

homes. So these are largely technical in nature and I would urge their adoption.

PRESIDENT MOUL: Thank you, Senator Withem. Senator Ashford, followed by Senator Robinson.

SENATOR ASHFORD: Thank you, Madam President and members. I assume that most of the debate on this bill will wait till we get to the bill, but...and so I will reserve my comments on the bill itself until we do get to the bill, but I would just affirm what Senator Withem has said and to emphasize one of the major points here and that is that this is not, this bill does not cut out the wards of the court program. What it does do is it reduces the cost of the wards of the court program by \$1.7 million and, as the debate, I believe, will show as we get into it and we can discuss the public policy behind it, what it essentially does is bring the program back towards what it originally was intended to be. The wards of the court program started in the seventies as a...as an appropriation for state aid to those school districts that educated individuals who resided in group homes. I believe the initial group home that requested that aid was the Alliance Boys Ranch. Over a period of years, the program went far beyond what its original intent was, as is the case with many state aid types of programs, and therefore we now have a program which I believe started at about \$45,000 is up over \$5 million. It is not my intention to cut that program out entirely, as I said, but to limit it and try to get it back, at least to some extent, to what it was originally intended to do. I'll talk more as we get on the bill about the budgetary reasons why we did this. I would just say in general that when we sat down to carve out our budget this year we had a very difficult job, as you can imagine, because what we were trying to do was to put in our package those programs that we felt that were necessary to do this year because we would either lose matching funds and in this case, in the case of the library funds or the EPSCoR program, funds available from the Kiewit Foundation in federal dollars and put those programs into the budget this year and in order to do that we needed to find reductions in existing programs and one of the programs that we looked at was the wards of the court program. And if one looks back at the legislative history of the wards of the court program and I think one will see that this program has gone way beyond what it was originally intended to do. A couple other points, I think when we look at the budget generally next year and even this year, and Senator Lamb raised the point with his