

Special committee on legislative oversight approved

Lawmakers voted Feb. 23 to authorize a special committee to review the Legislature's oversight functions.

LR298, introduced by Speaker John Arch of La Vista, creates the Legislative Oversight Review Special Committee of the Legislature. As introduced, members would include the speaker, chairpersons of the Executive Board, Judiciary and Health and Human Services committees, two at-large members of the Executive Board and three at-large members of the Legislature.

An amendment from the Executive Board, adopted 37-1, added all voting and nonvoting members of the Executive Board to the special committee membership.

Arch said the committee will allow the Legislature to engage in a long-term examination of its "complicated and multifaceted" oversight functions during the next interim and determine any changes that need to be made.

The status of three facets of that oversight — the Office of Public Counsel and the offices of Inspector General of Nebraska Child Welfare and Inspector General of the Nebraska Correctional System — have been in question since the attorney general issued an opinion in August of last year that cast doubt on the constitutionality of those offices.

Following that opinion, the executive branch removed access to facilities and databases needed by the offices to

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Fetal anomaly abortion exception considered



Sen. Merv Riepe said his bill is similar to an amendment he offered to last year's abortion bill.

The Judiciary Committee considered a bill Feb. 22 that would provide an exception to the 12-week abortion ban passed by the Legislature last year.

LB1109, introduced by Ralston Sen. Merv Riepe, would allow women to receive an abortion at up to 20 weeks of pregnancy if the fetus has a fatal fetal anomaly. The bill also would repeal criminal penalties for intentionally or recklessly performing an abortion in violation of state law, which currently is a Class IV offense.

The measure defines a fatal fetal anomaly as a terminal condition diagnosed before birth by at least two physicians that, in their reasonable medical judgment, is incompatible with life outside the womb and will result in the death of an unborn child

upon birth or "inevitably thereafter." Conditions such as Down syndrome or developmental disabilities would not be included in the definition, Riepe said.

During debate on additional abortion restrictions in 2023, Riepe said, he unsuccessfully offered an amendment with provisions similar to those in LB1109. Lawmakers ultimately approved a 12-week abortion ban based on gestational age without medical exceptions, he said, which he regrets.

"I failed last session to hold to my expectations, and we have an incomplete law," Riepe said. "I feel compelled to right a wrong."

Testifying in support of LB1109 was Tiffany Palmer, whose second pregnancy was determined not to be

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Fetal anomaly abortion exception considered

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viable at around 20 weeks. Her baby was diagnosed with trisomy 18, she said, a condition with no treatment that results in death at birth or within the first year of life.

Growing up, Palmer said she thought of abortion as a “dirty word.” After her experience, however, it became clear to her that abortion is necessary in certain medical situations, she said.

“When thinking about abortion, please understand it’s not only for the unwed mothers who had a one-night stand,” Palmer said. “It’s a health care option for those who want a child, but nature gave them the short end of the stick.”

Speaking on behalf of Students for Life Action, Isabella Orsi testified against the proposal. The bill would enable more abortions, she said, and insinuates that children with genetic conditions are “fit only to be aborted.”

“LB1109 operates under the idea that a human being’s life should be ended because its span may be shorter than the average human lifespan,” Orsi said. “It would be unjust to allow

Nebraskans to intentionally end the life of an innocent child still growing in their mother’s womb just because that child is deemed less than due to their physical condition.”

Robert Bonebrake, an OB-GYN in Omaha, also opposed the bill. Prenatal diagnoses are not always reliable, he said, citing instances of children diagnosed with fetal anomalies who have survived beyond expectancy.

“Unfortunately, there are times where we are wrong, even when consulting with multiple experts in the field,” Bonebrake said. “We cannot always know if the child will survive or not outside the uterus.”

Patricia Korensky of Lincoln, who lost a child due to a pregnancy complication, testified in opposition to LB1109. Although her doctor discussed the option of terminating the pregnancy when the complication was discovered, Korensky said, she opted to continue in order to spend as much time as possible with her unborn daughter. She said the pregnancy continued for another 10 weeks, which gave her and her family time to process

what was happening and grieve.

“We had no way to know how long it would be, but we allowed nature to take the lead on her life and death,” Korensky said.

John Trapp, president of the Nebraska Medical Association, offered neutral testimony. The NMA supports the provision that would remove criminal penalties for doctors, he said, but the bill is too vague regarding which conditions would qualify as fatal fetal anomalies.

The committee took no immediate action on LB1109. ■



UNICAMERAL UPDATE

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carry out their work. A memorandum of understanding signed by representatives of the legislative and executive branches earlier this month will restore access needed to carry out those oversight functions while the special committee does its work, Arch said.

The committee will study the structure and organization of current legislative oversight functions that exist within legislative divisions and offices. It also may study oversight conducted by statutorily created boards and commissions in Nebraska and the legislative oversight functions of other state legislatures.

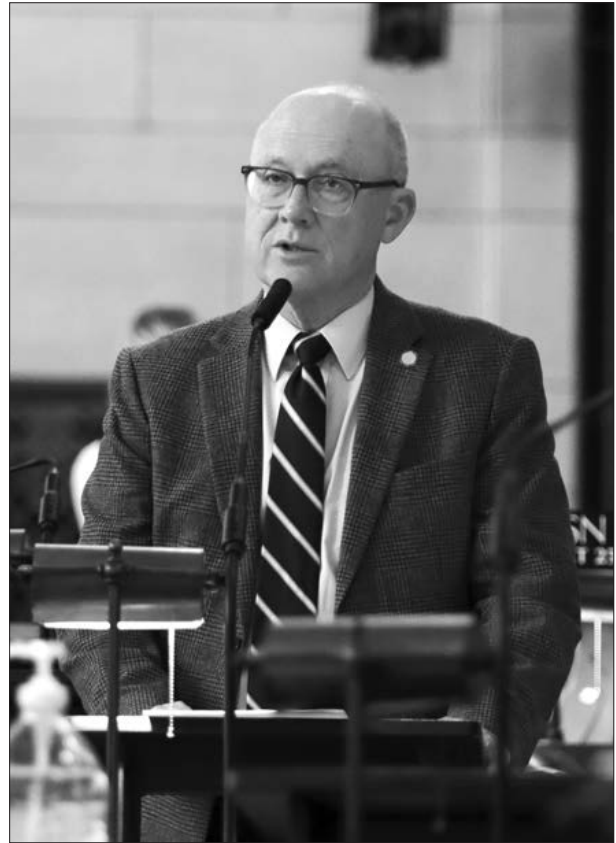
In addition to holding hearings, the committee could, with authorization from the Executive Board, issue subpoenas. It will issue a report and any recommendations to the Legislature no later than Dec. 15, 2024, and terminate Dec. 31, 2024.

Sen. John Fredrickson of Omaha

said he appreciated the attempt to move forward and allow the IGs to continue their important work, but he raised concerns about what he described as the erosion of legislative power that necessitated the resolution.

“We should have grave concern when we have branches [of government] – and, specifically, some code agencies – who are deciding to not follow the law,” he said. “Because once that starts happening and becomes normalized, that strips all our power as a legislative body.”

Omaha Sen. Mach



Speaker John Arch said LR298 would help to protect the authority of the legislative branch to engage in effective oversight.

aela Cavanaugh echoed those concerns. A comprehensive review of legislative oversight is “long overdue,” she said, but she expressed concern that the path laid out in LR298 and the MOU gives the impression that the executive branch can break the law and face no consequences for doing so.

Omaha Sen. Terrell McKinney agreed. He said the Legislature has constitutional authority over the state’s correctional system and should not have allowed the state Department of Correctional Services to deny the IG’s office access for more than six months.

“We’re willing to give up that authority to the executive branch because, I guess, they can do what they want,” McKinney said.

Sen. Mike Jacobson of North Platte supported the resolution, calling it a “practical” approach to a difficult situation. The Legislature could have tried to resolve the IG’s lack of access through the courts, he said, but the agreement reached through LR298 and the MOU allows for a more definitive and comprehensive response to the situation.

“You can always sue, but you never quite know what the answer is going to be,” Jacobson said.

Following adoption of the committee amendment, lawmakers approved LR298 on a 38-1 vote. ■



Sen. Machaela Cavanaugh said she supported the resolution but had reservations based on past dealings with the executive branch.

AGRICULTURE

Bill to prioritize Nebraska detasseling crews clears first round

Lawmakers advanced a bill from general file Feb. 20 meant to clarify how seed corn companies solicit bids for contract labor for roguing – eliminating undesired corn plants – and detasseling in Nebraska.

The federal H-2A temporary agricultural program allows employers who anticipate a lack of available domestic workers to bring foreign workers to the U.S. to perform temporary or seasonal agricultural work including detasseling and roguing.

LB844, sponsored by Bayard Sen. Steve Erdman, would amend the state Farm Labor Contractors Act to require seed corn producers who contract for detasseling and roguing services to solicit bids from local contractors before employing H-2A workers.

Erdman said the bill would protect young people who want to work at detasseling and roguing by making sure that producers follow existing law and prioritize hiring domestic workers if they are available.

The state has lost nine companies that previously provided detasseling crews to corn producers, he said, while in 2019 more than 700 young people applied for detasseling jobs that were unavailable because companies had hired H-2A workers instead.

“[The bill] is an opportunity for us to protect the local workforce,” Erdman said, adding that detasseling has a



Sen. Steve Erdman

long history of providing employment for Nebraska young people.

Among other provisions, LB844 would:

- add a definition for detasseling and roguing;
- create reporting requirements for seed corn producers who contract for roguing and detasseling labor;
- require the state Department of Agriculture to publish an annual report, beginning Sept. 30, 2025, containing information submitted by corn seed producers;
- require the department to publish a directory containing information related to seed corn operations seeking labor; and
- create a Class IV misdemeanor for seed corn producers who violate reporting requirements.

An Agriculture Committee amendment, adopted 36-0, would add a duty for the department to mail each seed corn producer a directory of exempt detasseling and roguing contractors annually, beginning Jan. 15, 2026.

Hastings Sen. Steve Halloran, chairperson of the committee, spoke in favor of the bill, noting the strong support for the proposal at the public hearing.

“It was particularly exciting to see the enthusiasm of the youth that came to testify about working hard and wanting to be able to have the opportunity to continue to do that in a fair fashion,” he said.

Following adoption of the committee amendment lawmakers advanced the bill to select file on a 36-0 vote.

APPROPRIATIONS

Bill would redirect ARPA funds to behavioral health provider support

The Appropriations Committee heard testimony Feb. 20 on a bill that seeks to repurpose unused federal American Rescue Plan Act funds to provide training and support opportunities for behavioral health students and professionals.

In 2022, the Legislature appropriated \$2.5 million in ARPA funds to the state Department of Health and Human Services to be used to increase the number of behavioral and mental health beds in rural Nebraska.

Omaha Sen. John Fredrickson, sponsor of LB931, said the department returned those dollars because the funding was insufficient to increase capacity in the way intended. He said the dollars now could be used to increase access to behavioral health services by providing internships, practicums and fellowships for graduate and postgraduate students in behavior health programs.

The bill would re-appropriate the \$2.5 million to the University of Nebraska Board of Regents to be used for Behavioral Health Education Center of Nebraska initiatives.

BHECN received \$25.5 million in ARPA funds from the Legislature last year to support individuals pursuing degrees in behavioral health, Fredrickson said, but was able to fund only 30% of the 344 applications it received.

“It is important to ensure that the



Sen. John Fredrickson

\$2.5 million in unused dollars from DHHS continue to go towards behavioral health as intended,” he said.

Under the bill, \$1 million would be used for BHECN stipends and supervision of behavioral health trainees to ensure successful completion of their degree programs. Another \$1 million would be allocated to provide support for provisionally licensed behavioral health providers and the remaining \$500,000 would be used for recruitment and retention efforts.

Erin Schneider, deputy director of BHECN, testified in support of the proposal on behalf of the University of Nebraska System.

Schneider said BHECN has distributed ARPA funds to more than 100 projects throughout the state but currently is unable to meet the demand. For example, she said, Northeast Community College’s stipend program for licensed drug and alcohol counselors received enough qualified applicants in the first semester to expend all of their allotted funding for the next three years.

“The reappropriation of these funds has the potential to develop, recruit and retain hundreds of behavioral health providers in the state and ultimately meet Nebraska’s growing behavioral health needs,” Schneider said.

Also speaking in favor of the bill was medical student Tony Le, who said BHECN was integral to his decision to pursue psychiatry. The center helped him become a competitive applicant for residency programs, Le said, and more funding would help BHECN address the state’s behavioral health provider shortage by doing the same for other students.

No one testified in opposition to LB931 and the committee took no immediate action on it.

Bill seeks additional ARPA funds for affordable housing

A bill that would direct millions in federal ARPA funds toward tackling the state’s affordable housing shortage was considered by the Appropriations Committee Feb. 20.

LB1079, introduced by Sen. Mike McDonnell of Omaha, would appropriate \$10 million in federal American Rescue Plan Act funds to the state Department of Economic Development to contract with the Nebraska Investment Financing Authority. Funds could be used by NIFA for the development of units eligible for federal 4% and 9% low-income housing credits.



Sen. Mike McDonnell

McDonnell said the ARPA funds appropriated to NIFA two years ago have resulted in grants to more than 600 units. Additional funds could be used to supplement projects that no longer meet NIFA’s financial feasibility requirements because of increased construction costs, he said.

“I’m asking that we continue to move forward and grow the work that we set forth to accomplish last year,” McDonnell said. “We need to make housing a priority as we move forward with both General Fund [dollars] and ARPA money.”

Shannon Harner, executive director of NIFA, testified in support of the bill. The funds allocated would be structured as loans to developers rather than as grants, she said, so as not to reduce any available tax credits.

“Tax credit unit owners agree to charge rents at rates that are affordable to people who earn 60% of the area median income or less,” she said, which helps Nebraskans maintain

their independence.

Housing developer Ward Hoppe spoke in favor of the proposal. He said the bill would facilitate affordable housing development on a large scale as the “last dollars in” to make a project work.

Hoppe said that without tax increment financing or municipal or non-profit grants, the kind of large projects that he develops would not happen because of the financing gap between “unprecedented” construction costs and the proceeds of tax credits.

Justin Brady also supported the bill, speaking on behalf of the Nebraska Realtors Association, Homebuilders Association of Lincoln, Metro Omaha Builders Association and Nebraska State Homebuilders Association. He said the proposal would be an opportunity for the state to invest in housing and leverage both federal funds and private equity to create more affordable housing statewide.

“You’re going to get a lot more than \$10 million worth of housing on the back end,” Brady said.

Testifying on behalf of Disability Rights Nebraska, Brad Meurrens also spoke in favor of LB1079. Affordable housing is especially important for the 13% of Nebraskans with disabilities, he said, because more of them live in poverty — in part because they earn approximately \$10,000 less per year if employed and because accessible housing, if needed, is “extremely scarce.”

“Poverty limits housing options,” Meurrens said, “and disability limits them even further.”

No one testified in opposition to LB1079 and the committee took no immediate action on the proposal.

EDUCATION

Media literacy requirements proposed

The Education Committee heard testimony Feb. 20 on a bill that would require Nebraska school districts to incorporate media literacy education into K-12 curriculum.

LB1371, introduced by Omaha Sen. Tony Vargas, would require, starting in the 2025-26 school year, that all Nebraska school districts incorporate media literacy into curriculum and instruction for K-12 students.



Sen. Tony Vargas

Additionally, starting with the 2027-2028 school year, students would be required to complete at least one three-credit high school media literacy course before graduation.

Under the bill, media literacy instruction would cover topics such as:

- critical thinking and using informative resources;
- knowledge and skills regarding research processes and how information is produced ethically;
- research methods, including accessing peer-reviewed print and digital library resources and primary and secondary sources;
- differences between facts, points of view and opinions; and
- economic, legal and social issues surrounding information use.

LB1371 also would require school districts to provide annual reports on media literacy course progress and other measures to school boards.

Vargas said the state Department of Education updated its English and social studies curriculum in recent years

but has not addressed the dramatic increase in student social media use.

Up to 95% of youth ages 13 to 17 report using at least one social media platform, he said, and 46% describe themselves as “online almost constantly” – a rate that has nearly doubled since 2016. Excessive internet and social media use among young people can result in negative body image and mental health issues, he said, and educating youth about media literacy would give them more control over how they receive and interpret media messages.

“[Students] can learn to be more critical of messages they’re receiving and less critical [of] themselves and each other,” Vargas said.

Rosemary Smith testified in support of the bill on behalf of the Getting Better Foundation, a nonprofit organization that advocates for media literacy. She said the bill’s aim is not to dictate opinions but to help people think critically and evaluate the credibility of information.

“Media literacy empowers students – and people in general – with the skills to think critically and for themselves,” Smith said. “It teaches them how to consume and evaluate information to ask critical questions, avoid online manipulation and to navigate within our complex and ever changing media landscape.”

Representing Civic Nebraska, Heidi Uhing also testified in favor of LB1371. She said misinformation can sway public opinion, create propaganda, undermine trust in reputable sources and sow the seeds of social division.

“Media literacy education provides students with the skills to recognize these tactics, identify credible sources and differentiate between reliable information and falsehoods,” Uhing said. “In doing so, we not only

safeguard our democracy, but also foster a more informed and engaged citizenry.”

Testifying in opposition to the proposal was Colby Coash, speaking on behalf of the Nebraska Association of School Boards. He said NASB would prefer that further curriculum changes be adopted through the state Department of Education, which tends to go “more smoothly” than doing so through the legislative process.

Charles Riedesel, speaking on behalf of Schools Taking Action for Nebraska Children’s Education, or STANCE, also opposed the measure.

Despite passage of a computer science graduation requirement by the Legislature two years ago, he said, that requirement has not been fully implemented due to insufficient funding and training. Riedesel said teaching students about media literacy is worthwhile, but he expressed concern that LB1371’s curriculum and graduation requirements could encounter the same roadblocks.

“I do not want to see the Media Literacy Act suffer a similar delay,” he said.

The committee took no immediate action on the bill.

HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Child care provider assistance narrowed, advanced

A bill that would create a new category of eligibility for Nebraska child care providers under the Child Care Subsidy program was amended and advanced from general file Feb. 21.

LB856, introduced by Omaha

Sen. John Fredrickson, would exclude all earned and unearned income from eligibility determinations for the Child Care Subsidy program for households with at least one individual who holds employment in a qualifying child care setting.



Sen. John Fredrickson

Under the bill, individuals who pass a criminal background check and are employed at least 20 hours a week at an in-home or licensed child care facility would be eligible for free child care for their own children under the program.

Fredrickson said LB856 is a simple and measurable way to address Nebraska's child care shortage. Similar programs in other states, including Kentucky and Iowa, have significantly increased the availability of child care, he said.

"[LB856] will create a multiplier effect," Fredrickson said. "More workers recruited and retained in our child care workforce means more children served and more workers into our overall economy."

Sen. Mike Jacobson of North Platte spoke in support of the proposal. He said access to adequate and affordable child care is the first barrier parents face when entering the workforce.

"We have shortages in every occupation out there ... but we need to begin at the right place," Jacobson said. "We first have to begin with having sufficient numbers of child care workers and sufficient child care facilities available."

Under current law, the state Department of Health and Human Services cannot provide a subsidy to a child care provider who cares for their own children. A Health and Human Services Committee amendment, ad-

opted 38-0, would create an exception if an employer has attempted to make reasonable accommodations to ensure that a provider is not caring for their own child but such an accommodation cannot be made.

The committee amendment also would require the department to submit an annual report to the Legislature by Dec. 1 of each year. The report would include the monthly number of enrolled children and households by county and program type.

St. Paul Sen. Fred Meyer supported the bill and the amendment. He said the provisions would help close the wage gap between child care providers and other industries by removing the cost of child care.

Fredrickson introduced an amendment to the committee amendment that would establish the bill as a pilot program scheduled to end on Oct. 1, 2026, and would cap total subsidies at \$10 million each year.

Speaking in support of the proposal, Lincoln Sen. Danielle Conrad said LB856 would address a critical need for working families across the state, but she questioned the need to cap the new subsidy. The bill would move the state "in the right direction," she said, but \$10 million a year would not be sufficient to address Nebraska's child care shortage statewide.

"We need to do more as quickly as possible to deliver for working families and to help move our economy forward," Conrad said.

Speaking in opposition to LB856, Bayard Sen. Steve Erdman questioned the effectiveness of placing an end date on the proposal. He said he has yet to see a sunset date take effect because lawmakers simply pass new legislation to extend programs once they're created.

"Don't count on this being a sunset," Erdman said.

Sen. Brian Hardin of Gering also opposed the measure. The bill could have a negative impact on the child care industry by opening the door to over-regulation of other areas in the future, he said.

"When you allow the government in and they're going to pay the cost for you, that sounds welcoming," Hardin said. "[But] they will then also begin to dictate other things that your business is allowed to do, and not to do."

After adopting Fredrickson's amendment on a vote of 38-0, senators voted 35-9 to advance LB856 to select file.

SNAP restaurant meal program considered

The Health and Human Services Committee heard testimony Feb. 21 on a bill that seeks to address food insecurity among vulnerable populations in Nebraska.

LB920, introduced by Omaha Sen. Terrell McKinney, would require the state Department of Health and Human Services to establish a Restaurant Meals Program no later than July 1, 2025.



Sen. Terrell McKinney

Under the program, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program recipients who are elderly, disabled or experiencing homelessness could use their SNAP dollars to purchase pre-made meals at below-market price from participating restaurants. Restaurants would contract with the department to offer meals to eligible individuals.

McKinney said barriers such as a lack of cooking facilities or stable housing can impede a person's ability to prepare meals at home. Allowing SNAP participants to use their

benefits to purchase prepared meals would ensure equitable access to nutritious food, he said, regardless of their circumstances.

“This initiative ensures that SNAP benefits are utilized effectively to combat hunger and improve food security among vulnerable populations,” McKinney said. “By providing SNAP beneficiaries with the option to purchase prepared meals at restaurants, we promote health and nutrition, support local businesses, ensure equity and inclusion and streamline access to benefits.”

Gladys Harrison, owner of Big Mama’s Kitchen and Catering in Omaha, testified in support of LB920. She said she proposed the idea to McKinney because the program would help increase access to nutritious food in both rural and urban areas of the state.

“One thing Nebraska has plenty of is restaurants,” Harrison said, “and restaurants can help [fill the] food desert needs that we have.”

Katie Nungesser, policy coordinator for Voices for Children in Nebraska, also spoke in support of the bill.

Over 3,500 Nebraska families with children were homeless in 2021, she said, and an additional 2,229 families were at risk of homelessness.

“When a family is homeless without a kitchen, the ability to pay for a precooked or ready-made meal can be the difference between going to bed hungry or fed,” Nungesser said.

Testifying in support of LB920 on behalf of AARP Nebraska, Jina Ragland said food insecurity has significant negative health effects for older Nebraskans. Older adults who are food insecure are more likely to experience depression, diabetes, heart attacks and limitations on their daily activities than their food-secure counterparts, she said.

“Participation in the SNAP pro-

gram is associated with improved health outcomes, contributes to lower health care costs, fewer ER visits and fewer long-term care admissions to a hospital,” Ragland said. “LB920 ... [allows] older Nebraskans to remain healthy, age in place and stay at the lowest level of care for longer periods of time.”

Ansley Fellers, executive director of the Nebraska Grocery Industry Association, spoke in opposition to the proposal. She expressed concern that the cost of meals at participating restaurants would be higher than a person would pay at a grocery store.

“We believe with [the] limited funds available, we should do our best to ensure SNAP dollars are stretched as far as possible,” Fellers said.

The committee took no immediate action on LB920.

Bills would expand Medicaid coverage for lactation support

The Health and Human Services Committee heard testimony Feb. 22 on a pair of bills seeking to increase access to breastfeeding services for Nebraska Medicaid recipients.

LB1106, introduced by Omaha Sen. Jen Day, would increase from five to 10 the number of lactation consultation visits authorized for a mother or child covered by Medicaid. The bill also would increase by 145% the reimbursement rate for lactation consultants.

Day said the start of breastfeeding can come with a number of challenges, including difficulty latching, low milk supply and pain. By addressing these challenges early on, lactation consultants can prevent complications and

help mothers achieve successful breastfeeding outcomes, she said.

“[The] early days in a newborn’s life are critically important for [their] health and well-being, as well as the well-being and health of the mother,” Day said.

Tiffany Uher, executive director of MilkWorks, spoke in support of the measure. CDC data shows a 33% decrease in infant deaths if breastfeeding is initiated in the hospital, she said. The health benefits of breastfeeding for mothers and babies has been well documented for decades, she said, yet barriers to successful breastfeeding abound.

“Improved access to instruction on lactation from breastfeeding experts during the postpartum period is critical to overcoming these barriers,” Uher said. “LB1106 would ensure that lactation support is more financially viable for providers and available regardless of the complexity of the mother’s and baby’s needs.”

Erin Feichtinger, policy director for the Women’s Fund of Omaha, also testified in favor of LB1106. The right to choose to breastfeed currently is limited by whether or not a person has access to the necessary support, she said.

Day also introduced a measure that would broaden Medicaid coverage of breast pumps.

Currently, Nebraska provides a breast pump to mothers insured under Medicaid prior to the birth of their child. However, uninsured mothers whose child will qualify for Medicaid coverage under the Children’s Health Insurance Program upon birth cannot apply for a breast pump until after the child is born.

LB1107 would require that breast pumps be provided before 36 weeks gestation to mothers whose children will qualify for Medicaid upon birth.



Sen. Jen Day

A mother who delivers a child before 36 weeks gestation would receive a breast pump the day of delivery, and pumps must meet certain technical specifications.

Breastfeeding counselor Teresa Peña testified in support of LB1107. She said breast pumps are essential during the first days postpartum because mothers need to remove milk from their breasts frequently to maintain a steady milk supply.

“It is crucial that all mothers in the state of Nebraska have access to sufficient quality pumps and are able to access them prior to the delivery of their babies,” Peña said. “Providing a pump prior to the birth of their baby is not only dignified but it allows families to learn, prepare and feel supported.”

Julia Keown also spoke in support of the bill on behalf of the Nebraska Nurses Association. Using a breast pump to express milk within one hour of birth increases the amount of long-term milk produced and stabilizes milk production sooner than pumping six hours after giving birth, she said.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, Keown said, infants fed breast milk have better short- and long-term health outcomes, protection from various infections and better neurodevelopmental and cognitive outcomes.

“This shows us that time is of the essence,” she said. “[LB1107] can lead to higher breast milk feeding success rates and results in better outcomes for infants in Nebraska.”

The provisions of both bills would take effect no later than Jan. 1, 2025.

No one testified in opposition to LB1106 or LB1107 and the committee took no immediate action on either proposal.

Changes to opioid fund usage advanced

Rules governing a fund that contains state settlement dollars related to the opioid crisis would be modified to allow grants to local public health programs under a bill given first-round approval Feb. 21.

Under LB1355 as originally introduced by Sen. Tony Vargas of Omaha, the state Department of Health and Human Services would be required to establish three programs to aid local entities working to address the state’s opioid problem: local public health departments, law enforcement and health care facilities.

The bill also would authorize transfers of \$4 million annually from the Nebraska Opioid Recovery Fund, beginning in fiscal year 2024-25, to fund the programs. No more than 10% of funds appropriated could be used for administrative costs.

Vargas said the grants would provide more resources to address a “serious health crisis” in Nebraska and are in line with recommendations from the Opioid Settlement Remediation Advisory Committee, which determines authorized uses of the state’s settlement funds.

Of the 175 overdose deaths in Nebraska in 2022, he said, 60% had at least one potential opportunity for intervention.

“This statistic stands out to me when we truly think about the cost of not getting these dollars out [to people who need help],” Vargas said.

Grants could be used by local public health departments to facilitate prevention efforts, education and training related to opioid harm remediation

and data tracking. Awards to local law enforcement could be used to facilitate problem solving courts and for opioid and fentanyl first responder training.

Finally, grants provided to local health care facilities could be used for opioid treatment, data tracking, support for individual recovery and rehabilitation and opioid use prevention.

A Health and Human Services Committee amendment, adopted 37-0, replaced the bill. As amended, LB1355 would award \$3.5 million to DHHS to administer the original grant program, but would house the law enforcement grant program with the Drug Control Division of the Nebraska State Patrol rather than with local law enforcement agencies.

A minimum of \$500,000 of the \$1 million annual appropriation to the NSP would be used for a corrections transition and re-entry aid program. The amendment also would appropriate \$2.5 million to DHHS for proportional disbursement to the state’s behavioral health regions for opioid prevention and harm reduction.

The amendment also would add the provisions of two other bills. LB1325, also introduced by Vargas, would allow pharmacists and local public health departments to distribute fentanyl strips as prescribed. LB1320, sponsored by Lincoln Sen. Beau Ballard, would require emergency medical services to report patient overdose information.

The provisions of LB1320 would require that EMS providers who treat or transport an individual experiencing a suspected overdose report the incident within 72 hours to DHHS for submission to a national overdose mapping program. Such information could not be obtained by law enforcement or used for a criminal investigation or prosecution. An EMS provider who makes a good faith report under



Sen. Tony Vargas

the bill’s provision would be immune from civil or criminal liability for making the report.

Ballard spoke in favor of the bill and the amendment. He said mapping of overdose data can help the state discover patterns, coordinate responses and allocate resources where they are most needed.

Sen. Danielle Conrad of Lincoln also supported the bill, but raised a note of caution. Lawmakers need to pay close attention to proposals that use settlement funds, she said, to ensure that money is swiftly moved to “frontline” programs that directly address Nebraska’s drug problem.

“Those funds come [to the state] because Nebraskans were harmed,” Conrad said. “We need to make sure that those dollars are going to their best and highest purposes.”

Following the 37-0 adoption of a technical amendment offered by Vargas, senators voted 40-0 to advance LB1355 to select file.

JUDICIARY



Enhanced penalties for controlled substance death, severe injury advanced

After two days of debate, senators gave first-round approval Feb. 22 to a bill that would enhance penalties for certain charges related to manufacturing or delivering controlled substances when doing so results in death or serious bodily injury.

LB137, sponsored by Lincoln Sen. Carolyn Bosn, would enhance the



Sen. Carolyn Bosn

penalty to the next higher penalty classification, not to exceed a Class IB felony. A Class IB felony carries a penalty of 20 years to life imprisonment.

The bill, initially introduced by former Lincoln Sen. Suzanne Geist, was inspired by Taryn Griffith, Bosn said, a young mother who died in 2021 after unknowingly taking fentanyl-laced pain medication given to her by a coworker.

Bosn said enhancing penalties is one part of a comprehensive approach to a growing drug overdose problem in Nebraska. Between 2018 and 2022, she said, 256 Nebraskans died from poisonings and overdoses due to fentanyl and other synthetic opioids.

“This bill is a step in the right direction for Nebraska in terms of addressing and attacking the fentanyl crisis that we are dealing with,” Bosn said. “We have lost too many young people in this state – and middle-aged people, quite frankly – to a death resulting from the use of a controlled substance that is so much more dangerous than any other controlled substances out there.”

Omaha Sen. Justin Wayne opposed the measure, arguing it fails to consider the issue of the intent behind a crime. In many instances, individuals – including those who share or sell drugs – do not know that they contain fentanyl, Wayne said.

He argued that not only would LB137 fail to prevent fentanyl overdoses from happening, it instead could be used by prosecutors to go after individuals who did not intend to harm others.

“We’re reacting to a situation, but we’re not actually addressing the situation that we’re trying to react to,” Wayne said.

Sen. Terrell McKinney of Omaha also spoke against the measure. He cited studies that have shown a direct correlation between the Legislature

enacting enhanced criminal penalties and Nebraska’s overcrowded prison population.

In addition, McKinney said, the crack epidemic of the ‘80s and ‘90s, and subsequent “war on drugs” that followed, resulted in a criminalization of addiction that disproportionately affected people of color. He warned that LB137 could have a similar effect by incarcerating people who ultimately need resources and support – including those who sell drugs.

“Some people who you deem as dealers are also addicts,” McKinney said. “They’re dealing with addiction themselves.”

Lincoln Sen. Danielle Conrad opposed the bill, which she said would not address the root causes of addiction and is unnecessary. Under current Nebraska law, she said, individuals already can be charged with manslaughter for providing drugs that cause death or injury – a crime that can result in up to 20 years of imprisonment.

Sen. Rick Holdcroft of Bellevue spoke in support of the bill and pushed back on the argument that enacting LB137 would exacerbate prison overcrowding. Neighboring states with similar laws – such as Kansas, Missouri and Wyoming – don’t have overcrowded prisons, he said, because they have more correctional facilities.

“You have two solutions to our overcrowding situation in Nebraska,” Holdcroft said. “One [is to] build more prisons – that’s not ideal, I agree – and also try to reduce recidivism or try to help with reentry.”

Brainard Sen. Bruce Bostelman also supported the bill, saying lawmakers also are addressing criminal justice reform through drug and problem-solving courts. Those courts, which were expanded by the Legislature in 2023, he said, have proven effective

in reducing recidivism and helping people turn their lives around.

“Problem-solving court is a huge part of helping individuals get over their addiction, keeping them out of our jails and making them productive individuals in our society,” Bostelman said.

Lawmakers approved a Judiciary Committee amendment on a vote of 34-1 that would limit the penalty enhancement to a Class IC felony, which carries a 5 to 50-year mandatory minimum prison sentence.

After also adopting a Wayne amendment that would narrow the applicability of the penalty enhancement to cases where the supplied drug was the “direct and proximate” cause of injury or death, lawmakers advanced LB137 to select file on a 35-2 vote.

Veteran justice program considered

Nebraska would develop a justice program aimed specifically at the needs of the state’s veterans under an amendment considered Feb. 23 by the Judiciary Committee.

As introduced last session by Gordon Sen. Tom Brewer, LB253 would create a second law enforcement academy in western Nebraska. The committee considered an amendment offered by Brewer that would gut the bill and instead require that each judicial district or county court in Nebraska establish a veteran justice program.

Under the amendment, a veteran would be eligible to participate in such a program if they are serving in the U.S. Armed Forces or previously served and were discharged other than dishonorably. A program could



Sen. Tom Brewer

be operated in conjunction with a problem-solving court or on its own.

A veteran would be eligible to participate in a veteran justice program if the offense meets the parameters of the program and there is reason to believe that a condition resulting from military service contributed to the offense.

Brewer said many veterans are left with invisible scars related to their service that “derail their lives,” and many become homeless, addicted or suicidal as a result. He acknowledged that the proposal presented to the committee was “rushed” and that changes would need to be made, but asked senators to focus on the overall concept.

“This is good for our veterans; this is good for our communities; this is good for Nebraska,” he said.

Among other provisions, a veteran service program would include evidence-based treatment tailored to address the specific challenges facing veterans, such as PTSD, traumatic brain injury, military sexual trauma or other condition. It would include a case plan that is based on clear and individualized supervision and treatment goals, including guidelines that detail the program rules, consequences for violating the rules and incentives for compliance.

Former U.S. Secretary of Defense and Nebraska U.S. State Senator Chuck Hagel, chairman of the national Veterans Justice Commission, testified in favor of the proposal. He said the commission is working to address the long-standing problem of justice-involved veterans by giving the courts more options to address their specific needs.

“We all love veterans. We all acknowledge the service of veterans and we say nice things about veterans,” Hagel said. “But when some veterans get in trouble and they commit a crime,

courts in this country, judges in this country, prosecutors in this country have very few options.”

Also testifying in support was Brock Hunter, a veteran and attorney working to advance veterans’ programs across the country. He said a similar law passed in Minnesota has been successful and works alongside that state’s existing veteran treatment court.

Not all veterans who are charged with a crime need the extensive resources of a veteran treatment court, he said, and — similar to the situation in Nebraska — those courts are not available in many rural parts of Minnesota, making a broader veteran program an important alternative option.

“It’s important for us to recognize that ... for as long as veterans have returned from war, some of them have brought their war home with them,” Brock said.

Dan Zieg testified against the proposal on behalf of the Nebraska County Attorneys Association. He said the measure does not follow “evidence-based, best practice standards,” and that lawmakers should invest more resources into existing veteran treatment courts instead.

The committee took no immediate action on the proposal.

Bill would eliminate handgun purchase certificate, change background check requirements

A measure that would remove a provision in state law that requires a county-issued certificate to purchase a handgun in Nebraska was considered Feb. 22 by the Judiciary Committee.

Gordon Sen. Tom Brewer, sponsor of LB883, said the bill was brought to him by the Nebraska State Patrol to bring the state in line with the rest of the country.

Brewer said that under current law, county sheriff's offices are required to perform a background check before issuing the certificate, which is valid for three years and can be used during that time to purchase handguns in lieu of a background check at the point of sale. One problem with the current system is the three-year timeframe, he said.

If a certificate holder commits a crime or is the subject of a protection order – or any other circumstance that would disqualify them from purchasing a handgun – before the certificate expires, Brewer said, there is no process for law enforcement to be notified and to rescind the certificate.

Instead of the current system, LB883 would harmonize the requirement to purchase a handgun with the state's requirements for long guns and shotguns, which require a background check for every retail purchase at the point of sale through the National Instant Criminal Background Check System, or NICS.

"We're just trying to clean that up so it's safer for everyone involved, so that you don't have people fall through the cracks," Brewer said.

He added that the \$5 certificate fee is not enough to cover the cost to counties to perform a background check and issue the certificate.

Kelsey Remmers, who manages the NICS program for the Nebraska State Patrol, testified in favor of the bill on behalf of the NSP. She said LB883 would enhance public safety by requiring a NICS query for any handgun purchased. Nebraska currently is the only state in the country with a separate, state-level background check for handgun purchases that allows a permit to be used instead of a NICS background check to purchase a handgun, she said.

"This [bill] would increase the

[number] of background checks occurring at the time of purchase, which is important because firearm-prohibiting information continues to be updated and/or entered into federal databases daily," Remmers said. "Confirming eligibility regularly utilizing a NICS background check is in the best interest of public safety and is paramount in the effort to ensure firearms stay out of the hands of prohibited individuals."

Testifying in opposition was Sharon O'Neal of Lincoln, a volunteer with Moms Demand Action. If the current certificate program is an unfunded mandate on counties, she said, the solution would be to fund the system adequately, not to discontinue the certificate process – especially at a time when gun homicides and suicides continue to rise.

"I urge you not to reduce our gun safety laws," O'Neal said.

Chief Deputy William Rinn of the Douglas County Sheriff's Department offered neutral testimony on LB883. He agreed that three years is too long for the current handgun purchase certificate to be in effect, and acknowledged that not all county sheriff's offices have the resources that Douglas County enjoys. On the other hand, Rinn said, his office has at times caught information missed in a NICS search that disqualified individuals from purchasing a handgun.

"The NICS process is not perfect," he said.

The committee took no immediate action on the proposal.

Age verification proposed for adult website access

A bill that would require websites containing sexually explicit content to verify a user's age was considered Feb. 21 by the Judiciary Committee.

LB1092, introduced by Glenvil

Sen. Dave Murman, would adopt the Online Age Verification Liability Act. The bill would bar a commercial entity from knowingly publishing or distributing material harmful to minors online by requiring them to use a reasonable age verification method to verify that the person attempting to access material is at least 18 or older.



Sen. Dave Murman

Under the bill, digitized identification cards, third-party age verification services or any commercially reasonable method that relies on public or private transactional data to verify a person's age could constitute a reasonable age verification method.

The proposal also would allow individuals, parents or guardians harmed by an entity that violates the act's provisions to pursue a civil lawsuit against the entity and potentially recover damages. LB1092 would not apply to any legitimate news-gathering organization or broadcaster, and internet providers would not be held liable if a minor accesses explicit content due to an entity's failure to implement an age verification method.

Murman said nearly three out of four teens have reported being exposed to online pornography. Such content also has become increasingly violent, he said, with 90% of scenes in pornographic videos portraying physical aggression – almost always against women – which distorts adolescents' perception of healthy relationships and sex.

"This bill protects our most vulnerable women and children," Murman said.

Joseph Kohm testified in support of the bill on behalf of the Family Policy Alliance, an organization based out of Colorado. Age verification for

pornographic websites is “crucial” in order to limit childrens’ exposure to sexually explicit content, he said. Seventy-five percent of youth have seen pornographic content by the time they reach age 17, Kohm said, and the average age at which children first encounter pornography ranges from 7 to 13.

Representing the Institute for Family Studies, Michael Toscano also spoke in support of the measure. He said children who are addicted to pornography are more likely to suffer from mental health problems, with regular pornography consumption exacerbating conditions such as anxiety and depression.

Content available on pornographic websites also can be disturbing, Toscano said, with content easily accessible that features minors, sexual assault, sex trafficking and violence.

“Pornography sites are exposing children to nothing less than moral harms,” he said.

Nate Grasz testified in support of the bill on behalf of the Nebraska Family Alliance. He said enacting age verification for pornographic websites would be consistent with other measures in place that protect children from explicit content, such as being 17 or needing a guardian’s approval to attend an R-rated movie.

“Given the harmful effects of pornography, it is dangerously inconsistent to not also require age verification for pornographic websites,” Grasz said.

Opposing the measure was Korby Gilbertson, testifying on behalf of Media Nebraska, Inc.. She expressed concern that the measure would violate the First Amendment by legislating speech. Additionally, Gilbertson said, other states that have passed similar measures are facing ongoing litigation as a result.

Jane Seu, speaking on behalf of ACLU Nebraska, also testified against the measure. Requiring age verification to access certain online content would have a “chilling effect” on protected speech, she said, and would put internet users’ privacy at risk.

“Age verification policies claim to be about internet safety, but all they do is legitimize surveillance regimes,” Seu said. “Forcing people to expose identifying information to access content online violates individuals’ right to privacy and to anonymity.”

The committee took no immediate action on LB1092.



Conservation exemption for road projects considered

The Transportation and Telecommunications Committee heard testimony Feb. 21 on a bill intended to better balance the conservation of Nebraska’s threatened and endangered species with highway maintenance.

Under LB1335, introduced by Columbus Sen. Mike Moser, the Nebraska Nongame and Endangered Species Conservation Act would not apply to the actions of state agencies or political subdivisions in certain circumstances when they design, construct, reconstruct, repair, operate or maintain transportation infrastructure, including roads, streets and highways.

Moser said he introduced the bill at the request of the state Department

of Transportation, which has found that the current law inhibits the maintenance and improvement of existing transportation infrastructure. Under LB1335, he said, the department still would be required to comply with the law when disrupting land for new projects, but it would be exempt for subsequent work in the same area.

Moser said the bill also would clarify that highways and their associated rights-of-way are manmade structures and not intended to serve as critical habitat for endangered or threatened species.

LB1335 also would require agencies and political subdivisions – to the extent practical – to consider the impact on threatened and endangered species when designing, constructing, reconstructing, repairing, operating or maintaining transportation infrastructure.

Testifying in support of the bill was Khalil Jaber, deputy director of engineering for the state Department of Transportation. Under current law, he said, the department is required to set aside two acres for each acre it disturbs when working in the range of the American burying beetle, which in Nebraska is found mainly in the Sandhills.

Without the proposed exemption, Jaber said, the department may have to purchase easements repeatedly for the routine maintenance, repair or resurfacing of highways and rights-of-way, delaying projects and increasing costs.

Testifying in opposition to the bill was Kristal Stoner of Audubon Great Plains. She said lawmakers could better address the conflict between current law and the department’s need to maintain highways by requiring agencies to obtain a state permit for the “taking” of an endangered or threatened species that is incidental to otherwise lawful activity, as allowed under the federal



Sen. Mike Moser

Endangered Species Act.

As introduced, Stoner added, LB1335 would make it optional for an agency to restore any habitat it disturbs in the right-of-way.

“If, as a part of this construction ... they destroy habitat that is needed for threatened and endangered species, they should be required to put it back,” she said.

Timothy McCoy, director of the state Game and Parks Commission, gave neutral testimony on LB1335. As introduced, the bill would allow exempted parties to ask the commission for support and recommendations relating to transportation infrastructure projects’ potential impact on threatened or endangered species.

McCoy requested that senators instead require exempted parties to consult with the commission on potential habitat restoration measures while allowing them to decide what, if any, action to take.

“If we can find a way that we can encourage good behavior and not create a future penalty for providing that conservation benefit to those species, I think it’s something we should talk about,” he said.

The committee took no immediate action on the bill.

REVENUE

Excise tax on commercial electric vehicle charging proposed

Nebraska would qualify for federal funding intended to establish a national electric vehicle charging network under a bill heard Feb. 22 by the Revenue Committee.

LB1218, sponsored by Lincoln Sen. Eliot Bostar, would impose an excise

tax of 3 cents per kilowatt hour on the electricity used to charge electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles at a commercial electric vehicle charging station beginning in 2028.

State fuel tax revenue will decrease as more Nebraskans purchase vehicles powered by electricity rather than fossil fuels, Bostar said, resulting in less funding for road maintenance and construction. EV drivers currently contribute to road infrastructure funding only through a higher registration fee, he said.

“This change means that drivers of electric vehicles will contribute to infrastructure funding based on the amount of energy they consume, similar to drivers of traditional fuel vehicles,” Bostar said.

LB1218 would allow an electric supplier to own, maintain and operate a direct-current, fast-charging station for retail services only at a location that is at least 15 miles from a privately owned station and at least one mile from a federally designated alternative fuel corridor.

An electric supplier also would have to conduct a right of first refusal process before beginning construction of a fast-charging station.

Vicki Kramer, director of the state Department of Transportation, testified in support of the bill. She said it would allow private charging station operators in Nebraska to qualify for \$30 million in federal funds under the National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Program, which requires recipients to charge customers based on the amount of kilowatts per hour they consume.

Nebraska currently requires retailers to charge based on the amount of



Sen. Eliot Bostar

time a customer draws electricity from a charger, Kramer said.

“Most of the intended recipients of the NEVI funds in Nebraska, such as fuel centers, car dealerships [and] local governments ... are unable to receive the funds under current law,” she said.

Randy Gard testified in support of LB1218 on behalf of the Nebraska Petroleum Marketers and Convenience Store Association and Bosselman Enterprises. He said the bill would ensure that retailers who choose to offer EV charging would not have to compete with electric utilities, which can pass on the cost of installing and operating fast-charging stations to their ratepayers.

“I believe these guardrails will ensure that Nebraska’s EV charging market develops with the same robust competition that has defined the traditional refueling markets for decades,” Gard said.

Testifying in opposition to LB1218 was Lincoln Electric System CEO Emeka Anyanwu. He said the proposed right of first refusal process would give an unfair economic advantage to private companies and interfere with the utility’s mission to provide ratepayers with “timely and equitable access” to EV charging.

“We have skilled staff, processes and procedures that make us more than well equipped to handle this kind of service to our customers,” Anyanwu said. “We reject the idea that the private sector can do it better than we can.”

Also in opposition was James Dukesherer, who testified on behalf of the Nebraska Rural Electric Association and the Nebraska Power Association. Giving retailers the right of first refusal to build a fast-charging station is unjustified, he said, because there have been no instances of an electric utility’s station undercutting

one belonging to a private business.

“We are more than happy to sell these companies the electricity they will need to power these chargers,” Dukesherer said. “What we can’t do is support a statute that says public power is not allowed to sell electricity in Nebraska without first obtaining permission to do so.”

The committee took no immediate action on the bill.

Income tax exclusion for guard members advanced

Lawmakers gave first-round approval Feb. 20 to a bill intended to help recruit and retain Nebraska National Guard members.

LB1394, sponsored by Sen. Tom Brewer of Gordon at the request of Gov. Jim Pillen, would allow guard members to exclude certain income from their federal adjusted gross income for state tax purposes beginning with tax year 2025.



Sen. Tom Brewer

Brewer said the bill would allow guard members to exclude the income they receive for attending weekend drills and annual training. The change would incentivize more Nebraskans to join the guard, which has struggled in recent years to meet its recruiting goals, he said.

The state Department of Revenue estimates that LB1394 would reduce state general fund revenue by \$969,000 in fiscal year 2024-25, \$2.2 million in FY2025-26 and \$2 million in FY2026-27.

The bill advanced to select file on a vote of 37-0.

TRANSPORTATION & TELECOMMUNICATIONS

911 outage reporting, hearing requirements proposed

The Transportation and Telecommunications Committee heard testimony Feb. 20 on a bill intended to help state regulators investigate 911 service system outages.

Under LB1256, introduced by Bennington Sen. Wendy DeBoer, a communications service provider that must file reports regarding 911 service system outages with the Federal Communications Commission also would have to file copies of those reports with the Nebraska Public Service Commission.



Sen. Wendy DeBoer

The bill would require the PSC to hold a public hearing within 90 days of receiving a report.

DeBoer said more than three months passed between a 911 service outage in August 2023 and a related public hearing held by the PSC. Requiring service providers to submit federally required outage reports to the commission would speed up any future investigations, she said.

“Any time there is an outage,” DeBoer said, “the public deserves to know why the outage occurred, that there are plans in place to avoid an outage from occurring in the future and who is ... being held responsible or accountable for the outage.”

Dan Watermeier testified in support of LB1256 on behalf of the PSC. He said the proposed requirements would make 911 outage investigations more transparent to the public, help-

ing to alleviate any concerns about the system’s reliability.

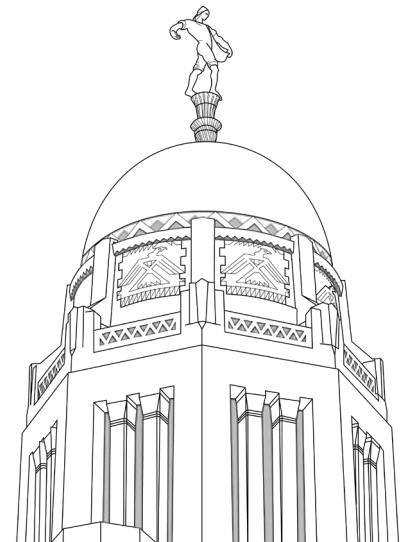
Also in support was Buffalo County Sheriff Neil Miller, who testified on behalf of the Nebraska Sheriffs Association, Police Chiefs Association of Nebraska, Police Officers Association of Nebraska and Nebraska Association of County Officials. He said the bill would ensure a more timely and thorough review of 911 outages.

“The more information we can obtain, the quicker that it can be reviewed, the better [the] opportunity to prevent it from happening in the future,” Miller said.

Testifying in opposition to LB1256 was Jake Lestock of CTIA, a wireless communications industry trade association. He said the bill is unnecessary because it would duplicate the FCC’s “robust” 911 outage reporting requirements, raising compliance costs for wireless providers.

Lestock said state entities like the PSC already may obtain outage reports from the FCC if they meet requirements intended to prevent the release of sensitive information about wireless infrastructure.

The committee took no immediate action on the bill. ■



PRIORITY BILLS

Priority bills generally are scheduled for debate before other bills. Each senator may select one priority bill, each standing committee may select two priority bills and the Speaker of the Legislature may select 25 priority bills.

Senator and committee priority bill lists appeared in Issue 7 of the Unicameral Update. A list of all priority bills is available on NebraskaLegislature.gov under Recent Legislative Information.

SPEAKER PRIORITY BILLS

Priority	Bill	Introducer	One-line description
Speaker Arch	LB78	Day	Redefine massage therapy under the Massage Therapy Practice Act
Speaker Arch	LB233	J. Cavanaugh	Provide for child support payment disregard under aid to dependent children program and eliminate child support income in determining eligibility
Speaker Arch	LB308	Bostar	Adopt the Genetic Information Privacy Act
Speaker Arch	LB607	McDonnell	Change provisions relating to grants for the 211 Information and Referral Network
Speaker Arch	LB664	Riepe	Provide powers and duties for the state Medicaid fraud control unit and the attorney general
Speaker Arch	LB834	Blood	Establish requirements for a resident dental license
Speaker Arch	LB839	Lowe	Change provisions relating to the executive director and members of the State Racing and Gaming Commission
Speaker Arch	LB852	Jacobson	Provide limitations for reimbursement for durable medical equipment
Speaker Arch	LB870	M. Cavanaugh	Provide for additional rights of notification, information, and preservation of evidence under the Sexual Assault Victims' Bill of Rights Act
Speaker Arch	LB874	Bostar	Change requirements relating to child care licensing and child care facilities
Speaker Arch	LB876	Holdcroft	Adopt the Newborn Safe Haven Act
Speaker Arch	LB894	Ibach	Change law enforcement certification requirements for candidates for county sheriff
Speaker Arch	LB906	Riepe	Change provisions relating to child labor laws
Speaker Arch	LB932	Fredrickson	Change provisions relating to provisional mental health practitioner licenses
Speaker Arch	LB1027	Clements	Change provisions relating to schools which elect not to meet accreditation and approval requirements
Speaker Arch	LB1030	Bostelman	Change provisions of the County Bridge Match Program and provide for a transfer of funds from the Roads Operations Cash Fund
Speaker Arch	LB1051	DeBoer	Eliminate obsolete provisions and reorganize provisions of the Nebraska Juvenile Code and change certain filing deadlines
Speaker Arch	LB1069	Halloran	Change provisions relating to the State Fire Marshal, pipeline facility administration assessments, and the Boiler Inspection Act and eliminate the Nebraska Fire Safety Appeal Board, appeals procedures, and obsolete provisions
Speaker Arch	LB1088	Linehan	Change provisions relating to certain employment and investment requirements under the Nebraska Advantage Act
Speaker Arch	LB1126	Bosn	Create the National Career Readiness Certificate Pilot Program within the Department of Correctional Services
Speaker Arch	LB1195	Conrad	Change provisions relating to county attorneys, public defenders, and loan repayments for attorneys practicing in certain rural areas
Speaker Arch	LB1197	von Gillern	Change the Sports Arena Facility Financing Assistance Act
Speaker Arch	LB1306	Education	Eliminate the Professional Practices Commission and provide, change, and eliminate provisions relating to standards for and conduct of teachers and administrators
Speaker Arch	LB1344	Wayne	Change provisions of the Nebraska Innovation Hub Act
Speaker Arch	LB1393	Hansen	Change provisions of the Nebraska Student-Athlete Name, Image, or Likeness Rights Act

COMMITTEE HEARINGS

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

Tuesday, Feb. 27

Banking, Commerce & Insurance

Room 1507 - 1:30 p.m.

- LB990 (Bostar) Change provisions of the Pharmacy Benefit Manager Licensure and Regulation Act
- LB1232 (Wayne) Prohibit certain actions under the Pharmacy Benefit Manager Licensure and Regulation Act
- LB833 (Blood) Adopt the Prescription Drug Affordability Act
- LB984 (Hardin) Prohibit certain actions relating to distribution of drugs by 340B entities
- LB1110 (Jacobson) Require dental plan carriers to meet a minimum dental loss ratio and provide a report to the Department of Insurance as prescribed
- LB1290 (DeBoer) Provide requirements for special needs trusts as prescribed
- LB954 (Kauth) Adopt the Biometric Autonomy Liberty Law

Education

Room 1525 - 1:30 p.m.

- Appointments:* Jeffrey Nellhaus, Linda Poole - Technical Advisory Committee for Statewide Assessment
- Appointments:* Courtney C. Wittstruck, Patricia M. Kircher - Neb. Educational Telecommunications Commission
- LB957 (Dungan) Provide for early childhood aid under the Tax Equity and Educational Opportunities Support Act
- LB1150 (Brandt) Change the Tax Equity and Educational Opportunities Support Act
- LB1065 (Lippincott) Authorize a school district to hire a chaplain to perform the duties of a school counselor without a certificate issued by the Commissioner of Education
- LB1006 (Walz) Change provisions relating to allocated income tax funds under the Tax Equity and Educational Opportunities Support Act
- LB1011 (Walz) Change provisions relating to early childhood education under the Tax Equity and Educational Opportunities Support Act
- LB1013 (Walz) Create the Family Engagement Grant Program for certain schools

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

- LB1340 (Kauth) Change provisions relating to enforcement of offenses related to interactive or handheld wireless communication devices, speed limit violations, removal of vehicles from highways, and motor vehicle homicide
- LB1186 (Sanders) Change provisions of the One-Call Notification System Act
- LB1105 (DeKay) Name the Branded Certificate of Title Act and provide for the issuance of destroyed-vehicle branded certificates of title
- LB1180 (Wishart) Change provisions relating to standards established by the Public Service Commission for specialized telecommunications equipment under the Telecommunications Relay System Act

Wednesday, Feb. 28

Executive Board

Room 2102 - 12:00 p.m.

- LB1285 (Walz) Create the Task Force on Supported Employment
- LR281CA (Erdman) Constitutional amendment to provide for biennial legislative sessions beginning in 2027

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

- LB1203 (J. Cavanaugh) Regulate artificial intelligence in media and political advertisements under the Nebraska Political Accountability and Disclosure Act
- LB1382 (Hansen) Prohibit paying petition circulators based on the number of signatures and prohibit certain contributions to ballot question committees
- LB1390 (Bostar) Require a report and prohibit certain activities related to elections and change and provide penalties (*Note: Joint hearing with LB1262*)
- LB1262 (Day) Change and eliminate provisions relating to the Commission on Indian Affairs and provide for an ongoing study relating to Native American voting issues (*Note: Joint hearing with LB1390*)

Health & Human Services

Room 1510 - 1:30 p.m.

- LB871 (M. Cavanaugh) Require a report by the Department of Health and Human Services regarding the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program
- LB1237 (M. Cavanaugh) Require a report regarding the medical assistance program
- LB1261 (Walz) Adopt the Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis Respite Services Act
- LB1280 (McDonnell) Provide eligibility for child care assistance to qualified apprentices and semiconductor workers

Judiciary

Room 1113 - 1:30 p.m.

- LB967 (DeKay) Change provisions relating to trafficking offenses and the Human Trafficking Victim Assistance Fund
- LR277CA (Sanders) Constitutional amendment to require the Legislature to enact laws providing for life imprisonment for sex or labor trafficking of a minor and certain sex offenses involving minors
- LR279CA (Holdcroft) Constitutional amendment to require the Legislature to enact laws providing for a minimum term of life imprisonment for certain offenses against first responders
- LB980 (McKinney) Change provisions relating to persons present when the death penalty is carried out
- LB970 (Lippincott) Provide for carrying out the death penalty by nitrogen hypoxia

Revenue

Room 1524 - 1:30 p.m.

- LB1379 (Dover) Change the rate and disbursement of the documentary stamp tax and provide for grants by the Department of Economic Development for its comprehensive housing affordability strategy
- LB1361 (McDonnell) Adopt the Long-Term Resident Homestead Exemption Act
- LB924 (McKinney) Provide a homestead exemption for residents of qualified census tracts

COMMITTEE HEARINGS

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

- LB1043 (McKinney) Require the development of certain real property and provide for the revocation of property tax exemptions
- LB1040 (Fredrickson) Change provisions relating to income tax credits for food donations
- LB1346 (Vargas) Provide a property tax exemption for qualified affordable housing developments

- on certain property owned by political subdivisions
- LB974 (Holdcroft) Change penalties for motor vehicle homicide of an unborn child
- LB1156 (Holdcroft) Require registration under the Sex Offender Registration Act for certain solicitation and trafficking offenses

- Revenue**
Room 1524 - 1:30 p.m.
 LB1149 (Day) Provide an exemption from the motor vehicle tax for motor vehicles with Gold Star Family plates
 LB1342 (Wayne) Provide a sales and use tax exemption for electricity and natural gas
 AM2672 to LB1317 ■

Thursday, Feb. 29
Government, Military & Veterans Affairs
Room 1507 - 1:30 p.m.

- LB1153 (Arch) Eliminate provisions relating to the Nebraska Sesquicentennial Commission that has terminated
- LB1417 (Brewer) Create, eliminate, terminate, and provide, change, eliminate, and transfer powers, duties, and membership of boards, commissions, committees, councils, task forces, panels, authorities, and departments and change and eliminate funds
- LB1327 (Brewer) Restate findings under the Nebraska Political Accountability and Disclosure Act
- LB1246 (Brewer) Change provisions relating to county government

- Health & Human Services**
Room 1510 - 1:30 p.m.
- LB982 (Riepe) Provide for employment of nurse aides in intellectual and developmental disabilities facilities
 - LB1086 (Walz) Eliminate the Department of Health and Human Services and create three departments
 - LB1283 (Arch) Correct the name of a commission in the Medicine and Surgery Practice Act
 - LB1392 (Ballard) Change provisions relating to the Foster Care Reimbursement Rate Committee

- Judiciary**
Room 1113 - 1:30 p.m.
- LB1185 (Lowe) Change the offense of obstructing a peace officer
 - LB1224 (Day) Prohibit certain conduct relating to mobile tracking devices and change provisions relating to intercepted communications
 - LB1357 (McDonnell) Prohibit camping



Unicameral Youth Legislature registration now open

High school students with an interest in law, government, leadership or public speaking are encouraged to register for the 2024 Unicameral Youth Legislature, which will convene June 10-14.

In this legislative simulation conducted at the State Capitol Building, high school students from around the state have the opportunity to take on the role of lawmakers. Student senators sponsor bills, conduct committee hearings, debate legislation and discover the unique process of the nation's only unicameral by learning directly from current state senators and staff.

The program is conducted by the Clerk of the Nebraska Legislature, through the Unicameral Information Office, in coordination with Big Red Summer Camps.

Registrants are encouraged to apply for a Speaker Greg Adams Civic Scholarship award, which covers the full cost of admission. Other scholarships may also be available. Note that all scholarships are awarded prior to registration.

For information on registration and scholarships, visit the Unicameral Youth Legislature page: NebraskaLegislature.gov/uyl. ■

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