

SENATOR ASHFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and members. LB 449 is the second piece in a puzzle that we started to put together last year with LB 518, which LB 518, as you may recall, created a transition funding program for ADC mothers who leave the welfare rolls and are employed in the job force. LB 449, or LB 518 last year increased or continued health care benefits, child care benefits for a period of time after the welfare recipient obtained employment. LB 449 is...initially had three parts to it. One was the ADC grant which was amended by the committee and we have just voted on those amendments. The second piece is a tracking system which will enhance the ability of the Department of Social Services to network these particular individuals once they leave the welfare rolls and become employed, network with them to enhance their job opportunities on an ongoing basis to maintain their employment, and, hopefully, make them more aware of better job opportunities so that they can continue in the work force. The second piece of LB 449 is a much needed alteration to the transition funding program in LB 518 of last year. I appreciate Senator Wesely's help over the interim in working on these changes or additions to LB 518. It provides for a 30 day grant, additional grant, for the first month that the welfare recipient is in the job force, and the reason for this is to fill the gap that...that gap that is created by the person leaving the welfare rolls and then going onto the employment rolls. There is a period of time when most of those welfare mothers do not have sufficient income to cover the expenses for that first month. So this is something, quite frankly, that should have been on 518 last year. It is a much needed addition and will enhance the ability of the department to continue to increase the number of welfare recipients who are leaving the welfare rolls. The statistics on this are significant. The department, through its Job Service Program, has been increasingly successful in the last year, have increased the number of individuals who have left the welfare rolls, and that, of course, is consistent with the intent behind the transition funding program of 518 and is also consistent with what we are trying...some of the gaps we are trying to fill in LB 449. So with that, I would move the advancement of LB 449. Thank you.

SPEAKER BARRETT: Thank you. Senator Wesely, discussion?

SENATOR WESELY: Thanks. Mr. Speaker, members, I will just take a second, time is running out, but I want to commend Senator