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provide additional clarity. The Nebraska Companion Program pairs low-income elderly volunteers that are mobile with frail, elderly individuals that are home bound and want the option of being able to stay in their own homes. The senior volunteers provide transportation to appointments or shopping, help with chores, or just provide company. The volunteers are paid a tax-free stipend of \$2.55 per hour. Not only is this stipend tax free, but it cannot be used by any agency when determining whether the senior volunteer is eligible for aid programs, such as housing allowance. The Nebraska Companion Program is modeled after a successful federal program that has been in existence for over 25 years. In 1999, the federally funded program had 14,400 active senior volunteers that serve 55,000 clients annually by providing approximately 13 million volunteer hours of service. It is not without good reason that Tom Brokaw stated on the "NBC Nightly News" the Senior Companion Program is probably one of the government's best kept secrets. The federally funded Senior Companion Program is currently being offered in Lincoln and Omaha areas. The number out of these programs are equally impressive. In 1999, Nebraska's federally funded programs utilized the services of some 140 volunteers and provided services to approximately 726 recipients. Currently, Health and Human Services is paying between \$6 and \$14 per hour for the services senior volunteers will provide for \$2.55 per hour. Thus, the program represents an immediate savings to Nebraska taxpayers. The savings realized due to the low cost associated with the companions is only half the story. The Nebraska taxpayers will see even larger savings in regards to the frail elderly who will receive the care. At present, one volunteer can provide services to five frail elderly for an entire year for approximately \$3,850. When you compare this to the \$35,000 to \$38,000 per year it cost to place a senior in a skill-care facility, the savings are clear. The Department of Health and Human Services will administrate the Nebraska Companion Program competitive grant process. Funds for this program will funnel through Health and Human Services and out to service contractors located throughout the state. You will note there is no fiscal impact for Health and Human Services to administrate this program. In order to be eligible for this program, a service contractor will submit a competitive grant application with Health and Human Services. As part of the application, the service contractor must show that they are able