

State would reimburse schools for meal costs

The Education Committee heard testimony Feb. 13 on a bill intended to ensure that Nebraska public schools serve free meals to all students.

LB99, sponsored by Omaha Sen. Machaela Cavanaugh, would require public schools participating in the federal school breakfast program or the national school lunch program to offer meals at no cost to all students and submit information on the number of meals served to the state Department of Education.

The bill also would require eligible school districts to opt in to a federal reimbursement program, called the community eligibility provision, that allows schools with high poverty rates to serve free



Sen. Machaela Cavanaugh said universal free school meals would help the one in six Nebraska children who are food insecure.

breakfast and lunch to their students without collecting financial information from households.

Cavanaugh said childhood hunger and food insecurity are linked to poor academic performance, poor health and higher rates of depression, suicide and incarceration.

“We can all agree that Nebraska taxpayer dollars are better spent on programs that keep kids healthy and learning,” she said.

The department would reimburse school districts for free meal costs that are not reimbursed by the federal government. Districts that have not adopted the

CEP would be reimbursed 30 cents for each reduced-

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Statewide model school dress code considered

A measure that would require all school districts in Nebraska to adopt a written dress code and grooming policy was considered Feb. 14 by the Education Committee.

Under LB630, sponsored by Omaha Sen. Terrell McKinney, the state Department of Education would be required to develop and distribute a model dress code and grooming policy by Dec. 1, 2024.

The model policy would be required to create a positive learning environment while complying with any applicable health or safety laws, rules, regulations, ordinances or resolutions.

McKinney said a recent report authored by the ACLU of Nebraska and other groups highlighted the need to



Sen. Terrell McKinney

update Nebraska’s dress codes and grooming policies to ensure that students can “show up as their true selves.”

In at least 90 percent of the school districts surveyed, he said, at least one school had a dress code with direct racial or religious implications – including prohibitions on scarves, bandanas and durags – which disproportionately impact students of color. The survey also found vague and subjective rules, he said, and schools that allowed punishments for dress code violations that included missing class time.

“The model policy will facilitate and encourage school districts to provide an inclusive and positive learning environment for our ever-growing diverse student populations,” McKinney said.

Under the bill, the model policy could not:

- target, disproportionately impact, discriminate or

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State would reimburse schools for meal costs

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price breakfast and 40 cents for each reduced-price lunch.

The state Department of Education estimates that the reimbursements would cost the state approximately \$55 million per year for each of the next two fiscal years.

Cavanaugh brought an amendment to the hearing that she said would allow the department to waive the free breakfast requirement for schools lacking the necessary facilities to provide breakfast.

Julia Keown testified in support of LB99 on behalf of the Nebraska Nurses Association. She said programs that provide free meals to students at schools are strongly associated with increased test scores and decreased disciplinary actions for students at school.

They also help reduce “toxic stress” during childhood that is tied to poor health outcomes, Keown said.

Eric Savaiano of Nebraska Appleseed also testified in support, saying California, Colorado and Maine have

adopted similar legislation. Three additional states have implemented a free school meal program for one year, and another has implemented it for two years, he said.

Also in support was Jane Seu of the ACLU of Nebraska. She said school meal debt often punishes low-income students and families, particularly students and families of color.

“No student in our public schools should be punished or shamed or lack focus in school because of their low-income status,” Seu said, “nor should a child have to sit through school for eight hours on a hungry stomach.”

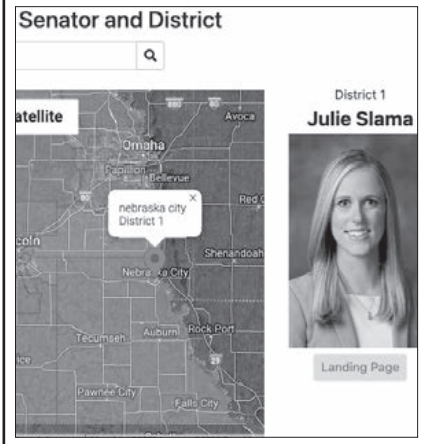
No one testified in opposition to LB99 and the committee took no immediate action on it. ■

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Statewide model school dress code considered

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be applied in a discriminatory manner against any students on the basis of race, religion, sex, disability or national origin;

- prohibit a student from wearing attire, including religious attire, natural and protective hairstyles, adornments or other characteristics associated with race, national origin or religion; or
- require a student’s hair to be permanently or temporarily altered.

By July 1, 2025, each school district would be required to adopt a code to be implemented at the start of the 2025-26 school year that is consistent with the department’s policy and may include other procedures and provisions that the school board deems appropriate.

Violations of the written dress code and grooming policy would be treated as minor on the continuum of school rule violations and would not subject

students to long-term suspension, expulsion or mandatory reassignment – nor require a student to miss substantial classroom or instruction time or school activities.

Under no circumstances could an administrator, teacher, other staff member or contractor temporarily or permanently alter or cut a student’s hair.

Nyomi Thompson of I Be Black Girl testified in support of the proposal, saying expressing one’s culture should not hinder a student’s educational success. Black students are disciplined at a rate four times higher than other students, she said, and are more likely to be disciplined for discretionary reasons like hairstyle violations and dress codes – neither of which have been found to be predictive of student misconduct.

“Penalizing Black hair and hairstyles is an overreach on students’ autonomy and exacerbates racial inequities and academic achievement

[disparities],” Thompson said.

Speaking in support of the bill was Rose Godinez of the ACLU of Nebraska. While many school dress codes may not be explicitly discriminatory in their language or intent, she said, they often have a discriminatory effect when enforced.

Kyla Johnson also testified in favor of LB630. Johnson said school personnel in Kilgore, Nebraska cut her two sisters’ hair in 2020 without the family’s permission. Hair is central to Native American identity, she said, and the Lakota people traditionally cut their hair only under specific circumstances and on a full moon.

“One of the important things in our cultural identity is our hair,” Johnson said. “That’s our medicine. It is a connection to our culture. Our hair is equivalent to our strength.”

No one testified in opposition to LB630 and the committee took no immediate action on the bill. ■

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MEET THE SENATOR

von Gillern builds on leadership experience

Sen. R. Brad von Gillern knew that he needed sign-off from one person before making his latest foray into public service as a first-time candidate for elected office — his wife, Mary.

“You don’t stay married 42 years by ignoring your other half,” he laughed. “I wouldn’t have done it had she not been on board.”

The couple have been in sync since their time as high school sweethearts and love traveling the world and learning about other cultures. They have visited all but two continents in their years together and count trips to Afghanistan, Israel and South Africa as among the most memorable.

A moment that touched the new senator deeply occurred on a two-week trip to Afghanistan about a dozen years ago. During an encounter with a father and son in Kabul, von Gillern realized that what mattered to the man above all else wasn’t religion, world events or hatred of Americans — it was

the desire to care for and protect his family.

“It broadened my view,” von Gillern said. “I’m a lot more open to opinions and different ways of life than I was in the past.”

He hopes to bring that spirit of openness and cooperation with him as he begins a new chapter at the Legislature.

As a leader in the Omaha business community and member of more than a dozen nonprofit boards, von Gillern said relationships are the “most energizing part” of any leadership experience.

He is the past president and CEO of Lueder Construction, a large commercial contractor that built the Lied Conference Center in Nebraska City among many other projects.

On the day that he sold his interest in Lueder Construction, a friend asked von Gillern to lunch to discuss running for the open District 4 seat in the Legislature. It was the opportunity he’d been waiting for to take his leadership skills and community service to a new level.

“No one was surprised that I decided to run,” he said. “It felt like a very logical next step.”

When asked about the torrent of information senators face daily now that session has begun, von Gillern said he works hard to focus on what’s important and concentrate on the issues that matter most to him and his constituents.

It’s a response that hints at the introspective side of a man who “goes hard” in both work and leisure — in addition to world travel and having a private pilot’s license, von Gillern also loves to sail, hunt and fish.

“I really like to get outside and walk alone in the woods,” he said. “The silence and the solitude are restoring for me.” ■



Sen. R. Brad von Gillern and his wife Mary — pictured on the family’s acreage north of Palmyra — have enjoyed traveling the world together, but agree that there’s no place like home.

AGRICULTURE



Additional right-to-farm protections proposed

The Agriculture Committee heard testimony Feb. 14 on a bill that would further restrict nuisance lawsuits against Nebraska agricultural operations.

Lincoln Sen. Beau Ballard, sponsor of LB662, said agricultural operations are “under constant attack” by environmental and animal rights groups, some of them from outside Nebraska. He said those groups have used nuisance lawsuits in other states as a tool to shut down similar operations.



Sen. Beau Ballard

“My goal with LB662 is not to prevent nuisance lawsuits but to rather narrowly tailor the law to better protect agricultural operations from the time and cost of frivolous lawsuits while maintaining an avenue for valid claims,” Ballard said.

Under the bill, which would update the Nebraska Right to Farm Act, no person could file a nuisance action against an agricultural operation unless:

- the person owns a majority interest in the real property affected by the agricultural operation and such real property is located within one-half mile of the agricultural operation; and
- the agricultural operation has “materially violated” an applicable federal, state or local law.

Currently, a farm or public grain warehouse — both of which would be redefined as an “agricultural opera-

tion” under LB662 — cannot be found to be a public or private nuisance if it existed before a change in the land use or occupancy of land in its locality and would not have been considered a nuisance before the change.

Under Ballard’s proposal, an agricultural operation could not be found to be a nuisance if it is “being conducted in a manner consistent with commonly accepted agricultural practices.” A change in ownership, increase in size, employment of new technology, change in the type of farm product produced and certain other conditions or activities also could not be grounds for a nuisance lawsuit under the bill’s provisions.

LB662 also would shorten the time that a property owner could file a nuisance lawsuit from two years to one.

Jessica Kolterman testified in support of the bill on behalf of Lincoln Premium Poultry, saying current law is “not as tight as it could be” in protecting agricultural operations from nuisance lawsuits.

Nebraska producers are “constantly attacked from different directions,” she said, including by those who do not want certain types of agricultural operations near their residence, are opposed to certain types of agriculture or do not understand how their food is produced.

Jonathan Leo, an environmental and administrative law attorney, testified in opposition to LB662. He said the proposal would eliminate the right to seek legal recourse for a “vast swath” of Nebraskans, including small farmers and rural residents who are unable to enjoy their property because of a nuisance.

As written, Leo said, the bill would deny standing to minority property owners, as well as lessees and renters, and “frustrate almost completely” county setback ordinances intended to

ensure that large livestock operations are located a certain distance away from sensitive sites such as churches and hospitals.

Unless an out-of-state entity purchases property next to a Nebraska agricultural operation, he added, it would be “almost impossible” for the entity to succeed in a nuisance lawsuit.

Also in opposition was Jane Egan, a resident of southwestern Lancaster County. Egan said she and a group of neighbors and activists sued the county planning department, county board members and Lincoln Premium Poultry in an attempt to stop the county from approving a permit for the Costco subsidiary to build four large chicken barns near their residences.

After the Nebraska Supreme Court upheld the decision to issue the permit, she said, the group later successfully lobbied the county board to develop new zoning regulations for concentrated animal feeding operations, or CAFOs.

Egan said LB662 is intended to protect CAFO operators from accountability when they become a nuisance to nearby property owners. No nuisance lawsuit has been filed against a CAFO owner since 2019 when lawmakers established the current two-year window, she added.

Anthony Schutz, a professor at the Nebraska College of Law who specializes in agricultural and land use law, gave neutral testimony on the bill on his own behalf. He said the absence of nuisance lawsuits would put more pressure on counties to update, maintain and enforce their zoning systems.

The committee took no immediate action on LB662.

**BANKING, COMMERCE
& INSURANCE**



Pet insurance proposal clears first round

A bill that would create a state regulatory framework for the sale of pet insurance, which covers pet illness and accidents, advanced from general file Feb. 16.

Lincoln Sen. Beau Ballard, sponsor of LB296, said pet insurance is one of the fastest growing areas of the insurance industry.

“The provisions of LB296 will provide needed protections for Nebraskans interested in purchasing pet insurance so they can make informed decisions about what’s right for their family and pet,” Ballard said.

The bill is based on model legislation endorsed by the National Association of Insurance Commissioners, he said, and is the result of more than two years of negotiations among stakeholders.

Among other provisions, the bill would require pet insurers to provide disclosures regarding waiting periods, claim schedules and exclusions for preexisting conditions. It also would require training for agents who sell pet insurance.

LB296 would take effect Jan. 1, 2024, and violations of the bill’s provisions would be considered an unfair trade practice.

Senators voted 32-0 to advance the bill to select file.



Sen. Beau Ballard

BUSINESS & LABOR



Compensation for certain mental injuries considered

A bill heard by the Business and Labor Committee Feb. 13 would expand workers’ compensation coverage for mental injuries and illnesses to include non-physical injury cases resulting from workplace violence.

Currently, only Nebraska first responders who experience a workplace mental injury or illness may qualify for workers’ compensation benefits without also experiencing a corresponding physical injury. LB5, introduced by Bellevue Sen. Carol Blood, would extend that provision to individuals diagnosed by a medical professional as having a mental injury or illness as a result of workplace violence.

Under the bill, workplace violence is defined as a shooting, hostage situation, act of terrorism or similar act of violence.

Blood said she brought the bill forward in the aftermath of a shooting that killed two workers at a Bellevue Sonic Drive-In in November 2020. Witnesses to the shooting didn’t qualify for financial support for the post-traumatic stress disorder they experienced because they did not have a physical injury, she said, despite the fact that the event was traumatic and life-altering.

“Many people associate this disorder with military veterans. PTSD is in fact very common in military populations and many that have been diagnosed were not personally injured, but witnessed [a violent incident],”



Sen. Carol Blood

Blood said. “Simply witnessing an event like a car accident can trigger PTSD symptoms. Imagine witnessing a massacre like the one at Sonic.”

Nine other states provide workers’ compensation coverage for stand-alone mental injury or PTSD, Blood said, and Nebraska should join them.

Trevor Towey, president of the Omaha Professional Firefighters Association, spoke in support of the bill. He said firefighters who experience mental injury from witnessing or experiencing traumatic events can receive workers’ compensation — a right that should be afforded to the general public for individuals who experience trauma from workplace violence.

“It’s my opinion that every worker — if they sustain an injury, whether a mental injury from workplace violence, or a physical injury — should be compensated and afforded the rights and protections that the work comp courts allow,” Towey said.

Bellevue Police Chief Ken Clary, speaking on behalf of the city of Bellevue and the Bellevue Police Department, also spoke in support. Both physical and mental injuries resulting from workplace violence can be life-altering, he said, but Nebraska currently does not recognize those stand-alone mental injuries for workers’ compensation.

“Survivors who face [mental] injuries and are unable to return to work should not be abandoned by the system that is set up to protect injured workers, especially as a result of some of the most dramatic events that could possibly occur in a workplace,” Clary said.

Justin Hubly, executive director of the Nebraska Association of Public Employees, testified in favor of LB5. Everyone deserves to go to work and feel safe, he said, however public servants sometimes end up in dangerous

situations that they never asked to be put in.

“I want to make sure our members and members of the public are protected and have recourse in the courts should they suffer a mental illness or injury that is the result of that direct workplace violence,” Hubly said.

In opposition to the bill was Dallas Jones, representing Nebraskans for Workers’ Compensation Equity and Fairness, American Property Casualty Insurance Association, Nebraska State Chamber of Commerce and the National Federation of Independent Businesses.

The burden of paying workers’ compensation in cases of workplace violence shouldn’t fall solely on a private employer who didn’t know the event was coming and would have done anything to stop it, he said.

Jones also expressed concern that LB5 as written does not require that an individual be on the premises during an instance of workplace violence in order to qualify for workers’ compensation. In fact, he said, the bill does not require that an individual witness the event to potentially receive a payout.

“The language is open to anybody that is off premises – not at work – who heard about it and had a mental reaction to it,” he said.

The committee took no immediate action on the bill.

Bill would cap minimum wage increases

The Business and Labor Committee heard testimony Feb. 13 on a bill that would cap upcoming annual cost-of-living increases to the state’s minimum wage.

At the November 2022 general election, Nebraskans voted to increase the state minimum wage incrementally

to \$15 per hour on Jan. 1, 2026. The wage then adjusts annually based on the Consumer Price Index to account for cost-of-living increases.

LB327, introduced by Lincoln Sen. Jane Raybould, instead would increase the wage by the lesser of 1.5 percent or the CPI beginning Jan. 1, 2028.



Sen. Jane Raybould

Raybould said she introduced the bill not to undermine the ballot initiative, but to provide certainty to businesses across the state that are required to comply with the mandated minimum wage increases. The Legislature should aim to strike a balance between the increase approved by voters in November and the interests of small and medium-sized businesses, she said.

“Most employers who are hiring at or just above the minimum wage are in industries that operate on razor-thin profit margins,” Raybould said. “Increasing their costs forces these businesses to raise prices, reduce jobs and training opportunities, decrease benefits or cut some of the services that they provide.”

In support of the measure was Katie Bohlmeyer, speaking on behalf of the Lincoln Independent Business Association. Adjusting the wage based on the CPI could trigger a wage-price spiral, she said, which would negatively impact both businesses and consumers.

“Failing to reduce inflation can trigger hyperinflationary issues,” Bohlmeyer said. “It’s also important to note that we’re not saying these rates should be what is required to pay employees – this is just the floor, not the ceiling.”

Alex Reuss, speaking on behalf of the Nebraska Chamber of Commerce

and Industry, also testified in support of the bill. While respecting the intent of the ballot initiative, Reuss said, the chamber remains “laser-focused” on making sure the change is manageable and structured in a way that does not harm small businesses, the state’s workforce or consumers.

“We believe [LB327] will help ensure small businesses can accommodate the changes passed in the ballot initiative without incurring undue financial hardship if inflation is high,” he said.

Ansley Fellers testified in favor of LB327 on behalf of the Nebraska Grocery Industry Association, Nebraska Hospitality Association, Nebraska Petroleum Marketers and Convenience Store Association and the Nebraska Retail Federation.

Fellers said that under the current system “bad actor” businesses that exploit labor, short benefits and cut hours will absorb the tighter margins caused by the CPI increase and will wait until small and medium-sized competitors go out of business.

“The valuable entry-level jobs – the fun jobs where you work for caring, creative and flexible people – are going to go away,” she said.

Anahí Salazar, representing Voices for Children in Nebraska, testified against the bill. As a partner that advocated for the ballot initiative, she said, the organization believes in the importance of adjusting the state’s minimum wage for the cost of living.

“Increasing the minimum wage and adjusting after inflation will allow parents to meet their children’s basic needs year after year regardless of market fluctuation,” Salazar said.

Susan Martin, testifying on behalf of Nebraska State AFL-CIO, also testified against LB327. In a world of higher prices, low-wage workers need stronger labor standards in order to

make ends meet, she said, and increasing the minimum wage is sound policy that supports working families.

“Indexing the minimum wage to keep pace with inflation should and must be a priority to protect workers from rising prices,” Martin said. “Capping the minimum wage increase at 1.5 percent or lower is a regressive move.”

The committee took no immediate action on the bill.

EDUCATION

School athletics, bathroom access proposal considered

Nebraska students would be required to use school bathrooms and play on school sports teams based on their sex assigned at birth rather than their gender identity under a bill heard Feb. 13 by the Education Committee.

Under LB575, sponsored by Omaha Sen. Kathleen Kauth, school athletic teams or sports would be designated as for males, men or boys; females, women or girls; or coed or mixed.

Teams or sports designated for females, women or girls would not be open to biological male students, and those designated for males, men or boys would not be open to biological female students unless there is no female team available.

In recent years, Kauth said, there have been instances of transgender women and girls outcompeting non-transgender women and girls in athletics. She said LB575 is necessary to uphold Title IX — the 1972 civil



Sen. Kathleen Kauth

rights law that prohibits sex-based discrimination in education programs or activities that receive federal funding — by ensuring that women and girls can compete fairly in their chosen sports.

“Biological females will lose spots on teams, playing time and the ability to compete for scholarships if we do not act,” she said.

The bill also would require Nebraska public and private schools to designate each group bathroom and locker room in school buildings as either for use by biological females or biological males, as determined by chromosomes and anatomy.

Schools could not allow a biological male to use a restroom or locker room designated for use by biological females, and biological females could not use a male-designated restroom or locker room.

Kauth said LB575 is intended to protect students’ privacy and dignity and would not prevent youth with gender dysphoria from playing school sports as long as they play on the teams and use locker rooms and bathrooms that match their biological sex.

Greg Brown, a professor of exercise science at the University of Nebraska at Kearney, testified in support of the bill on his own behalf. He said transgender women athletes have certain physical advantages — such as greater muscle mass and lung capacity — over non-transgender women athletes, even if they receive hormone therapy.

“The issue of males wanting to compete in girls’ sports is not just an abstract concern but is happening here in Nebraska,” he said. “LB575 is necessary because it seeks to maintain the level playing field for female athletes without the intrusion of male bodies.”

Also in support was Paige Steinman, a cross country runner at UNK. She said she would not feel safe sharing a locker room with transgender

women athletes.

“With an already increasing dropout rate of girls participating in sports,” Steinman said, “I fear that allowing males in locker rooms would only further discourage female sports participation.”

Sarah Hanson, a mother of two high school athletes in Nebraska, also testified in support. She said it defies common sense to allow children or teens to use bathrooms or locker rooms or to participate in school-sponsored sports based on their gender identity rather than their biological sex.

“Boys competing in a girls’ race makes a mockery of the sport,” Hanson said, “and it’s an embarrassment to the basics of biology.”

Testifying in opposition to LB575 was Aaron Burbach, who said he realized he was a transgender man during his junior year at a high school in Omaha. Although he cut his hair and began to wear more masculine clothing, Burbach said, he continued to use the women’s bathroom.

One day, Burbach said, as he was leaving the bathroom, two other students chased him down the hall, yelling at him.

“What exactly is the plan for students like me?” he said. “I was doing exactly what this bill would have required me to do, and I was nearly attacked for it.”

Jay Irwin, an associate professor of sociology at the University of Nebraska Omaha, testified in opposition to the bill on his own behalf. He said LB575 is aimed at excluding already marginalized people and uses “baseless assumptions” about the inherent superiority of individuals who are assigned male at birth.

“The easiest statement is that elite athletes are elite regardless of their sex assigned at birth,” Irwin said. “Bills

like these devalue the strength of assigned-female-at-birth people and assume that they are fragile and in need of ‘protection’ even as elite athletes.”

Also testifying in opposition on her own behalf was Sofia Jawed-Wessel, an associate professor of public health at UNO. She said most sports governing bodies no longer use genital anatomy and chromosomal testing alone to perform gender verification tests.

“They’ve tried it and failed because there was too much variation in anatomy and chromosomal makeup,” Jawed-Wessel said.

Ryan Salem, a Lincoln high school coach, also testified in opposition to LB575. He said the Nebraska School Activities Association, which governs Nebraska high school athletics, already has rules for transgender athlete participation that ensure fairness in competition.

Rose Esseks testified in opposition to the bill on behalf of the Nebraska Psychological Association. She said there is no evidence of any transgender student assaulting another student in a bathroom, but 70 percent of transgender youth report being verbally or physically harassed in a bathroom or being denied access to one.

Esseks said transgender children and teens are at higher risk of developing significant mental health problems than cisgender youth because they are much more likely to be bullied, assaulted and discriminated against.

“When they are not able to use the appropriate bathrooms and excluded from sports, transgender children are at even greater risk of poor outcomes than their cisgender peers,” she said.

The committee took no immediate action on LB575.

GENERAL AFFAIRS

Digital keno option proposed

Nebraskans would have a new way to play keno under a bill heard by the General Affairs Committee Feb. 13.

LB232, introduced by Sen. John Cavanaugh of Omaha, would authorize the sale of digital keno tickets for players verified to be at a licensed Nebraska lottery location. Currently, keno tickets are available only in paper form.



Sen. John Cavanaugh

Under the bill’s provisions, a lottery operator must file with the state Department of Revenue and provide clear procedural regulations in order to sell digital on-premises tickets. All regulations would be subject to approval by the department.

The bill also would authorize the use of additional ticket payment methods, including debit card, bank account, prepaid cash account or cash balance of a payment application. Additionally, a lottery operator could allow players to create an account to store up to \$500 from the player’s winnings or an approved payment method to pay for tickets or wages.

Credit card purchases or transfers would be prohibited, which Cavanaugh said would ensure that keno play cannot occur outside the facility because geofencing would establish a virtual boundary around the operator’s physical location.

“LB232 would modernize the way keno can be played,” Cavanaugh said. “We can get flights, order groceries, pay parking meters and order lunch [online].”

Bill Harvey, general counsel for Big Red Keno, testified in support of the bill. He said the decision to implement digital on-premises tickets would be up to each operation.

“Each city can decide with their operator whether to adopt this change,” Harvey said. “This is a city run game ... and we will honor their choice.”

Harvey also noted that the Legislature recently approved the use of very similar payment methods in casinos.

City of Omaha representative Jack Cheloha also spoke in support of the bill, saying LB232 would help generate more revenue for cities to invest back into their communities.

Cheloha said the revenue generated from keno gaming over the last 30 years has been used for a number of projects in the Omaha area, including funding for new police cruisers, the Nebraska Humane Society, economic development and educational programs for workers.

“Right now, we budget roughly \$12 million a year in terms of revenue from our Big Red Keno game in Omaha,” he noted. “The revenue that comes back to us can only be used for community betterment purposes.”

Nebraska Family Alliance representative Nate Gras testified in opposition to LB232. Any form of gambling, especially state sponsored gambling, puts the interests of the state at odds with the best interests of Nebraskans, he said.

“The changes proposed under this bill make it so that people can lose more money, more easily,” Gras said. “For the state to win, it’s our own citizens who have to lose.”

Local economist Loretta Fairchild also spoke in opposition to the proposal. She emphasized that more research needs to be done by experts outside the gaming industry to establish necessary regulations.

“The keno industry in this bill is dictating to the state what shall be approved,” she said. “When regulation is needed, the state is in charge of dictating to the industry – not visa versa.”

The committee took no immediate action on LB232.

Bill could delay new casino licenses

The General Affairs Committee heard testimony Feb. 13 on a bill that would extend the deadline for studies evaluating horse racing and casino gaming in Nebraska.

Under current Nebraska law, the state Racing and Gaming Commission is required to conduct a market analysis and socioeconomic impact study on horse racing and casino gaming statewide and in each county that has a licensed racetrack before any new licenses can be issued.

The stipulation was put in place last year in a continuing effort by the Legislature to implement a 2020 voter initiative that legalized all games of chance at licensed horse racing tracks.

LB311, introduced by Kearney Sen. John Lowe, would change the deadline to complete the studies from Jan. 1, 2025, to Jan. 1, 2029, although the commission could choose to complete the requirements at an earlier date.

Lowe said the extension is necessary to ensure that the state has enough time to collect quality data. The earliest estimate for a Nebraska casino to be fully operational is 2024, he said, which would give the state less than a year’s worth of data to analyze.

“That, quite simply, is not enough time to get a full and clear understand-

ing,” Lowe said. “If we are not properly informed, we cannot ensure our decisions are the right ones.”

Nebraska Horsemen and WarHorse Casino representative Lynne McNally spoke in support of LB311. Development of the Lincoln and Omaha racetracks has been delayed significantly due to the current financial climate and the cost of materials, she said, and a number of requirements under the market analysis and impact studies cannot be completed until all of the materials have arrived and the racetracks are fully operational.

“We just need additional time,” McNally said. “The original six [racetrack] licensees would like an opportunity to get open so that you can do a market analysis that has value.”

Proponent Lance Morgan, an economic developer, estimated that it takes casinos around two years to become fully established. It is not uncommon for customer levels to fluctuate at the beginning of operations, he said, especially in a new market.

“There is a seasonality to the whole thing,” he said. “I think it’s going to take at least two years after a facility opens to know how it’s going to do.”

John Hassett, president of Aksarben Equine, Inc, testified in opposition to LB311. He said any delay in conducting the studies could result in a significant loss of potential revenue for the state. According to studies conducted in New Mexico and Iowa, Hassett said, the proposed racetracks in each respective state are projected to generate an additional \$100 million in wagers, or \$20 million in gaming tax for cities.

“If you push the study back five years, you’re saying ‘no’ to over \$100 million in additional tax revenue just from the gaming tax,” he said. “The additional economic impact to the state would be two to three times the

tax impact.”

Also speaking in opposition to the bill was chairperson of the Sarpy County Board of Commissioners, Angi Burmeister. While the board takes no official position on gambling or racing ventures, Burmeister said, it has concerns about the impact the bill would have on the county if passed.

“[LB311] encroaches on initiatives that have been approved by voters,” she said. “It limits economic development and favors the operations of some entities over others in our county.”

The committee took no immediate action on the bill.



National Guard tuition assistance expanded, advanced

Lawmakers amended and advanced a bill from general file Feb. 16 intended to enhance the state tuition support program for Nebraska National Guard members.

The program, which provides a 100 percent undergraduate tuition credit to Nebraska National Guard members who enroll in any state-supported university, college, community college or accredited, nonprofit independent college, currently is capped at \$900,000 annually.

As introduced, LB52, sponsored by Central City Sen. Loren Lippincott, would have raised the cap to \$1 million. Lippincott said the existing cap has been in place since 1999.



Sen. John Lowe



Sen. Loren Lippincott

“The state tuition assistance [program] is one of the most popular benefits the Nebraska National Guard offers,” he said. “As service members improve themselves through education, our National Guard units become more professional and more capable.”

The program also provides a 50 percent tuition credit for graduate and professional degrees.

Lippincott said that unless the cap is raised, approximately 29 Nebraska National Guard members could be denied assistance for the upcoming spring semester.

Kearney Sen. John Lowe offered an amendment, adopted 32-0, to remove the cap entirely.

Sen. Danielle Conrad of Lincoln supported the bill and the amendment, while also raising concerns about the ability of all Nebraskans to afford tuition should it increase due to insufficient funding of higher education in the state budget.

“It’s important that we don’t divorce these issues from each other,” Conrad said. “We can’t neglect to do our part to ensure that our institutions of higher education have the resources they need to benefit not only the brave men and women who serve ... but all Nebraskans who are trying to better their lives and increase their opportunities to be successful in a global economy.”

Omaha Sen. John Cavanaugh also supported the bill and the amendment.

“A lot of folks join [the guard] and serve as a way to pay for school, so we need to make sure that every one of those people gets that benefit,” he said.

Following adoption of the Lowe amendment, senators voted 34-0 to advance LB52 to select file.

Privacy sought for nonprofit info

A bill meant to protect the privacy of certain personal information was heard Feb. 16 by the Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee.

Under LB297, sponsored by Bellevue Sen. Rita Sanders, local and state government agencies could not compel a nonprofit organization to release the personal information of its members, supporters, volunteers or donors.

Sanders said the U.S. Supreme Court consistently has upheld the freedom of association outlined in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The right also should be codified in state law, she said, as a way to communicate the policy clearly to state agencies.

Nonprofits serve a “vital role” in American society by encouraging the free exchange of ideas, Sanders said, and that role needs to be protected.

“Activists want to seek private information through nonprofits in order to target individuals for their personal beliefs,” she said.

The bill’s provisions would not apply to legally required disclosures under the Nebraska Political Accountability and Disclosure Act or for use in criminal or civil investigations.

Nate Grasz of the Nebraska Family Alliance testified in support of the bill, calling it a “proactive” step to ensure that government cannot force or coerce nonprofits to disclose the personal information of their members and donors.

Undermining donor privacy would have a “chilling effect” on charitable giving, he said, due to fear of harassment, bullying and even acts of

violence against individuals based on their associations.

“In today’s polarized culture and political climate, it is not hard to imagine the harm that can be done by private donor information being released to the public,” Grasz said. “Government officials may use confidential donor information to target those with different or disfavored views by those in political power, as they did during the Civil Rights era.”

Testifying on behalf of the ACLU of Nebraska, Spike Eickholt also supported the bill. He said the right of “associational privacy” that goes along with the First Amendment guarantee of freedom of association is “fundamental” to U.S. democracy.

“[LB297] is an important bill because it does provide for a preemptive assurance of protection for organizations and their members,” Eickholt said.

Korby Gilbertson testified against the bill on behalf of Media Nebraska. She cautioned that some organizations have “hidden” under the guise of nonprofit status while engaging in political activity. In light of that reality, protections such as those outlined in LB297 should be narrowly tailored, she said.

Ann Hendry, CEO of the Nonprofit Association of the Midlands also opposed the bill. Nonprofit donor information already is “safe, secure and confidential,” she said, and the broader nonprofit community is not seeking the changes contained in the bill.

“[LB297] is a solution to a problem that simply does not exist,” Hendry said. “[It’s] chasing a hypothetical threat of what might happen in the future based on something that didn’t happen in the past.”

The committee took no immediate action on the bill.



Sen. Rita Sanders

HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Medicaid dental reimbursement increase considered

Members of the Health and Human Services Committee heard testimony Feb. 16 on a bill that seeks to increase access to dental services for Nebraska Medicaid recipients.

LB358, sponsored by Fremont Sen. Lynne Walz, would increase the reimbursement rate for dental services provided under Medicaid by 25 percent. Walz said the increase would better support providers who choose to care for some of Nebraska’s most vulnerable residents.

“People on Medicaid are already struggling to get by day to day, but compounding factors like poor dental health make life even harder,” she said.

Walz said early childhood tooth decay, one of the most chronic illnesses in the U.S., has been connected to educational and behavioral issues and can lead to disabilities. She also noted that poor dental health in adults can cause employment issues, mental health problems and impaired speech and can lead to other health issues, including heart attack, stroke or dementia.

Nebraska Dental Association vice president and pediatric dentist, Jessica Meeske, testified in support of LB358. Meeske said her practice has cared for kids on Medicaid for over 40 years, but is being forced to reconsider that commitment due to reimbursement rates.

“The number of people with Medicaid is going up and the number of

dentists willing to see them is going down,” Meeske said. “Only 12 percent of adults with Medicaid in 2022 received any dental visit – preventative or emergency.”

Sophia Pankratz, a third-year dental student, also spoke in support of the bill. Her program has limited the number of Medicaid patients seen because the cost of care is significantly higher than the reimbursement rate, she said. Treating Medicaid patients enhances clinical training and teaches dental students how best to support patients with barriers to health care, Pankratz said.

“This not only impacts student opportunities to treat patients and gain valuable experience,” she said, “it also limits our ability to care for underserved Nebraskans.”

Also testifying in favor of LB358 was Corinne Van Osdel, an Omaha dentist who primarily provides care to medically compromised patients and individuals with special needs.

Van Osdel and her two colleagues are the only dentists within a three-hour drive of Omaha who provide operating room care to special needs patients on Medicaid, she said. The waitlist for a patient to be examined and provided traditional care is one year, she said, but for patients who need care in an operating room, that wait can be up to four years.

“We do not know how severe a special needs patient’s dental disease is until we are able to get them into the operating room,” Van Osdel said, “in four years this can become catastrophic.”

Arc of Nebraska representative Edison McDonald also spoke in support, noting the impact the bill would have on individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

“In Nebraska, 41 percent of individuals with an intellectual or devel-

opmental disability do not receive regular dental care,” he said. “This is frequently one of the most difficult services for our members to find.”

No one testified in opposition to LB358 and the committee took no immediate action.

JUDICIARY

Juvenile confinement reporting changes considered

The Judiciary Committee heard testimony Feb. 15 on a bill that would change certain reporting requirements for room confinement of juveniles in Nebraska detention facilities.

Current state law requires a juvenile facility to report room confinements that last for more than one hour. LB60, introduced by Omaha Sen. John Cavanaugh, would require that all incidents of room confinements be reported. The bill also would make other minor reporting changes and require submission of an annual summary report to the Legislature.

Cavanaugh said room confinement incidents of less than an hour currently are documented by juvenile detention facilities but are not required to be reported. This creates an incomplete picture of room confinement that may understate the frequency of confinement while overstating its duration, he said.

“Changing this requirement will give a more complete picture of the use of room confinement,” Cavanaugh said.



Sen. Lynne Walz



Sen. John Cavanaugh

Jennifer Carter, Inspector General of Nebraska Child Welfare, testified in support of the bill. Improving data collection and reporting requirements will provide a more accurate understanding of juvenile room confinement and help to reduce its use, she said.

Also in support was Anahí Salazar, representing Voices for Children in Nebraska. Teenagers need healthy social environments to grow into well-adjusted adults, she said, and extended segregation from their peers is linked to increased mental health concerns and suicide rates.

“Through facility reporting, we have seen facilities reduce their use of room confinement and we know it can be done safely and effectively,” Salazar said. “LB60 is the right next step for Nebraska to continue on the path of full elimination of this practice.”

No one testified in opposition and the committee took no immediate action on the bill.

Juvenile treatment center program sought

A bill that seeks to create a pilot program in Lancaster County to provide mental health services, family outreach, education and family reunification services to juveniles was considered Feb. 15 by the Judiciary Committee.

LB473, introduced by Lincoln Sen. Suzanne Geist, states legislative intent to appropriate \$12 million in general funds for fiscal year 2023-24 to create the pilot program. The Nebraska Commission on Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice would be required to develop eligibility



Sen. Suzanne Geist

criteria and would administer grants to an eligible county to operate a pilot program for the youth facility.

To be eligible, a county must contain a primary class city. Lincoln currently is the state’s only primary class city.

Under the bill, an eligible county would be required to use the grant funds for a 16-bed juvenile center run by the county or another contracted entity, with operations to begin on or before Jan. 1, 2024. Juveniles who reside in the county would have first priority for placement at the center.

On or before Oct. 1, 2026, the eligible county would be required to electronically submit a report to the Legislature regarding the pilot program, including outcomes for youth placed at the center, recommendations for modifying or expanding the program and any other matters deemed appropriate by the county.

Geist said the state currently spends between \$9 million and \$12 million to send troubled youth out of state to receive help. The pilot program’s purpose is to provide a home-like facility – not a detention center – for juveniles, she said, with the goal of protecting youth from harm and providing intensive services before they become more deeply involved in the criminal justice system.

“There’s currently a major gap in services for these juveniles in the juvenile justice system,” Geist said. “These youth are hurting [and] their parents are hurting because the system is not only letting down the youth, but it’s also hurting the parents and the families.”

Douglas County Sheriff Aaron Hanson testified in support of the bill, saying sheriffs across the state are struggling with juvenile justice issues. Risky behavior, self-harm and “running” are some of the common issues sheriffs

are seeing, he said, and many juveniles need intensive psychiatric care.

“We have to find safe places to put these kids where they cannot run and traumatize themselves more,” Hanson said.

Dan Martin, representing the Omaha Police Officers Association, also testified in support. Parents are frustrated when their child runs away over and over again, he said, and there needs to be a secure place for juveniles to receive help.

“We’re desperately in need of a facility that is secure ... has education opportunities, family reunification resources [and] mental health therapy,” Martin said.

Speaking in a neutral capacity was Spike Eickholt, representing Voices for Children in Nebraska. He expressed concern that the center would operate similarly to a detention facility based on the repeated use of the word “secure” in the bill.

Eickholt also recommended that the bill include language to specify reporting requirements and that any recipient of grant funds be state accredited.

No one testified in opposition to LB473 and the committee took no immediate action on it.



State grant would help rebuild camp destroyed by wildfire

The state would help rebuild and expand a 4-H camp in north-central Nebraska under a bill heard Feb. 15 by the Natural Resources Committee.

LB281, introduced by North Platte Sen. Mike Jacobson, would require the state Department of Economic Development to provide grants to

certain qualifying nonprofit organizations for the purpose of building or renovating youth outdoor education camp facilities.



Sen. Mike Jacobson

Each grant would require a minimum of a 25 percent match in private or other money from the applicant, and no applicant could receive one or more grants totaling more than \$30 million.

The bill would require the department to give preference to any applicant that intends to rebuild a youth outdoor education camp facility that was damaged due to a natural or man-made disaster.

Jacobson said the proposal is intended to help rebuild and expand the Nebraska State 4-H Camp destroyed last fall by the Bovee Fire, which burned approximately 19,000 acres of forest and grassland in and around the Nebraska National Forest at Halsey. Insurance payments will not cover the total cost to rebuild the 64-year-old camp, he said, which also hosted local events such as wedding receptions, high school dances and conferences.

Jacobson brought an amendment to the hearing that he said would require the department also to give preference to applicants intending to build certain facilities that would make the site a “gateway destination” to draw more visitors to the Sandhills and the national forest, two of Nebraska’s “greatest treasures.”

“This makes it clear that our goal with LB281 is to not just replace what was there but to build 21st century facilities and infrastructure to host youth development camps and create new economic opportunities for residents of the Sandhills,” Jacobson said.

The bill states legislative intent to appropriate \$50 million from the

state’s general fund to the department for the grant program.

Jeff Yost testified in support of LB281 on behalf of the Nebraska Community Foundation, saying the new, expanded camp would be managed by an independent, locally governed nonprofit. He said an economic impact study commissioned by the foundation last fall found that the proposed \$37 million project would generate an estimated \$4 million in economic activity each year.

In addition to providing educational programs for campers, Yost said, the project would include lodging, a conference and event center, a restaurant and activities including hiking, camping, horseback riding, canoeing and stargazing.

“This investment will create new jobs as well as diversify the existing job pool,” Yost said. “It will catalyze small businesses focused on ecotourism to grow and expand.”

Cay Ewoldt, who runs a grocery store and an outfitting business in Thedford, also testified in support. He said the camp drove his passion for nature and conservation as a youth and taught leadership and life skills to tens of thousands of Nebraskans.

Rebuilding the camp could provide new jobs to area residents and encourage others like him to return, Ewoldt said.

Also in support was Brenda Masek, who said rebuilding the camp is “time critical.” Many who live in the Halsey area have fond memories of the camp, she said, but residents and local businesses also relied on the tourism it generated and seasonal jobs it offered.

“This is not about sentiment,” Masek said. “This is about need.”

No one testified in opposition to LB281 and the committee took no immediate action on it.

Bill to address nuclear, hydrogen workforce needs considered

The Natural Resources Committee heard testimony Feb. 16 on a measure that would require the state Department of Economic Development to create a work group to determine the workforce training needs of the nuclear and hydrogen industries.

Brainard Sen. Bruce Bostelman, sponsor of LB568, said the work group would collaborate with Nebraska’s community and state colleges to develop coursework and programs that would make the state a leader in nuclear and hydrogen industry training.



Sen. Bruce Bostelman

Testifying in support of the bill was David Madcharo, energy generation operations program director at Southeast Community College. He said companies around the country are seeking to partner with states to train the next generation of workers needed to operate advanced nuclear reactors and fill other critical infrastructure jobs.

“I think this is a golden opportunity for us to step forward,” Madcharo said.

Amy Ostermeyer of Monolith also testified in support of LB568. She said the company, which uses electricity to turn natural gas into carbon black and hydrogen at a plant near Hallam, plans to begin construction on a second plant in Nebraska next year and needs more highly skilled workers, including engineers, operations managers, plant operators and software developers.

“This important bill will provide the resources and collaboration that is needed to sustain and grow Nebraska’s position on the forefront of the hydrogen and nuclear industries,” Ostermeyer said.

Also in support was Ross McConnell, president of DZ Atlantic, which

provides maintenance and construction services to many of the country's nuclear plants, including Cooper Nuclear Station near Brownville. He said the country faces a "critical" shortage of skilled craft workers such as carpenters, pipefitters and welders.

"Workforce development efforts like these proposed in this bill will build a valuable pool of skilled labor right here in Nebraska and will connect those trained residents to plentiful, good-paying and flexible careers," he said.

Tom Kent testified in support of LB568 on behalf of the Nebraska Public Power District and the Nebraska Power Association. He said the shortage of qualified workers recently forced NPPD to leave Cooper Nuclear Station offline for longer than planned during refueling.

Additionally, Kent said, NPPD is researching the possibility of incorporating small modular nuclear reactors into its electricity generation fleet and is leading an effort to make Nebraska a regional hydrogen hub under a U.S. Department of Energy program.

"To ensure Nebraska is prepared to meet the demand for employees to fill jobs in these promising fields, industry and education institutions must work together to develop the necessary programs and curriculum to train these employees," he said.

No one testified in opposition to the bill and the committee took no immediate action on it.

NEBRASKA RETIREMENT SYSTEMS

Bill would increase certain retirement contribution rates

The Nebraska Retirement Systems Committee heard testimony Feb.

14 on a bill that would increase the contribution rate for law enforcement personnel under the state's County Employees Retirement Act.

Under LB160, sponsored by Omaha Sen. Mike McDonnell, the supplemental retirement benefit rate for counties that participate in the County Employees Retirement Plan would increase from 1 to 2 percent



Sen. Mike McDonnell

of compensation in counties with a population of 85,000 or less. The rate in counties with a population greater than 85,000 would increase from 2 to 3 percent.

McDonnell said the change would apply to all Nebraska counties except Douglas and Lancaster, which do not participate in the county plan. The increase would help create a retirement plan for county sheriffs and deputies that is competitive with other law enforcement agencies, he said.

Buffalo County Sheriff Neil Miller testified in support of the bill on behalf of the Nebraska Sheriffs Association. All state and local law enforcement agencies have difficulty attracting and retaining personnel, he said, and as a result some agencies are only 50 percent staffed.

"LB160 is critically important to help the sheriffs' departments across the state of Nebraska attract and retain our deputies," Miller said.

Jon Cannon, executive director of the Nebraska Association of County Officials, also spoke in support of the measure. The more rural a Nebraska county is, he said, the harder it is to compete for law enforcement personnel who may be attracted to other opportunities with better benefits.

"This is a great step forward," Cannon said. "This is good for recruit-

ment and retention."

No one testified in opposition and the committee took no immediate action on LB160.

TRANSPORTATION & TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Driving card proposed for some documented non-citizens

Certain federally authorized, non-citizen Nebraska residents could qualify for a driving privilege card under a bill considered Feb. 14 by the Transportation and Telecommunications Committee.

LB199, introduced by Gordon Sen. Tom Brewer, would create a new driving privilege card, which would serve as a license to operate a motor vehicle for individuals who are non-citizens but whose presence in the U.S. is authorized by the federal government.



Sen. Tom Brewer

Cards would be issued by the state Department of Motor Vehicles and would include information indicating that the cards are not valid for federal purposes or as photo ID for voting.

Brewer said current state law prohibits many Ukrainian refugees from obtaining a license, despite the fact that many of them were drivers – including some individuals who held commercial driver's licenses – before coming to the U.S.

"We're trying to make a category to put them in so that they can have a license and have a life here doing the things that they need to do in order to be productive," Brewer said.

Nick Grandgenett, testifying on behalf of Nebraska Appleseed, supported the bill. He said most Nebraska residents, including Ukrainian refugees, need to drive to get to work, take kids to school and accomplish other daily tasks. The roads are safest when all drivers are licensed and insured, he said.

“Without LB199, community members are put in the untenable position of choosing between going to work or choosing work that doesn’t require a commute,” Grandgenett said.

Maksym Byesyedin, a Ukrainian refugee who came to the U.S. eight months ago, also supported the bill. Byesyedin said he needs a driver’s license to be able to meet his basic needs and those of his family, including going to work, medical appointments and the grocery store. His job at a sewage pipe company is not accessible by public transportation, he said.

“My colleague has graciously agreed to pick me up from home in the morning and bring me home after work,” Byesyedin said, “but one way or another, it can’t go on like this forever.”

Katie Patrick, executive director of Catholic Social Services of Southern Nebraska, testified in favor of the bill. CSS is one of three agencies in the state that provides immediate services to refugees, she said, most recently humanitarian refugees from Ukraine.

“While many of these services are provided by our staff in the first few weeks of arrival, how clients continue to access services is really dependent on their ability to drive to our offices,” Patrick said.

Testifying in a neutral capacity was Rhonda Lahm, director of the state Department of Motor Vehicles. She said the bill as written could open the door for other non-Real ID compliant documents to be issued in Nebraska to numerous classifications

of individuals.

Lahm recommended that the committee consider including a provision that would authorize a fee for the driving privilege card. She also requested that the date for card activation be set at July 1, 2024, to allow sufficient implementation time.

No one testified in opposition to LB199 and the committee took no immediate action on it.

URBAN AFFAIRS

Expanded disabled veteran parking proposed

The Urban Affairs Committee heard testimony Feb. 14 on a bill that would allow veterans who have been issued a Disabled American Veteran license plate to park in handicapped designated stalls.

Disabled American Veteran license plates are available to any veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces who was discharged with a characterization of honorable or general conditions and is classified by the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs as being 100 percent disabled as a result of their service.

Bellevue Sen. Rick Holdcroft said he introduced LB274 as a way to honor the sacrifices made by military members in Nebraska.



Sen. Rick Holdcroft

“Not all of the injuries sustained by our veterans are physical, and not all of them are immediately visible just by casual observation,” he said. “I believe this bill is a significant, substantial way that we can honor members of our armed forces that have received

injuries or impairments in conjunction with their military service.”

Testifying in support of the bill was veteran R.G. Smith, who said he was disappointed that Nebraska does not grant the same rights to disabled veterans as many states do, including his home state of Nevada.

“Currently, there are 16 other states ... with similar legislation as LB274,” Smith said.

Amanda Vazquez, government relations director for the Great Plains chapter of the Paralyzed Veterans of America, testified in opposition to the bill. Under current Nebraska law, she said, an individual can apply for a handicapped license plate or placard if they have a certified medical condition that results in their inability to walk over 200 feet without assistance from a wheelchair, crutch, walker, prosthetic or other assistive device.

“A veteran with a 100 percent [disability] rating through the VA may not have a limitation to their mobility, making them unqualified for handicapped parking,” Vazquez said. “This bill would cause handicapped parking spaces to be more difficult to access because they could be used lawfully by people who do not need the accessibility they provide.”

Purple Heart recipient Robert Tobin also testified in opposition to the bill, saying handicapped parking permits should be reserved for individuals with mobility challenges.

“Individuals who have disabilities involving [a] diminishing ability to walk can independently apply for handicapped parking permits,” Tobin said. “My wounds and injuries will probably diminish my ability to walk, at which time I can always apply for a handicapped parking permit – which I will.”

The committee took no immediate action on LB274. ■

COMMITTEE HEARINGS

Current hearing schedules are available at: NebraskaLegislature.gov/calendar

Tuesday, Feb. 21

Agriculture

Room 1524 - 1:30 p.m.

LB263 (Agriculture) Change provisions of the Nebraska Hemp Farming Act
 LB336 (Halloran) Terminate the Nebraska Hemp Commission, create the Nebraska Hemp Advisory Board, and eliminate a fee and penalty
 LB735 (Blood) Create a work group and establish the Nebraska Stewardship Program under the Nebraska Apiary Act

Appropriations

Room 1507 - 1:30 p.m.

Agency 46: Dept. of Correctional Services
 Agency 64: State Patrol
 Agency 94: Commission on Public Advocacy
 LB439 (Raybould) State intent regarding appropriations to the Department of Correctional Services for domestic violence programming
 LB554 (J. Cavanaugh) Appropriate funds to the Commission on Public Advocacy
 LB660 (Ibach) Appropriate funds to the Commission on Public Advocacy

Education

Room 1525 - 1:30 p.m.

LB222 (Fredrickson) Prescribe requirements for the student application and admission process of public colleges and universities regarding criminal history and juvenile court record information
 LB231 (Dungan) Change provisions related to student attendance and require plans for excessive absences
 LB386 (Linehan) Prohibit changes to the base limitation for school districts and the local effort rate calculation under the Tax Equity and Educational Opportunities Support Act
 LB455 (Wayne) Require the State Department of Education to create a grant program
 LB705 (Murman) Change provisions for the distribution of lottery funds used for education, transfer powers and duties, create new acts and funds, and change education provisions
 LB702 (Murman) Change provisions

relating to educational service units
 LB701 (Murman) Change legislative intent provisions under the Tax Equity and Educational Opportunities Support Act

Transportation & Telecommunications **Room 1113 - 1:30 p.m.**

Appointments: Leah Barrett, Katie Niemoller, Zacharay J. Mellender - Neb. Information Technology Commission
 LB61 (Brandt) Authorize leasing of dark fiber and eliminate certain powers of the Public Service Commission
 LB134 (J. Cavanaugh) Provide requirements under the Small Wireless Facilities Deployment Act
 LB733 (Bostar) Adopt the Broadband Pole Placement and Undergrounding Fund Act

Urban Affairs

Room 1510 - 1:30 p.m.

LB171 (McKinney) Name the Metropolitan Utilities District Act and transfer and change provisions relating to metropolitan utilities districts
 LB45 (Dorn) Create the Revitalize Rural Nebraska Grant Fund
 LB224 (McKinney) Adopt the Aid to Municipalities Act
 LB707 (Dungan) Provide for grants to cities of the primary class from the Affordable Housing Trust Fund
 LB629 (McKinney) Change provisions of the Middle Income Workforce Housing Investment Act and the Economic Recovery Act

Wednesday, Feb. 22

Appropriations

Room 1307 - 1:30 p.m.

Agency 18: Dept. of Agriculture
 Agency 18: Dept. of Agriculture (*Note: Potato Board & Poultry/Egg*)
 Agency 39: Neb.Brand Committee
 Agency 19: Dept. of Banking
 Agency 22: Dept. of Insurance
 Agency 67: Equal Opportunity Commission
 Agency 82: Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
 Agency 81: Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Agency 23: Dept. of Labor
 LB614 (McDonnell) Appropriate funds to the Department of Agriculture
 LB755 (Vargas) Appropriate funds to the Department of Labor

Government, Military & Veterans Affairs **Room 1507 - 1:30 p.m.**

LB53 (McKinney) Create El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, Malcolm X Day and establish a holiday
 LB791 (Wayne) Appropriate funds to the Commission on African American Affairs
 LB20 (Wayne) Provide for restoration of voting rights upon completion of a felony sentence or probation for a felony

Health & Human Services

Room 1510 - 1:30 p.m.

LB593 (Hardin) Change provisions relating to licensure and regulation of hearing instrument specialists
 LB586 (Hughes) Provide duties for the Nebraska Center for Nursing regarding clinical training sites
 LB792 (Wayne) Provide for a pilot program for assessing and treating post traumatic stress disorder
 LB765 (DeKay) Change, provide, and eliminate definitions, powers, and duties under the Statewide Trauma System Act

Judiciary

Room 1113 - 1:30 p.m.

LB42 (Hansen) Change provisions relating to child abuse and neglect under the Child Protection and Family Safety Act and the Nebraska Juvenile Code
 LB14 (Dungan) Change provisions under the Young Adult Bridge to Independence Act
 LB174 (Dungan) Eliminate the statute of limitations on certain civil actions for sexual assault of a child
 LB271 (McKinney) Change reporting requirements for child abuse and neglect
 LB87 (Hunt) Allow persons eighteen years of age to make health care decisions and persons under nineteen years of age in correctional facilities to consent to medical and mental health care

COMMITTEE HEARINGS

Current hearing schedules are available at: NebraskaLegislature.gov/calendar

Natural Resources

Room 1525 - 1:30 p.m.

LB255 (Brewer) Change eminent domain and renewable energy generation provisions relating to certain power suppliers

LB399 (Brewer) Change provisions relating to privately developed renewable energy generation facilities and other electric generation facilities

Revenue

Room 1524 - 1:30 p.m.

LB584 (Hughes) Impose a tax on selling or dealing in electronic nicotine delivery systems

LB706 (Moser) Authorize the issuance of highway bonds under the Nebraska Highway Bond Act

LB97 (Clements) Change provisions relating to required reports for inheritance tax

LB126 (Day) Change provisions relating to homestead exemptions

Thursday, Feb. 23

Appropriations

Room 1307 - 1:30 p.m.

Agency 5: Supreme Court

Agency 15: Board of Parole

Agency 78: Commission on Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice

LB176 (Dungan) State intent regarding appropriations to the Supreme Court for interpreter services

LB508 (Conrad) Appropriate funds to the Supreme Court for the Office of Dispute Resolution

LB761 (DeBoer) Appropriate funds to the Supreme Court for the Office of Public Guardian

Government, Military & Veterans Affairs

Room 1507 - 1:30 p.m.

LB712 (Hardin) Create the Ground Based Strategic Deterrent Deployment Fund

LB642 (Brewer) Provide duties for the Adjutant General regarding Nebraska National Guard members impacted by the COVID-19 vaccine mandate

LB731 (Brewer) Provide for service by state agency department heads in reserve components of the armed

forces of the United States
LB771 (Sanders) Provide for the Department of Veterans' Affairs to award grants to qualifying postsecondary institutions

Health & Human Services

Room 1510 - 1:30 p.m.

LB276 (Wishart) Adopt the Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic Act

LB605 (Albrecht) Change provisions of the Mental Health Practice Act to include protections and requirements for certified art therapists

LB570 (Vargas) Adopt the Overdose Fatality Review Teams Act

LB657 (McDonnell) Appropriate funds to the University of Nebraska

Judiciary

Room 1113 - 1:30 p.m.

LB49 (Dungan) Change provisions relating to solar energy and wind energy, declare certain instruments void and unenforceable, and provide for a civil cause of action

LB186 (J. Cavanaugh) Adopt the Unlawful Restrictive Covenant Modification Act

LB394 (Erdman) Change provisions relating to the determination of damages as a result of eminent domain

LB379 (Conrad) Change provisions relating to civil liability for violations of occupant protection system requirements

LB472 (Geist) Change provisions relating to admissibility of evidence of use of an occupant protection system or a three-point safety belt system

Natural Resources

Room 1525 - 1:30 p.m.

LB40 (Blood) Adopt the Riparian and Water Quality Practices Act

LB729 (McDonnell) Change provisions relating to the Jobs and Economic Development Initiative Fund

Nebraska Retirement Systems

Room 1525 - 12:00 p.m.

Appointment: Thomas E. Henning - Neb. Investment Council

LB198 (McDonnell) Provide for a return to work and authorize contributions

under the School Employees Retirement Act and the Class V School Employees Retirement Act

LB197 (McDonnell) Redefine eligible employees voting in a referendum relating to social security

Revenue

Room 1524 - 1:30 p.m.

LB727 (Linehan) Change provisions relating to the sales and use tax exemption on purchases by the state and other public entities

LB491 (von Gillern) Change provisions relating to claiming tax credits under the Nebraska Advantage Research and Development Act

LB173 (Bostar) Change provisions relating to the taxation of nonresident income

LB689 (Linehan) Change provisions relating to an income tax credit for community college taxes paid

Friday, Feb. 24

Appropriations

Room 1307 - 1:30 p.m.

Agency 7: Governor

Agency 8: Lieutenant Governor

Agency 9: Secretary of State

Agency 10: Auditor of Public Accounts

Agency 12: State Treasurer

Agency 87: Accountability and Disclosure Commission

LB477 (Wayne) Appropriate funds to the Omaha Streetcar Authority

LB551 (J. Cavanaugh) State intent to appropriate funds to certain counties for long-term care facility operations and services

LB578 (DeBoer) Appropriate funds to the Auditor of Public Accounts

LB598 (Clements) Eliminate obsolete provisions relating to the Cash Reserve Fund

Executive Board

Room 1525 - 12:00 p.m.

LR21 (Brewer) Provide for a special committee of the Legislature to be known as the Small Modular Nuclear Reactor Study Committee

LB566 (Bostelman) Require a study and report by the Natural Resources

COMMITTEE HEARINGS

Current hearing schedules are available at: NebraskaLegislature.gov/calendar

Committee of the Legislature regarding intermittent renewable energy generation

**Government, Military & Veterans Affairs
Room 1507 - 1:30 p.m.**

LB637 (Albrecht) Require members of the public to be allowed to speak at each meeting subject to the Open Meetings Act

LB190 (Brandt) Authorize scheduled extension of county bridge project payments

LR1CA (Blood) Constitutional amendment to require the Legislature to reimburse political subdivisions as prescribed

LB420 (Raybould) Require the state to pay counties for the cost of office and service facilities used for the administration of public assistance programs

Health & Human Services

Room 1510 - 1:30 p.m.

LB794 (Wayne) Adopt the Nursing Incentives Scholarship Act

LB503 (Aguilar) Adopt the Rural Nebraska Nursing Workforce Act

LB463 (Health & Human Services) Change provisions relating to application for licensure under the Health Care Facility Licensure Act

LB714 (J. Cavanaugh) Change provisions of the Nebraska Affordable Housing Act

Judiciary

Room 1113 - 1:30 p.m.

LB95 (Slama) Adopt the Asbestos Trust Claims Transparency Act and the Asbestos Claims Priorities and Claims Legitimacy Act and change a statute of limitations

LB325 (Dungan) Change immunity for intentional torts under the Political Subdivisions Tort Claims Act and the State Tort Claims Act

LB341 (Halloran) Adopt the State and Po-

litical Subdivisions Child Sexual Abuse Liability Act and exempt actions from the State Tort Claims Act and Political Subdivisions Tort Claims Act

LB521 (Walz) Provide for immunity for school personnel administering naloxone

LB795 (Wayne) Provide immunity for administration of naloxone or other federally approved opioid antagonists

LB351 (Wayne) Increase and eliminate limits on medical malpractice liability and change provisions relating to proof of financial responsibility and the Excess Liability Fund

Revenue

Room 1524 - 1:30 p.m.

LB213 (Slama) Change provisions regarding tax credits under the Nebraska Job Creation and Mainstreet Revitalization Act and grants under the Rural Workforce Housing Investment Act

LB606 (Albrecht) Adopt the Nebraska Pregnancy Help Act and provide tax credits ■

FIND LEGISLATIVE DOCUMENTS

Committee hearing schedules, daily agendas and more can be viewed using the calendar on NebraskaLegislature.gov.

Clicking the “Calendar” link on the left side of the website’s homepage will open a calendar that is constantly updated with new information.

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Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
01	02	03	04 Day 1 108th Leg. 1st Session	05 Day 2 108th Leg. 1st Session	06 Day 3 108th Leg. 1st Session	07
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