

PRESIDENT MOUL: Senator Abboud.

SENATOR ABOUD: Madam President, could we go to have an explanation done by Senator Ashford on this bill?

PRESIDENT MOUL: Senator Ashford.

SENATOR ASHFORD: Thank you, Madam President and members. This bill is, in its essence, a children's rights bill and I'm going to explain it in that context. First of all, a couple of years ago I introduced a bill for a family court and that bill would have created or institutionalized a separate judicial body to handle domestic relations matters and the cost of that type of facility and the changes...or institution and the changes that would have been necessary to implement it bogged that proposal down. LB 728 is, though, a measure which gets to the same issues and the issue...the issues, in their essence, are should we not take from the normal, to a certain extent, from the normal judicial system a portion of the conflicts that arise out of domestic relations matters, and in my view we should, especially those issues that relate directly to children. In Nebraska, in 1990, there were 6,500 divorces. Four thousand of those divorces involved children. Today, if any of you or your families have...and I'm sure some of you have been connected in one way, shape or form with divorce, you know that oftentimes divorce cases center on property settlements and disputes over property and money and that somehow, in the process, the children get lost in the shuffle. And if you've seen a decree dissolving a marriage, you will note that about 99.9 percent of that decree deals with the property settlement portion of it--who gets the car, who gets the summer house--and maybe there's a sentence or two that says, oh, by the way, the custody of the children are granted to either the husband or wife and either one or the other has reasonable rights of visitation and that's it. And then the chil...and then the two parents who have disagreed go on about their merry way and the children are left to deal with what's left, and that's a tragedy and it's a tragedy in our society. Thirty-three states have adopted what's called a parenting plan process and that's what this bill does, and of those 33 states, the vast majority of them have said that if you get into a dispute with your spouse involving your marriage and if there are children involved, you must seek mediation over those issues. And as this debate progresses today, and hopefully it won't take too long, the central, core