

Testimony on LB 968
Before the Health and Human Services Committee
Nebraska Legislature
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Good afternoon Senator Riepe and members of the committee. For the record, my name is Brad B-R-A-D Meurrens M-E-U-R-R-E-N-S and I am the Public Policy Director for Disability Rights Nebraska, the designated Protection and Advocacy organization for people with disabilities in Nebraska. I am here today in strong support of LB 968.

While policymakers tout the individual and collective benefits of competitive employment, Nebraska continues to ignore and has refused to act substantively on ways to improve the employment of its citizens with disabilities. Many Nebraskans with disabilities want the opportunity to work, want the opportunity to take a better paying job, or want the opportunity to take a promotion or a raise. However, individuals with disabilities who rely on the Medicaid program for their essential healthcare needs face a draconian decision when seeking any of the aforementioned opportunities: either be gainfully employed and jeopardize eligibility for Medicaid or stay unemployed with no risk to their Medicaid coverage (at full cost to the state). In other words, Nebraskans with disabilities have to finesse a very fine line that is unique to them: try to get a job and earn a good wage, but don't make too much money lest you be deemed ineligible for Medicaid.

For many people with disabilities, Medicaid is the only healthcare coverage they can get or is the only healthcare program that meets their unique health needs. Thus, many people with disabilities who want to work, get a raise, or take a new/better job are stuck in a state of "forced dependency". It is often very easy to label individuals in this state as "takers" or to just say "get a job". However, it is often not that easy for Nebraskans with disabilities, given the mix of social and employer attitudes toward people with disabilities as well as the systemic policy

structures that directly inhibit or discourage employment for people with disabilities on Medicaid.

Nebraskans with disabilities have an employment rate around half of their peers without disabilities (Nebraskans with disabilities have an employment rate 49.8%; Nebraskans without disabilities have an 85.7% employment rate) and 31.9% of Nebraskans with disabilities age 21-64 were employed full-time/full-year whereas 67.6% of Nebraskans without disabilities were employed full-time/full-year.¹

LB 968 presents an opportunity for individuals with disabilities who are already receiving Medicaid benefits to get a job or a better paying job without the scare of losing their Medicaid coverage. LB 968 presents a long-overdue opportunity for Nebraskans with disabilities who are working or want to work to escape forced dependency. LB 968 would allow them to save and to earn a good living which has a myriad of beneficial effects both individually and collectively. LB 968 allows more Nebraskans with disabilities to have “skin in the game” economically, through increased wages, taxes, and sliding-scale premiums; although it would seem that since Medicaid is their lifeline, they already have the most “skin” in the game.

However, we would suggest one small change in the language on page 4, subsection (g), lines 3 through 6. We would prefer that subsection to read: “one representative from the designated Protection and Advocacy organization in Nebraska”, so that the language in (g) would read as follows: “one representative from the ~~federal~~ designated Protection and Advocacy organization in Nebraska ~~for 4 Individuals with Developmental Disabilities program created by the 5 federal Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act, 42 6 U.S.C. 15001 et seq., as such act existed on January 1, 2018~~”

We recommend LB 968 be advanced.

¹ Erickson, W., Lee, C., von Schrader, S. (2017). Disability Statistics from the American Community Survey (ACS). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Yang-Tan Institute (YTI). Retrieved from Cornell University Disability Statistics website: www.disabilitystatistics.org