

advance LB 752 to E & R. Thank you.

PRESIDENT ROBAK: Thank you, Senator. Senator Wesely.

SENATOR WESELY: Thank you, Madam President. Let me begin by thanking Senator Robak for taking the lead on this issue. She has chaired a couple of studies on mental health services and helped to bring to light a number of concerns that people have about mental health services. The issue of the rehab option under Medicaid has been of interest, through those studies and even prior to those studies with legislation that I introduced, to try to recognize that we can take existing state dollars, in our Medicaid program, in our services for the mentally ill, and we can turn that money around and match some federal dollars that we hadn't otherwise matched. We can bring in approximately \$2.5 million a year under this bill. This bill was actually part of the welfare reform bill, last year, but was not ultimately passed because there were indications, from the administration, that they would implement this without legislation and wanted to do so. Unfortunately, they did not take that step. And rather than wait and take the chance that we once again miss the opportunity to maximize federal dollars, Senator Robak, I'm glad, picked this as a priority bill. What we should be able to do is to take the chronic and persistently mentally ill, so we're talking about chronic cases of individuals with mental illness, we should be able to work with them in a managed care setting where we take their case, examine their needs and then meet those needs, not necessarily in a mental health hospital, that we should be able to find a way to meet the needs of the mentally ill in the community-based programs that we would develop, that would be of a higher intensity than currently is the case, but a much lower cost than we spend in a mental health hospital. Those would be the three regional centers that we have in the State of Nebraska. Currently, costs \$200 a day in General Fund dollars to meet the needs of these individuals in these state hospitals, and it's over \$70,000 a year that we spend on the mentally ill in these hospital settings. So the idea is to take and have those people move into the community, then meet their needs in the community at a lower cost, utilizing federal dollars, and be able to then meet the broader needs of the mentally ill in the system that we have in the State of Nebraska. So I see this as a very positive step forward. I don't see this as bringing an additional burden to state taxpayers, but it will in fact maximize the federal dollars that are due the State of Nebraska. Now, you might say,