

Disability Rights Nebraska

Protection and Advocacy for People with Disabilities

**Testimony on LB 493
Before the Appropriations Committee
Nebraska Legislature**

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Good afternoon Senator Stinner 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 with Disability Rights Nebraska. Disability Rights Nebraska is the designated Protection and Advocacy organization for persons with disabilities in Nebraska. I am here today in support of LB 493.

For decades, Nebraska has had maintained and supported a severely long waiting list for developmental disability services where individuals and families wait years for services. A recent 2019 analysis¹ of the Nebraska developmental disability services demonstrated:

1. While almost 5,000 Nebraskans received developmental disability services in 2018, another 2,300 sat on the state waiting list not receiving services.
2. Typically, a person on the waiting list in 2017 or 2018 was on the waiting list for six to seven years, with some having waited almost eight years.

Of those on the waiting list, about three-quarters are between the ages of 10 and 30, while only about one in six are over age 30. The analysis also acknowledged the important fiscal support this committee has provided over the years to manage the size and growth of the developmental disability services waiting list. The analysis also described the importance of substantial state funding for services so individuals and families can move off of the waiting list (*ideally* providing adequate funding for services to eliminate the waiting list as the *ultimate* goal)²:

¹ See Disability Rights Nebraska and The Nebraska Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (2019) "Waiting for Services: Analyzing the Impact of Nebraska's Developmental Disabilities Waiting List", October, available at https://www.disabilityrightsnebraska.org/what_we_do/most-inclusive-settings/developmental-disabilities-waiting-list-initiative.html

² Testimony of Dr. Eric Evans Legislative Resolution 216 (2019) before the Health and Human Services Committee, Nebraska Legislature, p. 2. Available at https://www.disabilityrightsnebraska.org/file_download/4914894a-7c06-423d-bd58-bd252c9f61ba

The data clearly also shows what is likely to happen if we don't act on the waiting list in a timely manner: during the course of the next five years the State would need to increase its annual spending on developmental disabilities by \$113 million to account for annual growth in service costs [approximately a 50-50 split between state and federal funds]. In terms of the cost to eliminate the waiting list by 2024, the State would have to allocate an additional \$67 million...

In addition to the economic reasons to invest in services (and not waiting), the state has a compelling moral obligation to substantially address (and ultimately eliminate) the waiting list³:

Nebraska was the first state in the nation to make the commitment to serve people with intellectual/developmental disabilities in the community and this idea has spread worldwide. We were also among the first states to pass legislation requiring schools to open their doors to students with disabilities--two years before the passage of federal legislation. We have a system of medical, social and educational services for infants, children and youth with disabilities, from the date of diagnosis through age 21. Yet, we have approximately 2,300 people on the waiting list who need services but cannot obtain them. How can we justify providing the services and supports to individuals over many years, and at significant cost, only to abandon them because they don't qualify for an existing service or they have aged out of the educational system? We must do more than offer them a hollow promise of the good life. We have a moral obligation to do so.

Disability Rights Nebraska recommends that LB 493 be advanced.

For further information or comment, please do not hesitate to contact me: brad@drne.org or 402-474-3183.

³ Ibid, pp. 3-4