there at-risk populations, and if so, what can we do to ameliorate those risks?

DOVER: Thank you.

DON COULTER: Yes, sir.

CLEMENTS: Other questions from the committee? I had one. How many physicians are there in the pediatric center?

DON COULTER: It's kind of you to ask. There are seven of us--

CLEMENTS: All right.

DON COULTER: --and we cover two hospitals. So we cover Children's Hospital and Medical Center and we cover the University of Nebraska Medical Center. All of us see patients. I am one of the two stem cell transplant physicians that are here in Nebraska. And we take care of all pediatric cancer within the state. And we also take care of all of the benign hematology in the state. I have the greatest job in the world.

CLEMENTS: All right. Thank you for your passion for kids and thank you for your testimony.

DON COULTER: Thank you.

CLEMENTS: Other proponents for LB802? Welcome.

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KYLE ZART: Welcome or thank you. And thank you for sharing that information, too, Doctor. My name is Kyle Zart. I'm from here in Lincoln. That's K-y-l-e Z-a-r-t, and I want to take that information and make it a little bit more tangible again here. My cancer journey starts when I was two months old. I was diagnosed with neuroblastoma. Fortunately for me, we were able to catch it early and I immediately started receiving treatment at the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha. As I said, I was very lucky. We caught it early. I didn't have-- my hospital stay wasn't too prolonged. I went through a couple of rounds of chemotherapy, surgery, and was able to go home several months after. I've also been the witness in my family of in a, a more unfortunate outcome. My cousin, Gena Sahling, was diagnosed with osteosarcoma when she was 12 years old and she went the full three years and ultimately lost her battle to cancer. During her treatment, they tried everything. They traveled to Houston. They went to the Medical Center. They did everything they could, but ultimately, the medication, science, technology was not up to speed. Some of my most fond memories actually growing up are going to the Medical Center every year with my mom, who many of you may know as Shelley Zart, who's here often representing LES. She also submitted written testimony, which I hope you're able to, to look at. Every year we would go up for my annual checkup and we would talk with families, kids in the waiting rooms before seeing Dr. Gordon or before seeing-- or getting my blood drawn. You know, we would make friends, we would talk, we would get to know each other. Then we would go our separate, separate ways only for weeks or months later for my mom to come across another obituary. I have an abundance of personal experience with this disease with pediatric cancer incidences. But I also know that this is something that affects all Nebraskans. This rattles the foundation of people's lives. This rattles relationships. This touches everyone, whether in a direct way or an indirect way. And I hope that this committee advances this legislation. And thank you for Senator Vargas for introducing this as well. That's all I have.

CLEMENTS: Any questions from the committee? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony. Are there other proponents for LB802? Seeing none, is there anyone here in the-- speaking in opposition? Seeing none, anyone here in the neutral capacity? Seeing none, Senator, you're welcome to close.

VARGAS: I want to thank you for staying later on a Friday and, and for those that, that came and shared their stories for the physicians, for the families, for the survivors, and for those that have lost loved ones. There's just a few things I wanted to make sure to share on this. One of them is somebody that has probably reached out to you,

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Jesse Shumaker, he's a constituent, he was a constituent of mine. I believe he emailed you. And I just want to share something that he sent with his story. So he says, I know firsthand the impact of childhood cancer. My daughter, Madelyn, was diagnosed with an extremely aggressive brain cancer called DIPG in January of 2015 when she was seven years old. She died less than a year later on December 10, 2015, after treatment failed. I had the opportunity to sit down with Jesse in my first couple of years in the Legislature, and it was my first, my first education on how the disparity exists and just hearing a story and realizing that there's something that we have started to do in the state of Nebraska nearly ten years ago putting funding in, and that there's clearly more that we need to and can do. And because of these discrepancies with what we're doing with either adult cancer versus childhood cancer, we have an ability to continue to do more. And I just want to thank you because, you know, I have a four-year-old who's upstairs wondering where I am right now. And one of the hardest, the hardest things about this and hearing any of these stories is it has to do with, it has to do with children, it has to do with our kids, it has to do with our future. And it is so much harder to hear the stories of individuals that are going through this treatment and having to go through just the pain and suffering. And I know it's something that we can address and we can do more of and dedicated funds from our state. So I thank you, I thank for those that have testified, I thank you for taking the time.

CLEMENTS: Any other questions from the committee? Seeing none, thank you, Senator Vargas. And we have position comments for the record on LB802. I have five proponents, no opponents, and nobody in neutral. That concludes the hearing for LB802. That concludes Appropriations Committee for today.