

February 21, 1996 LB 1001

I ask how many minutes I have left, Madam President?

SENATOR CROSBY: You have approximately eleven minutes.

SENATOR SCHIMEK: Oh, okay, fine, thank you.

SENATOR CROSBY: About ten, DiAnna.

SENATOR SCHIMEK: Thank you. Members of the body... Senator Kristensen, I seem to have the same problem this morning. This bill is a result of a committee hearing that we held last summer that was with a number of grandparents that belong to a group called Grandparents Raising Grandchildren that is in existence here in Lincoln. And we heard a lot of very touching and eloquent stories about these grandparents who are in the process of raising their grandchildren. And we learned at that hearing that in Nebraska now about 12 percent of out-of-home placements are with relatives. One of the things that we learned is that this is a growing phenomena in this country and that it really crosses all ethnic, economic, cultural, and age lines, and gender lines. There probably has been, since 1980, about a 40 percent rise in the number of children being raised by grandparents. It's estimated that there's 3.4 million children under the age of 18. The Department of Social Services did come in and testified in favor of the bill, and they did tell us that this is already one of their preferential considerations, comes right after the noncustodial parent. And, of course, in all of these placements, the overriding concern is the best interest of the child. And I guess in some ways, this bill is a reinforcement of what DSS is already doing, at least to some degree. But I think it's probably the first step in maybe another policy decision that we will make at some time in the future, and that is that we give these grandparents some support. We did find that many of them were struggling financially to deal with raising their children, their grandchildren because some of them had extraordinary, extraordinary expenses because of some traumatic lives that they had lived. And their only choice at this point is to put these children in foster care and make them wards of the state. So I think that eventually, probably that will be looked at by the Health and Human Services Committee. At least for right now I'd like to ask your support for this bill and would try to answer any questions that you might have. Thank you.