

SENATOR KRISTENSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, members of the Legislature, and I don't want to prolong this particular amendment for a long time, but I think there are some facts you need to know. Senator Beutler said it isn't Lancaster and Douglas County that is interested in this bill. That's not true either. You have some...a couple of people who are very protective of their public defender office that they don't want anybody looking at or even coming near their offices, but I think you need to dismiss that. Look at what the facts are though. Lancaster County, for example, could put this particular bill, if it was in place, to great use right now, and, in fact, they would look at that. They had one of their commissioners come in and testify in favor of this bill, saying it would help Lancaster County. And the same thing would happen, Douglas County has \$800,000 a year they pay in conflict fees, \$800,000 a year, where their public defender's office has a conflict. Now this, obviously, this bill isn't going to solve \$800,000, but it certainly is going to be used and utilized fairly well, and it is going to have some cost savings because you are paying these people on a salary. Lancaster County, for example, has just got a recent case where they've got a conflict of interest, and it is in a homicide case, and the public defender's office has got a conflict, they can't represent him. So who is going to pay the tab? Poor old Lancaster County is going to pay it, and they are going to pay it by the hour for who knows how long. Now they would be eligible to utilize this sort of system, and so, while I appreciate Senator Beutler's discussion about, look, we need to consolidate, what he is really saying is, look, there are counties that are too small that shouldn't exist out there, and why should we bail them out or give them any help as long as they want to remain small. Is that a legitimate argument? I disagree with that argument but there is some element of truth in that argument as well. The key is, is that appropriate to do here on this bill, and it isn't. And if you opt out or allow these people to do those sorts of things, now what you are really going to do is you're going to choke off those smaller counties, the ones that this is designed for. It is those counties who have the conflicts in high-profile cases where it is expensive, and I don't care if that's in Lancaster, Douglas, or Arthur County. It is still going to be of some assistance to them, and it isn't going to solve the problem. It isn't going to be a hundred percent, but it is on the track that it is going to save some money, but it also improves the quality of that defense, and, ultimately,