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April 28, 2003 LB 724

SPEAKER BROMM: Thank you, Senator Tyson. Senator Jensen on the Tyson amendment.

SENATOR JENSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Members of the Legislature, when I opened on LB 724 on General File, and in the green copy, the original green copy, it said the purpose of the Nebraska Behavioral Health Reform Act are to provide the Legislature intent for reform of the behavioral health system, intent. And I certainly agree with Senator Tyson that...and I hope that he has the same compassion for the consumers that I do, and I believe that he does, and I also would agree that in the past that we have made mistakes in how we care for those individuals who cannot care for themselves. And I don't deny that, yes, we put people out of our institutions, many of those that we've put on the streets, but also many of those we were able to care for in a much better way. We were able to care for them closer to their home. We have some wonderful drugs today that people can use that weren't available 50 years ago, 20 years ago, even 10 years ago, and more coming on the market every day that can be given to people and they can lead healthy and productive lives. Now I'll say right off that I do oppose the Tyson amendment and the other two amendments that he has put into...on to this bill, the reason being is that let's not get the cart before the horse here. Certainly let's look at the situation that we have. If LB 724 passes then the real work begins, and that work begins in that we will have numerous meetings in Norfolk, in Hastings and Lincoln, where the regional centers are, in Omaha, where we've closed down a Richard Young facility and we have such a great shortage now of facilities that are available to those individuals. But to take this bill and say that we will not look at the regional centers, I want to mention just a couple things to you in that we have three regional centers with 75 buildings, 75 buildings, with a capacity of 511 patients, spending \$63 million a year. Those 75 buildings, all of them are old, many two-story, many that are not handicapped accessible, many...most of them with asbestos in them. They have the...they're on campuses that have the central heating and cooling units that is then piped via a tunnel system into the buildings, and you can imagine we have a boiler system, we have a heating system and a cooling system that was meant to operate many buildings. In Norfolk, at the regional center