

Health and Human Services Committee
LB 225
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Good afternoon, Senator Riepe, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Doug Weinberg (D-O-U-G W-E-I-N-B-E-R-G) and I am the Director of the Division of Children and Family Services in the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). I am here to testify in a neutral capacity to LB 225. This bill would allow the Division of Children and Family Services to continue Alternative Response and expand the program to all counties in Nebraska until December 31, 2020.

Alternative Response is a new approach to help families, with less severe reports of child abuse and/or neglect, connect with the supports and services they need in order to enhance the parent's ability to keep their children safe and healthy. Research shows that families who receive an assessment rather than an investigation are more likely to be receptive to and engage in services when they are approached in a non-adversarial, non-accusatory manner. Alternative Response began in October 2014 in five pilot counties and is currently in 57 counties.

While DHHS has no position on this bill at this time, we would like to take this opportunity to share the following technical issues.

LB 225 does not allow for Alternative Response continuation after December 31, 2020. This timeline meets terms and conditions of the Title IV-E waiver. However, DHHS prefers the flexibility to continue the program at the end of the waiver without additional approval of the Legislature.

LB 225 does not include an end date to the evaluation requirement. DHHS has contracted with an independent evaluator to evaluate the Alternative Response program as part of the Title IV-E waiver. The current evaluation will stop collecting data on June 30, 2019. DHHS would need to negotiate a new contract for any evaluation after the June 30, 2019, and cannot guarantee the current evaluator would be willing to continue the evaluation process.

Finally, LB 225 contains no emergency clause. Current statute only authorizes Alternative Response through July 1, 2017. Without an emergency clause there could be a lapse in services to the current Alternative Response families; DHHS would be unable to accept new Alternative Response families until this bill becomes effective and DHHS would violate the terms and

conditions of the Title IV-E Waiver.

DHHS anticipates that as the Alternative Response program expands, families will be more able to safely care for their children and less children will enter the foster care system.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you regarding LB 0225. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.