

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Education Committee February 27, 2026
Rough Draft

MURMAN: Welcome to the Education Committee. I'm Senator Dave Murman from Glenvil, I represent the 38th District. I serve as chair of the committee. This public hearing is your opportunity to be part of the legislative process and to express your position on the proposed legislation before us. The committee will take up agenda items in the order posted. If you wish to testify on the mic today, please fill out a green testifier sheet. The forms can be found at the entrances to the hearing room. Be sure to print clearly and provide all information requested. If you will testify on more than one agenda item, you'll need a new green testifier sheet each time you come forward to speak on the mic. When it's your turn to come forward, please give the testifier sheet and any handouts you might have to the page as you are seated. If you have handouts, we request that you provide 12 copies for distribution. If you do not have 12 copies, please alert the page when you come forward. At the microphone, please begin by stating your name and spelling both your first and last names to ensure we get an accurate record. Observers, if you do wish to testify but would like to indicate your position on an agenda item, there are yellow sign-in sheets and notebooks at the entrances. The sign-in sheets will be included in the official hearing record. We will begin with the introducer giving an opening statement at the mic, followed by proponents, opponents, and those wanting to speak in a neutral capacity. The introducer will then have an opportunity to give a closing statement if he wishes. We will be using a three-minute light system for all testifiers. When you begin your testimony, the light on the table will be green. When the yellow light comes on, you'll have one minute to wrap up your thoughts. And the red light indicates that you have reached the end of your time limit. Questions from the committee may follow off the clock. A few final items to facilitate today's hearing. Please mute your cell phones or any other electronic devices. Verbal outburst or applause are not permitted. Such behavior may be cause for you to be asked to leave the hearing room. Know that committee members may need to come and go during the afternoon for other hearings. I will now ask the committee member with us today to introduce themselves, starting at my right.

HUGHES: Woo-hoo. Jana Hughes, District 24: Seward, York, Polk and a little bit of Butler County. And that's all she wrote.

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MURMAN: That's it. Staff with us today are the committee legal counsel, Don Garrell. And to my far left is the committee clerk, Connie Thomas. The pages who serve on committee today are--

ELIAS REIMAN: Elias Reiman, junior at UNL, studying psychology in the pre-law track.

MADDIE BANKS: Maddie Banks, sophomore at UNL, studying political science on the pre-law track.

MURMAN: Thanks for helping us out today. With that, we'll begin today's hearing with LB1216. Welcome, Senator McKinney.

McKINNEY: All right. Good afternoon, Chair Murman and members of the Education Committee. My name is Terrell McKinney, T-e-r-r-e-l-l M-c-K-i-n-n-e-y, and I represent Legislative District 11, and I'm here to present LB1216. LB1216 makes a targeted improvement to the Nebraska Treatment and Corrections Act by providing for educational services and programming for specific individuals committed to the Department of "Punitive" Services. Under current law, the director of the Department of "Punitive" Services tasked with providing appropriate programs to prepare incarcerated individuals for successful reintegration into society. LB1216 ensures that any person under the age of 21 who is committed to the department and has not yet earned a high school diploma or high school equivalency credential is provided with meaningful access to educational services and programs. The bill requires that educational services align with minimum standards determined by the State Department of Education. These services include core academic subjects such as language arts, social science, mathematics, and may also include vocational education, computer instruction, arts and physical fitness. Partnerships with outside educational institutions can be used to deliver programming as well. By ensuring access to robust educational opportunities for young people in custody, this bill, this bill supports rehabilitation, enhances prospects for lawful employment upon release, and strengthens public safety. It also clarifies roles and responsibilities for the Department of "Punitive" Services and the State Department of Education in implementing and overseeing educational programming. LB1216 is about investing in human potential, reducing recidivism, and creating pathways to success for individuals who want to improve their lives. The department sent a, a letter in neutral. The fiscal note says that there is no fiscal impact. And if we need to clean this up

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because they perceive it's some issue, I do have a suggestion. Basically, to amend this, it would say that the director shall offer and make available educational services and educational programming to any person committed to the department who is under 21 years of age and has not previously earned a high school diploma or high school equivalency diploma. Director shall ensure special education services are provided, as provided by state and federal law. Nothing in this subsection requires participation in educational program except to the extent necessary to provide these services under the law. So maybe that makes them not even just neutral, but probably just not say nothing. But it's just a suggestion. I think this bill should go to consent calendar. I think it's a no-brainer. And if we just need that clarifying language, I'm all for it. Thank you.

MURMAN: Thank you. Any questions for Senator McKinney? Senator Hughes.

HUGHES: Thank you, Chair Murman. Thanks for bringing this, Senator McKinney. So I, I was under-- I thought that if, if you have an IEP or special ed, you have to-- the state requires education for those kids through 21. Does that change if you do get incarcerated, or I thought we would still be responsible, the state would still be responsible for that?

McKINNEY: That's the hairy part about-- this is why the bill was brought, because when I've talked to some and some, some individuals inside, some have been provided and some haven't, so.

HUGHES: But some are getting and some are not.

McKINNEY: Yeah. Yes.

HUGHES: OK, so that's kind of--

McKINNEY: And for whatever the circumstance is, I don't know the details, but some have said it hasn't happened.

HUGHES: Gotcha.

McKINNEY: Yeah.

HUGHES: OK.

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MURMAN: Any further questions at this time? If not, I assume you'll be here to close?

McKINNEY: Yeah.

MURMAN: Thank you. First proponent for LB1216.

LAUREN MICEK VARGAS: Chairman, do you mind if I bring up water with me?

MURMAN: No, that's fine.

LAUREN MICEK VARGAS: Thank you so much. My throat.

CONRAD: The entire Legislature is sick, so. [INAUDIBLE].

HUGHES: She is not wrong.

LAUREN MICEK VARGAS: This whole space.

HUGHES: I have a kennel cough now too, like everybody else.

LAUREN MICEK VARGAS: I'm like, I don't want to be hacking in front of you like I was last time, so.

MURMAN: It's non-alcoholic water, isn't it?

LAUREN MICEK VARGAS: I'm sorry. I don't know, Senator. No, it's not. OK. Chairman Murman and members of the Education Committee, my name is Lauren, L-a-u-r-e-n, Micek, M-i-c-e-k, Vargas, V-a-r-g-a-s, and I'm the CEO of Education Rights Council. ERC exists for one core purpose, and that is to protect the right to learn for all youth. This includes youth who are incarcerated. That mission is why we, we strongly support LB1216. LB1216 is essential because it ensures that young people who are incarcerated do not lose access to education and supports and services to which they are already entitled under federal law, as Senator McKennedy mentioned-- McKinney mentioned. This bill creates a clear and structured framework to provide education, similar to what students receive prior to age 18, for young people ages 18 to 21 who have not yet earned a high school diploma. Under Nebraska special education regulations, and it's noted here in my testimony, students with disabilities are entitled to a free, appropriate public education, or FAPE, through the school year until they-- in which they turn 21, unless they have already graduated with a regular high school

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diploma. While Nebraska law does require that education be offered to incarcerated individuals, it does so only as prescribed by the Department of Corrections. Importantly, that standard does not align with the federal protected education rights of people with disabilities who are less than 20 years of age. Federal law, the IDEA, clearly guarantees eligible students with the right to FAPE. While the setting and delivery of such services may differ due to safety and security concerns, federal law is unequivocal. Incarceration does not extinguish a young person's right to an appropriate educational services to address Senator Hughes' question. The Department of Corrections does offer some educational opportunities, and those efforts do matter. However, their current focus primarily focuses on college-level programming, not a high school diploma. LB1216 addresses a different and critically underserved population, the youngest incarcerated individuals who have not yet graduated from high school. For these students, education is often not prioritized, nor is it structured in a way that meets their academic or disability-related needs. The data underscores why this matters. Most Nebraskans who enter prison have between a third and sixth-grade education level, and national research also supports this. These statistics strongly suggest that the presence of unmet learning disabilities such as ADHD, anxiety, dyslexia, these are conditions that under the law require education officials and-- to identify and support them. Without this legislation, Nebraska remains exposed to the claims of non-compliance with both state and federal law. Legal claims that could place federal funding at risk for education. But beyond compliance, this bill reflects our values. Education is fundamental to rehabilitation. Education creates pathways to employment. And education gives young people a real chance to return their-- to their communities as productive citizens. We thank Senator McKinney for introducing LB1216, and we respectfully urge this committee to advance the bill for consideration to the full Legislature. Thank you so much for your time.

MURMAN: Thank you. You mentioned in your testimony that most Nebraskans that enter prison have between a third and sixth-grade education level.

LAUREN MICEK VARGAS: That is--

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MURMAN: Is that all persons that enter prisons? You're not just talking about the under 21?

LAUREN MICEK VARGAS: No, I'm not just talking about the under 21. The majority of the population that enters incarceration has between a third and sixth-grade reading level, which I know that this committee is attempting to address in our community with another bill. So hopefully that will see some positives in that realm. But I think that we're dealing with that, especially when we're having incarcerated individuals get out of jail and try to be reintegrated into the communities, our expectations also need to be set up with that rehabilitation of education.

MURMAN: Yeah, that's, that's the reason I asked, because of some of the other legislation that we're doing. Thank you.

LAUREN MICEK VARGAS: Yes, of course

MURMAN: Any other questions? Senator Conrad.

CONRAD: Hi, Ms. Micek Vargas. Quick question. I know that for my work as a civil rights attorney, and then I know still today as a policymaker, I'll frequently receive intakes from Nebraska families that have a kid that's detained or incarcerated. And not in all instances, but in some instances, the institutional facility is meeting their educational obligations by like handing the kid a packet, and there's not a lot of engagement or teaching or mentorship. I also have heard on the flip side, there are teachers working in our prison system and our youth correctional facilities that are inspirational and passionate and changing lives and doing really incredible things. Can you just help to paint a little bit broader a picture from what you know about what educational services kind of look like inside?

LAUREN MICEK VARGAS: Yes, so I think it varies based off of county and, and correctional facility, of course. I think when we're talking about county facilities, some of those county facilities, especially 18 and younger-- here in Lincoln, for instance, they partner with Lincoln Public Schools to provide that education.

CONRAD: Right.

LAUREN MICEK VARGAS: At Douglas County Youth Center, that is not the case. They are providing it through packets that were created in the 1970s for migrant children. So those packets are being provided for those children, and they do now partner with OPS and other Omaha-based schools to provide special education but not the general education that is focused. So it's really, I wouldn't say it's a mastery focus, right? It's really focused on credits. How many credits do we need to graduate? I think now with some of the new bills, and what we see is when a child turns 18, they transition to either county facilities, or obviously because they can now be charged at such young ages, we're seeing them transition into prisons. In the prison system, what we are seeing is that the focus is holistically on GEDs. The problem with a GED is twofold. A GED is not a high school diploma. It requires a level of, I will just name it, intellect and engagement that many of the individuals with disabilities are unable to complete. And so can't complete that GED program because they do not have the exposure, nor maybe do they have, due to their disability, the intellectual capacity to complete a GED to get out. A high school diploma, on the other hand, aligned with an individualized education plan, requires supports and services that the school district alongside the correctional facility would work towards. So let's say, Senator Hughes, if you don't mind, I'm gonna use you as my example. Let's say Senator Hughes is in Tecumseh. She is 18 years old. She's been incarcerated, right? Senator Hughes has ADHD, let's say, and is required to get services. What would happen is that Seward County Public-- Public Schools would have to provide the special education alongside the corrections officials to provide and negotiate a contract to get that service to her. That is what we are not seeing currently happen. I think we are starting to engage in those conversations. Some facilities are doing it better than others, but for the majority of individuals who are incarcerated, we are seeing it. The other concern to your question is because, now with the juvenile justice bills that we're seeing come out of the Legislature that younger and younger children may be entering into these facilities. I will tell you, none of them are set up to provide middle school and elementary education for an 11-year-old who could potentially be incarcerated. Absolutely none of them. They are only able to provide high school education. And so we have to think with the new legislation, what can we provide these individuals, especially our 11, 12, 13, 14, 15-year-olds.

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CONRAD: Oh, that's really helpful. Thank you. I just have one quick follow-up question. I hadn't thought about some of those issues. So thank you for drawing the committee's attention to it. But I know the committee worked with Senator Arch, I think it's maybe in the last year, last biennium or so. He had kind of a multi-year effort with the schools and HHS and the courts to try and figure out better information sharing for kids who were system-involved, whether that's the child welfare system or juvenile justice or criminal justice system to make sure that their educational records were appropriately following them so they didn't see lags when perhaps their, their residency changed between different school districts or between different systems. And I know it was a really, really long process and he worked super hard on it, and I think we finally, finally made some strides in that regard. So it almost strikes me that Senator McKinney's measure is kind of a perfect next step after we have that clear information sharing for kids and their educational records amongst all the different entities kind of in place to then kind of ensure that that's working how it's supposed to be.

LAUREN MICEK VARGAS: I would agree. We are working with the, the Nebraska Department of Education. I think Commissioner Mayer is really focused on putting and operationalizing that system through data and getting it launched. They're still in that process of MOUs between DHHS, et cetera, of course. But I think that the investment that this Legislature put into individuals who are in the juvenile justice system is just as-- this would be a second step forward. That if those individuals are then incarcerated in the adult setting, or if they're sitting in our county facilities, that they also would have access to everything that we are investing in as a state.

MURMAN: Great, thank you. Thank you.

MURMAN: Senator Hughes.

HUGHES: Thank you. Sorry, I'm just going to take one step back. To me, this kind of was talking to like kind of two different-- kind of two different groups of kids past the point of 18. Correct me if I'm wrong. By law in Nebraska, we have to educate kids till they're 18, and if they-- and or if they have an IEP, to 21.

LAUREN MICEK VARGAS: That is corr--

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HUGHES: So if you don't have an IEP, it stops at 18. But if you do have an IEP, it goes to 21, So part of this bill is for that piece of the IEP to 21. We shouldn't have to put it in a bill, right? It should, it should be happening. Am I wrong with that?

LAUREN MICEK VARGAS: I do not think that you were wrong, I think who's holding it accountable. And I think that's what LB1216 seeks to do, is to hold the state, the Department of Corrections, et cetera, accountable to what is going on currently. Because there's, outside of litigation, right now there's no other accountability metric.

HUGHES: But then this also has the other piece that we could talk about, which is, I'm already 18, I didn't get a high school diploma, but now this is saying, I don't have an IEP, OK, I am that kid.

LAUREN MICEK VARGAS: Mm-hmm.

HUGHES: This is seeing that the-- that you have to help them get a high school diploma or a GED, which is treating that person a little differently because just because they're in prison they get that access. But I'm not in prison, I don't get that access. So that's to me the other half of this that maybe-- do you see what I'm saying?

LAUREN MICEK VARGAS: I understand what you're saying that there may be like a discourse. I really think that the-- because there's such a large proportion, I would say almost 85% of individuals who are coming in to the juvenile justice and then the corrections system, have-- are IEP eligible or have a disability--

HUGHES: The majority are that, that group.

LAUREN MICEK VARGAS: Correct. Yes. If the committee wants to discuss what those variances are, I agree. But I think that's what the, this bill was intending to serve, was that there's such a large percentage of the population who do have disabilities. And as you know when they get out of incarceration, where do they come? To our communities. And so how do we offer them a step up to at least get integrated?

HUGHES: OK. Thank you.

LAUREN MICEK VARGAS: Yeah, of course. Thank you so much

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MURMAN: As Senator Conrad referenced, we've done a lot of work with the YRTC's in their education. Are you thinking that this model will be similar to what we've done with the YRTC's?

LAUREN MICEK VARGAS: I think what is happening at the YRTC's right now as they stand, it has been phenomenal. In the past five years prior to what was occurring, and I'm not saying what, I'm talking about educationally, OK? From an education perspective, what I saw as a public defender to now what I'm seeing under the leadership of Scott English has been an amazing application of what juvenile justice education should look like in our incarcerated systems. And it should be used as a beacon and of what we should be doing statewide. And I have not only told that to him, I've told that to county members. I've tried to introduce and show people what is happening. At Kearney in particular, they have a full running school with direct instruction happening, special education and vocational skills. They have a wood-- like a woodworking group, an art class, et cetera. Those kids are getting exposed to some of the best education that they have seen in some of lives because they weren't attending school. So to answer your question, yes. I think that's also part of the concerns of some things that are happening at the YRTC. Just recently I sat in a committee hearing, which was not in front of this hearing, but I think it was Commissioner Bish from DHHS, stated that her intention is to change that, to go from a Rule 10, which requires an accredited education system with accredited teachers to what is a Rule 18, which does not require that. And what it would-- what she testified to her intention was to put everybody online and to end the education systems that we're now seeing at the YRTC. And I would-- I have serious concerns about what that would look like because, to your point, Senator Murman, I've been very impressed with what we have educationally in our current system.

MURMAN: Since we're talking about YRTC's now, the YRTC's are move-- the YRTC in Kearney is moving to Omaha. Is that correct?

LAUREN MICEK VARGAS: I believe that that is what is being proposed. I don't know if that can happen yet until that bill gets out of committee and, and part of me, I can't remember exactly, the, the name, but I know it's senator Hansen's bill. I think, yes, it-- the proposition is that, that it would move to NCYF, which would be in Omaha, that the girls in Hastings would move to Kearney, and that

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Whitehall would close in Lincoln and Whitehall would go to Hastings. Don't quote me on that, but I think that's-- I'm getting that correct.

MURMAN: That's why I was asking you. Not sure.

LAUREN MICEK VARGAS: Yeah, and so obviously-- and obviously I have concerns about that we have all these infrastructures and they may be taken out brick by brick for those students, especially in trying to put them on a better path for recidivism.

MURMAN: Yeah, for instance, some of the technical support for high school at the YRTC in Kearney, would that be at risk if the YRTC did move to Omaha? Or is there similar facilities there?

LAUREN MICEK VARGAS: To my knowledge and to the testimony that happened, again, this is all hearsay, right. Like what I heard somebody say, but from-- to my knowledge, there is no way to have a woodworking class at NCYF. There's no way to have vocational skills that are provided and no way to provide art, et cetera. In fact, what was testified to is that there would be no direct instruction. It would all go to an online system. And I think that that's not only concerning for the students, but also for the teachers. I think it really devalues what the, the passion that Senator Conrad discussed, the passion and the input that they've been putting into Kearney and to those students is really remarkable, and I would highly recommend you go and see it.

MURMAN: Well, part of the reason I asked is when the girls YRTCs moved from Geneva--

LAUREN MICEK VARGAS: Yes.

MURMAN: --I don't think they lost so much educational facilities, but recreational facilities were more limited when they moved out of Geneva.

LAUREN MICEK VARGAS: Correct, and I think that the YRTC at that time, and I was a public defender and had many clients who were actively at Geneva who called me during that move, I think that there was a lot of concerns about what they were missing out on and programming they were miss out on. And I know the clients that I had were very upset about what that looked like for them. And so I think when we're thinking about incarcerated youth in general, right, whether that be at YRTC,

in county facilities, or at Tecumseh, et cetera, I think we need to think about what does that, what does continuity look like for those individuals? Because ultimately, they aren't moving out, right? We talk about brain drain, a lot of individuals. Guess who's staying here? These individuals are staying. And so how can we invest in their youth now so then they stay and can actually make an impact in our society later?

MURMAN: Thank you. Any other questions? If not, thank you.

LAUREN MICEK VARGAS: Thank you so much.

MURMAN: Other proponents for LB1216.

KAELYN KINNAMAN: Thank you, Chairperson Murman and the members of the Education Committee. My name is Kaelyn Kinnaman, spelled K-a-e-l-y-n K-i-n-n-a-m-a-n. I am representing Voices for Children in Nebraska as an intern studying criminal justice, and we are in support of LB1216. Every young person deserves the opportunity to learn, grow, and prepare for a meaningful future, regardless of their circumstances. Access to quality education for individuals 21 years of age and under in state custody reflects our commitment to equity, rehabilitation, and human dignity. Voices for Children is in support of LB1216 as it focuses on providing educational opportunities, empowers young people to build skills, earn credentials, and contribute positively to their communities, strengthening both their futures and the safety and wellbeing of Nebraska as a whole. LB1216 affirms a clear and important principle: young people do not lose their right to education because they're incarcerated. Education programs in correctional settings should be understood as a long-term public investment. Strong evidence shows that when people have access to education while incarcerated, they are less likely to return to the justice system and community safety is strengthened. These programs also improve people's chances of finding stable employment and earning sustainable incomes after release, contributing to healthier local economies. From a fiscal standpoint, the return is clear. The public gains more in economic and social benefits than what is spent providing education opportunities to incarcerated young people. System-involved young people are already experiencing disrupted schooling, learning gaps, and unmet special education needs. Incarcerated individuals are twice as likely to have the lowest literacy proficiency and are twice as likely to not have obtained a high school diploma. Not only can the

state see financial benefits from offering more education in our facilities, but there can also be a major impact on the person incarcerated. Education in prisons significantly, significantly improves mental health, increases self-esteem, reduces anxiety, and can help create more hope for the future. This bill aligns correctional education with minimum standards set by the State Department of Education. This aligns, strengthens educational integrity. When curriculum instruction and programming meet state standards, students can earn credit, build transferable skills, and pursue credentials that have real value beyond confinement. This creates continuity between correctional education and Nebraska's broader public education system. LB1216 supports successful educational reentry. Education is one of the strongest predictors of long-term stability and opportunity. Young people who leave custody with education, vocational skills, and credentials are more likely to continue their education, secure employment, and build stable futures. This strengthens families, communities, and Nebraska's workforce. From an educational and youth perspective-- justice perspective, access to quality education is a foundational right and a public investment in Nebraska's future. When the state commits to educating young people in its custody, it affirms their capacity for growth, learning, and contribution to society. It strengthens accountability, it promotes educational equity, and builds pathways to stability and success. For those reasons, we respectfully urge the Education Committee to advance LB1216 and support meaningful access to quality education for young people in the custody of the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services. The vast majority of these young people will return to our neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces. They are still our future, and ensuring that they have access to education is essential to their success and to strengthen our communities. Thank you, Senator McKinney, for introducing this legislation, and to the committee for your time and attention.

MURMAN: Thank you. Any questions?

HUGHES: Thanks for coming.

MURMAN: If not, thanks for your testimony.

KAELYN KINNAMAN: Thank you.

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MURMAN: Other proponents for LB1216.

JASON WITMER: Good afternoon, Chair Murman, Senator Hughes, and Senator Conrad, and our missing senators. I am Jason Witmer, J-a-s-o-n W-i-t-m-e-r. I'm here on behalf of the ACLU. I know you, you get plenty of statistics and you guys know the statistics. So I changed my testimony slightly. LB1216 requires NDCS, Nebraska Department of Correctional Services, to provide youth under 21 access to a high-school-level diploma and required special education. And why does that matter? Because crime is not a singular event. It is rarely one moment in isolation. It is often a cumulative instability, trauma displace-- trauma displacement, educational disruption, and systems that intervene late or not at all. And I know this personally. Before I was a teenager and until I aged out, I moved through the foster system into homes where I knew no one. Often in the towns where I knew no one. Some adults were kind, some were not. Kids questioned my hair, how I looked. Others were meaner, usually older children. And after years of relentless bullying, I learned a simple lesson. When I hit back, things changed. And while I did have several foster parents who were good people, they didn't know what to do. Outside of punitive measures, no one taught me another way. Not one adult ever stood up against what was happening weekly, sometimes daily. No one helped me process the trauma of seeing my mother killed, and no one showed me work. It was left up to me, and we know where that eventually landed me. My basic needs were met, but stability was not. And when a system meets only basic needs, then acting out or even violence can start to feel like the only language that works. Some of the young people entering our adult prison system have done irreversible harm. And trust me, I understand why people believe that this is where they belong. But belief is not indisputable, nor is punishment reform. Education changed how I thought. It built critical thinking, the ability to question, reflect, and choose differently. It strengthened accountability, worth ethic and empathy. Education started me down a path to restore something I thought I lost, the belief that I could become more than my trauma and more than my worst decisions. And it is this committee who is the front line to determine if basic education should be optional or mandatory for those children in our adult prisons. By advancing LB1216, you are preparing, you are preparing the building blocks that leads towards reform, towards successful reentry and reintegration to society, and ultimately towards community safety.

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That is why LB1216 matters. I respectfully-- I respectfully and humbly ask you to advance LB1216. Thank you.

MURMAN: Thank you. Any questions? Senator Hughes.

HUGHES: Thank you for sharing that. Can you, and I've heard your story a little bit, can you just remind me when-- what age you were that you were incarcerated? And then you said you got education, was it through the incarceration system or was it outside of that-- like just kind of tell that story of your-- the education pieces that you were able to receive, if you don't mind.

JASON WITMER: So, yeah, I went to-- went into the foster system young, and eventually with decisions in what was happening, because none of it's an excuse. These are things that often lead to decisions in how we think. But I went to Kearney young and then eventually, when I was about 18, I went to LCC, which is RTC now. But before that, I did get a GED. I got it through Seward. Seward-- I got kicked out of Seward, which is where I-- that's another story. I won't even talk about that. I got kicked out of Seward, it was [INAUDIBLE]. Nobody talked about it and I was too young to understand what resistant, but I will say for the record, there was other children who spoke up for me. Which I think about these days because often you concentrate on the terrible things. But when I went into the system, I'm glad you asked this question because it was usually older men, a lot of them that were doing life, are a huge amount of time who chose to educate themselves and be different. And you would see them in the yard giving GED lessons to other individuals in there. And absent that, they wouldn't have made it because there was no support around that. People just expect you to go there and, and figure it out. And we're talking about the prison system. They didn't figure out life getting there. We didn't figure that out. Just thinking that you just have a couple of things here and then, and sometimes it was there and sometimes it was not. So education in the system was--

HUGHES: So was your GED from Kearney?

JASON WITMER: No, I got mine right here in Lincoln. I went in there and I just walked right through it. I don't know what I was-- how I did that.

HUGHES: And before you-- then before you went to LCC or whatever.

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JASON WITMER: And then when I went, well, yes, LCC, NSP, Tecumseh, I got the--

HUGHES: You got all of them.

JASON WITMER: --all the big ones, but also education doesn't stop there. If I didn't have a GED or whatnot, I wouldn't have been reading all them books. I wouldn't have been actually trying to hear the guys where it sounded like they was talking nonsense because I was a kid. But education started building on that. And when we'd have debates and arguments, that's critical thinking because now I'm thinking I'm debating you, but I'm also hearing you. And that's where, that's what I want to point out is this is a building block for the kid to start thinking about, you know, really thinking about well, how did I get here and what did I do and what can I learn to my future will be different, et cetera. And asking the department-- making it mandatory for the department, it should be something. This is should be a minimum expectation when we want community safety, education should be mandatory. They should have to write in writing that this is why this, this person didn't get educated, because of their resistance or they wouldn't, what not. And we continued to offer it down the line. Because reform is community safety. Investment in the people incarcerated to be better, to do better, to think better is community safety.

HUGHES: Thank you.

JASON WITMER: Yeah.

MURMAN: Any other questions. If not, really appreciate your testimony.

JASON WITMER: Thank you.

CONRAD: Thank you.

MURMAN: Other proponents for LB1216.

CHARLOTTE WALKER: Good afternoon. LB1216 should be passed because-- should be supported because people in prisons, they do need education. And it, it helps them to become better citizens. It helps them to learn a job skill so when they get out, after they finish their time, they can become productive members of society and have a job and help like to support their families. And, you know, education teaches

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people how to think differently and it, it like saves people's lives. And the least that education someone should get, you know, they should be educated in jobs such as like truck driving, computer technology, cooking and baking and things where they they will be guaranteed almost to get a job because-- and, and it does support community safety because when people are working, they don't have to go out and think about committing heinous crimes. So I'm all in support of LB1216.

MURMAN: Thank you very much for your testimony. I don't think, just like, did you spell your name, say your name and spell it?

CHARLOTTE WALKER: Oh, I'm sorry. My name is Charlotte Walker. You need me to spell it?

MURMAN: Yeah.

CHARLOTTE WALKER: C-h-a-r-l-o-t-t-e, Walker.

MURMAN: And we're not very good at spelling, you'll have to spell that too.

CHARLOTTE WALKER: W-a-l-k-e-r.

MURMAN: Thank you. And is there any questions for Ms. Walker?

CONRAD: Thank you.

HUGHES: Thank you.

MURMAN: If not, thank you very much for your testimony.

CHARLOTTE WALKER: Oh, I have one more comment. Education should also be tied to drug and alcohol re-- rehab. Like if somebody finishes that course, then they should automatically be able to, you know, pursue education or do it both at the same time, because they are both, you need both commitments to become a better member of society. Thank you.

MURMAN: Thank you. Any other proponents for LB1216? Any opponents for LB1216, neutral testifiers for LB1216. If not, Senator McKinney, you're welcome to close. And while he's coming up, online, we had 20 proponents, 7 opponents, and 1 neutral.

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McKINNEY: Thank you, Chair Murman and members of the Education Committee. I think LB1216 is a simple bill to ensure that those that we do decide to take under our care as a state, for whatever reason, is educated. I think it helps with rehabilitation and re-entry once they are-- once do re-enter, re-enter into our societies. I think when people have improved educational skills, they make better decisions. And I just think just base level we should ensure that everybody is educated as much as possible. If I-- again, I could send over the language that I talked about in my opening about clarifying the language, if that's needed. But I do think this is a consent-calendar-worthy bill. I think if the department really has strong opposition to this, they definitely would have showed up. They sent neutral testimony just about clarifying language, so I'll try to get that to you as soon as possible, and I'm open to any questions.

MURMAN: Thank you. That clarifying language would be very helpful, we'd like to get that.

McKINNEY: OK.

MURMAN: But I do have a question, and it's not that I'm looking for a fiscal note at all, but if there's some education that's, you know, not going on now that we need to have there, it appears to me there should be a fiscal note.

McKINNEY: I don't think so, though. I think the issue is more so they offer the programming and the education. I think it's-- I don't know why. It could be because of disciplinary issues and things like that where people aren't getting it. But somewhere along the, the line of this, a ball is being dropped somewhere, and some are getting it, and some are not, or some are getting a mix of it. And it could be just moving from facility to facility. Somebody going from NCYF to the State Pen, it might be a miscommunication somewhere. So I think the resources are there to provide the education. I think that implementation is part of the issue at some points along in the process.

MURMAN: Thank you.

McKINNEY: Yep.

MURMAN: As Senator Conrad mentioned earlier, when we were looking at education in the YRTC's, there wasn't a lot of coordination or

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sometimes at least there was a lack of coordination between whatever the home school district was or when individuals were moved around. Sometimes the documentation didn't follow them and so forth. Is that an issue here too?

McKINNEY: I think that probably it should be less of an issue because they're in the department's care, but it probably is a slight issue, depending on electronic, you know, communications or, or records versus them using something more physical. Because I know in some cases they still use physical. They've begun to more-- move more digital, but I don't think that transition has happened as much as we might think it has within the department. But there's some records that are still physical, which might be part of the issue.

MURMAN: OK, thank you. Any other questions for Senator McKinney? If not, thank you very much for the bill.

McKINNEY: Thank you.

MURMAN: And we'll close the hearing on LB1216 and all hearings for the Education Committee for this year.