

SENATOR PIRSCH: Thank you, Madam President, and members of the Legislature. LB 658 ends Aid to Dependent Children cash grants until the child is born. We amended it, if you will remember, yesterday with increasing the number of women and children who would be eligible for the health benefits to 150 percent of the federal poverty level. So this bill really has two components now. And the original bill, in reviewing the background on it, maybe it would be helpful to update some assumptions about the continued likelihood that there will be any federal funds to maintain this program into the future. February 16th, the date of the hearing, the Omaha World-Herald reported that the welfare reform clears the House subcommittee and talked about eliminating federal funding for that last trimester, which they now do, for pregnant mothers who will...who are under the age of 18, well, actually 18 and under. And so that is...that will be a segment of the population that federal funding, I believe, according to this article, will no longer be subsidized by the federal funds so it will come entirely out of state tax funds. I do believe that the states will have more flexibility under these welfare reform proposals, but it should be clearly understood that paying Aid to Dependent Children cash during pregnancy is not a federal mandate. It is something that Nebraska, and Nebraska alone, if we do not pass this bill, it will revert back to the original paying at the confirmation of pregnancy and Nebraska alone will be the only state that will do that. So LB 658 proposes simply that we move forward in continuing a reform of our ADC system that was begun in 1992 rather than return to the unaccountable dependency maintenance model. Specifically, LB 658 would alter the statutes reverting to commencing Aid to Dependent Children payments upon the birth of the eligible dependent child rather than providing these payments throughout the pregnancy or even during the last trimester, as we presently do. The payment to a woman with one child or carrying one child would be almost \$300 per month and if, indeed, they are already receiving ADC, it would be an additional \$71 per month, even before a child was born, if we do not pass LB 658. So what does it mean that LB 658 would prevent a return to an unaccountable system? To quote Department of Social Service Director, Mary Dean Harvey, in 1992, said, and I quote, "This is a cash payment to a household that they are free to do with as they please. And there is really no way to ensure that this is going to purchase the kind of health lifestyle and health checks." Also, I would note that payments are three times as much to a pregnant individual already residing in an