

# Lawmaking in Nebraska: An Advocate's Overview of How it Works

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# The Legislature: An Overview

- There are 49 senators in the Nebraska Legislature. Each senator represents one district that has about 35,000 people living in it. You live in one of these 49 districts.
- Senators are elected by citizens and serve four-year terms. About half of the Legislature is up for election or re-election every two years. To be a state senator, you must be at least 21 years old, have lived in your district for one year and be a registered voter.
- The Nebraska Legislature is a citizen legislature, which means most of its members have other jobs in addition to serving as a state senator. Senators receive \$12,000 a year for serving in the Legislature.

# The Legislature: An Overview

- The lawmaking process in Nebraska officially begins when a senator introduces a bill into the Legislature, which meets each January. But the process actually begins much earlier, when a senator first begins to formulate ideas for new laws.
- An idea for a new law may be suggested by anyone: concerned citizens, special interest groups, state agencies or the governor.

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Nebraska State Capitol  
(Photo: Nebraska Unicameral Information Office)

# The Legislature: An Overview



Norris Chamber, Nebraska State Capitol  
(photo: Nebraska Unicameral Information Office)

- Before the Legislature can formally consider the idea, it must be introduced as a bill by a senator or legislative committee.
- Committees debate and propose amendments to bills, and the full Legislature has an opportunity to debate each bill at least two times before its final passage.
- Senators may propose amendments to alter a bill at each stage of debate.

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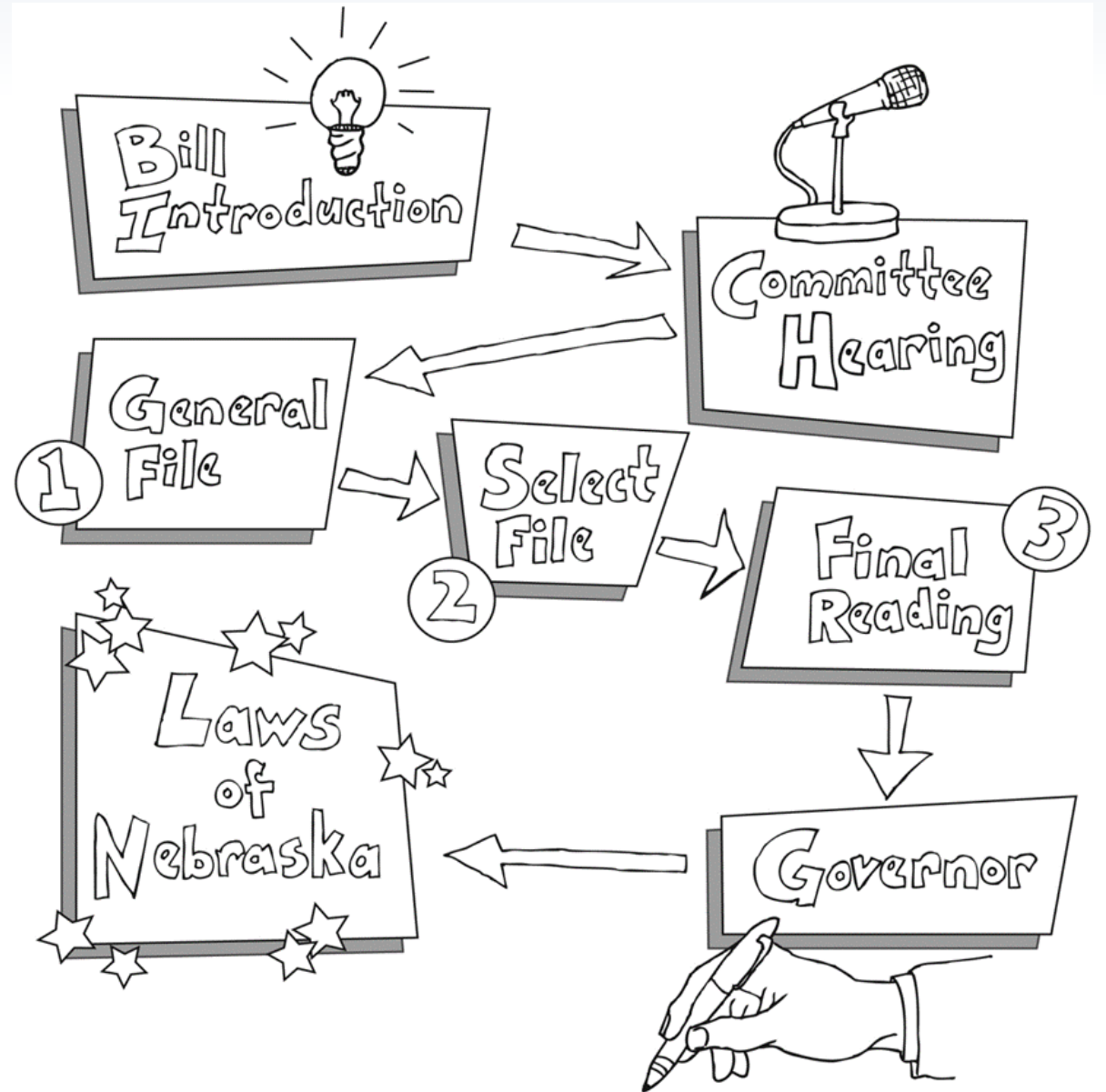
# *FROM A BILL TO A LAW*

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# Legislative Process

Bill Introduction →  
Committee Hearing →  
General File →  
Select File →  
Final Reading →  
Governor →  
Laws of Nebraska



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# Bill Introduction

- Roughly 500 – 800 bills are introduced each session.
- The idea must be introduced by a senator to be formally considered by the Legislature.
- Committees then debate and propose amendments to introduced bills, and the full Legislature has an opportunity to debate each bill at least two times (General File and Select File).

## RESOURCES

[www.nebraskalegislature.gov](http://www.nebraskalegislature.gov)

Bill Room: Rm. 1104

Unicameral Update

Legislative Hotline: 800-742-7456

# Committees

- With the exception of a few technical bills, all legislative bills must receive a public hearing by a legislative committee where citizens have a chance to express their opinions to committee members.
- After the hearing, committees may vote to send the bill to General File with or without amendments, indefinitely postpone the bill or take no action on it.

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Warner Chamber, Nebraska State Capitol  
(photo: Nebraska Unicameral Information Office)



# Legislative Committees

The Nebraska Legislature has 14 standing committees:

1. **Agriculture**
2. **Appropriations**
3. **Banking, Commerce, Insurance**
4. **Business & Labor**
5. **Education**
6. **General Affairs**
7. **Government, Military & Veterans Affairs**
8. **Health & Human Services**
9. **Judiciary**
10. **Natural Resources**
11. **Nebraska Retirement Systems**
12. **Revenue**
13. **Transportation & Telecommunications**
14. **Urban Affairs**

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# Committee Hearing

- After a bill is introduced, it is sent to a committee.
- After the public hearing, the committee members consider what action they want to take on the bill.
- They can advance the bill as it is, indefinitely postpone the bill (kill it), take no action on the bill, or advance the bill to the next stage with suggested changes (amendments).

Nebraska State Capitol Library  
(Photo: Nebraska Unicameral Information Office)



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# General File

- If the committee advances a bill, it goes to the General File stage.
- General file is the first time the full Legislature has the opportunity to debate and vote on a bill.
- Senators also can propose amendments in General File.
- It takes a majority vote of the Legislature (25 votes) to adopt amendments and to move a bill from General File to the next stage of consideration.



Memorial Chamber, Nebraska State Capitol  
(Photo: Nebraska Unicameral Information Office)

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# Select File and Final Reading

## SELECT FILE

- Select File is the second time the full Legislature debates and votes on a bill.
- This step allows senators another opportunity to amend, compromise and reflect on the proposed law.
- On Select File, a bill may be indefinitely postponed or advanced to the next stage.

## FINAL READING

- Final Reading is the third and last time a bill is considered by the entire Legislature.
- A bill may not be amended or debated during the Final Reading stage.
- Usually, it only takes a majority vote (25 senators) for a bill to be passed on Final Reading.
- A bill with an emergency clause requires a vote of 2/3 (33 senators) of the Legislature.

# Last Step: The Governor



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- After the Legislature passes a bill in the final reading stage, it goes to the governor for his or her approval.
- The governor has five days, excluding Sundays, to decide what to do with a bill.
- If the governor signs a bill or declines to act on it, the bill becomes a state law.
- The governor may veto a bill, and can line-item veto, or strike specific budget items.
- The Legislature may override a governor's veto, although it takes a vote of 30 senators to do so.

# *ADVOCACY: RESOURCES & TIPS*

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# “Citizens” Unicameral Page

This page is designed to help citizens find features and resources on the Legislature’s website that may be particularly helpful to citizens:

<http://nebraskalegislature.gov/feature/citizen.php>

# Clerk of the Legislature: A Key Resource

**Patrick J. O'Donnell**

Room 2018, State Capitol

P.O. Box 94604

Lincoln, NE 68509-4604

Phone: (402) 471-2271

- The Office of the Clerk of the Legislature is the administrative arm of the Legislature.
- The office maintains official records of all legislative business.
- These records include: the Legislative Journal, bill indexes, committee hearing schedules, rosters, bill status information and legislative histories.

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# 24-Hour Request Line & Legislative Hotline

## 24-HOUR REQUEST LINE

**(402) 471-2877**

The request line may be used to request free subscriptions to the Unicameral Update, or to request free limited copies of bills, resolutions or amendment. Callers are asked to provide the bill numbers and year of the legislation they wish to receive.

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## LEGISLATIVE HOTLINE

Lincoln area, Voice & Telephone Text (V/TT): **(402) 471-2709**

Other NE areas, Voice & Telephone Text (V/TT): **(800) 742-7456**

The hot line operates during the legislative session from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Hot line staff answer questions about the status of bills and respond to information requests from callers. The service also is available to any person who has a hearing loss or speech impairment.

# Bill Room and Mail Room

## BILL ROOM

Copies of legislation also can be obtained by visiting or writing:

### Legislative Bill Room

Room 1104  
P.O. Box 94604  
State Capitol  
Lincoln, NE 68509  
(402) 471-0617

## MAIL ROOM

Senators may be reached by writing them at:

**Senator** \_\_\_\_\_  
P.O. Box 94604  
State Capitol  
Lincoln, NE 68509

A list of Senators Web Pages and a printable list of Senators by District and by Name is here:

[http://nebraskalegislature.gov/senators/senator\\_list.php](http://nebraskalegislature.gov/senators/senator_list.php)

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# Unicameral Update:

## “The Nebraska Legislature’s Official News Source Since 1977”

- The Unicameral Update is a news source produced by the Nebraska Legislature's Unicameral Information Office.
- The office also works with the Legislative Technology Center on the web site design and content, and produces various educational and informational videos, brochures, and publications about the Nebraska Legislature.
- The Unicameral Update recaps what happened in the legislature that week.
- If you would like to receive a free subscription to the print version of the Unicameral Update call (402) 471-2788.
- To view the Unicameral Update online, visit:  
<http://update.legislature.ne.gov/>

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# NEBRASKA LEGISLATURE

The official site of the Nebraska Unicameral Legislature



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## 106th Legislature, 1st Session - Day 21

View Day 21 Activity

The Legislature is adjourned until Friday, February 8, 2019 at 9:00 am.

### Recent Legislative Information

The online Nebraska statutes have been updated as of May 22, 2018.

2019 Committee List

2019 Senator List

2019 Legislative Session Calendar

A Legislator's Guide to Nebraska State Agencies (1/3/2019)

Tax Rate Review Committee Report (11/15/2018)

Hearing schedules

Written Position Letter Policy for Public Hearings

Introduced Legislation

Priority Bill Listing

General Fund Financial Status

### News from the Unicameral Update

Unicameral Update

Merger of energy, environmental quality agencies advanced

Unemployment for family caregivers clears first round

Study of issues facing Native American women advanced

Constitutional amendment to ban convict slavery advanced

Expanded tax incentive considered for college savings plan accounts

Higher pay, lower age threshold considered for lawmakers

Bill would waive occupational fees

Natural resources department rulemaking changes considered

Statewide regulations proposed for small wireless facilities

Bill would authorize transfer of county jail inmates

### Search Current Bills

Search Past Legislation

### Search Laws

### Live Video Streaming



Streaming video provided by Nebraska Educational Telecommunications

### Find Your Senator

### Legislative Calendar



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## LB17 - State a right of juveniles who have a parent with a disability

Search Current Bills

LB # Q

### Document Info

Introduced By: Briese  
Date of Introduction: January 10, 2019

### Text Copies

Introduced

### Additional Info

Statement of Intent  
Fiscal Note

### History

View Details

### Amendments

Date	Action	Journal	Vote
Jan 23, 2019	Notice of hearing for January 31, 2019	317	
Jan 14, 2019	McDonnell name added	164	
Jan 14, 2019	Referred to Judiciary Committee	130	
Jan 10, 2019	Date of introduction	80	

### Proposed by Priority

### Considered

### Related Transcripts

Floor Debate January 14, 2019

Frequent Questions

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## Senators' Web Pages

Each senator offers a page where the public can find his or her contact information, committee assignments and news releases. Senators' pages also contain his or her biography, district map, photos and information about bills the senator introduced. Click on a senator's name below to access his or her page or find your senator.

[Speaker of the Legislature](#)

[Photos](#)

[Print Friendly List Of Current Senators - Sorted By Both Last Name And District](#)

Find Your Senator

Enter Street Address, City State Zip



### Links to Senators' Web Pages

Sort by Last Name or District

Name	District
Sort By District	
Speaker of the Legislature	19
Albrecht, Joni	17
Arch, John	14
Blood, Carol	3
Bolz, Kate	29
Bostelman, Bruce	23
Brandt, Tom	32
Brewer, Tom	43
Briese, Tom	41

### Search Current Bills

LB #



Search Past Legislation

### Search Laws



Browse Statutes by Chapter

### Live Video Streaming



Streaming video provided by Nebraska Educational Telecommunications

### Find Your Senator

Enter Street Address, City State



### Legislative Calendar

February

07

Today

February

			1	2
3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27
28				

Month View

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# Live Streaming Hearings and Floor Debate

Nebraska's PBS & NPR Stations

Television Radio Learning Services Support NET Demand

news • sports • kids • science • arts & humanities • schedules • events • browse A-Z • work with us • about NET

## LIVE & ON DEMAND: STATE GOVERNMENT

government live streaming schedule & on demand videos

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- Any - Submit

**FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 25**

10:00 am [Legislative Hearing: General Affairs, Room 1525](#)

10:00 am [Legislative Hearing: Business and Labor, Room 1524](#)

01:30 pm [Legislative Hearing: Urban Affairs, Room 1510](#)

**THURSDAY, OCTOBER 01**

02:00 pm [Nebraska Department of Education: October 2015 NDE Work Session](#)

**FRIDAY, OCTOBER 02**

**Live & On Demand**

- NET Radio Live
- State Government**
- Mobile Apps
- Podcasts
- Streaming Media FAQ

**Series**

- All About Books
- Big Red Wrap-Up
- Consider This
- Control Diabetes for Life
- Friday Live

<http://www.netnebraska.org/basic-page/television/live-demand-state-government>

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# Bill Tracker:

This service provides a convenient way to track legislative activity in an organized way.

The eBill Book (a limited and free service) allows you to track up to 15 bills simultaneously and (if you choose) receive daily e-mail notifications of activity on your bills of interest.

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<http://www.nebraska.gov/billtracker/>

[BillTracker](#) [About](#) [FAQs](#) [Register](#) [Search Bills](#)

Nebraska Unicameral Legislature

NEBRASKA  
Good Life. Great Opportunity.

## BillTracker Home

BillTracker provides a convenient way to track legislative activity in an organized way.



### eProfiles

★ Premium Service

A premium service with fees that allows you to set up criteria (such as introducer, committee, keyword/phrase, statute section or bill number) to track legislative activity. This premium service also includes daily email notifications of activity on bills or subjects of interest. To register for Premium BillTracker services, fax this completed [agreement](#) to Nebraska.gov.

LOGIN



### eBill Book

✓ Free Service

A limited but free service that allows you to track up to 15 bills simultaneously and (if you choose) receive daily email notifications of activity on your bills of interest. To register for an eBill Book, simply click on the login link below, then click the sign-up link. You will be asked to provide an email address and then choose a password. You will receive an email notifying you that your account is ready to activate, then you simply log in and begin using your eBill Book.

[Set up an account for Premium BillTracker Services \(eProfiles\) for Agencies](#)

LOGIN



# *TESTIFYING TIPS*

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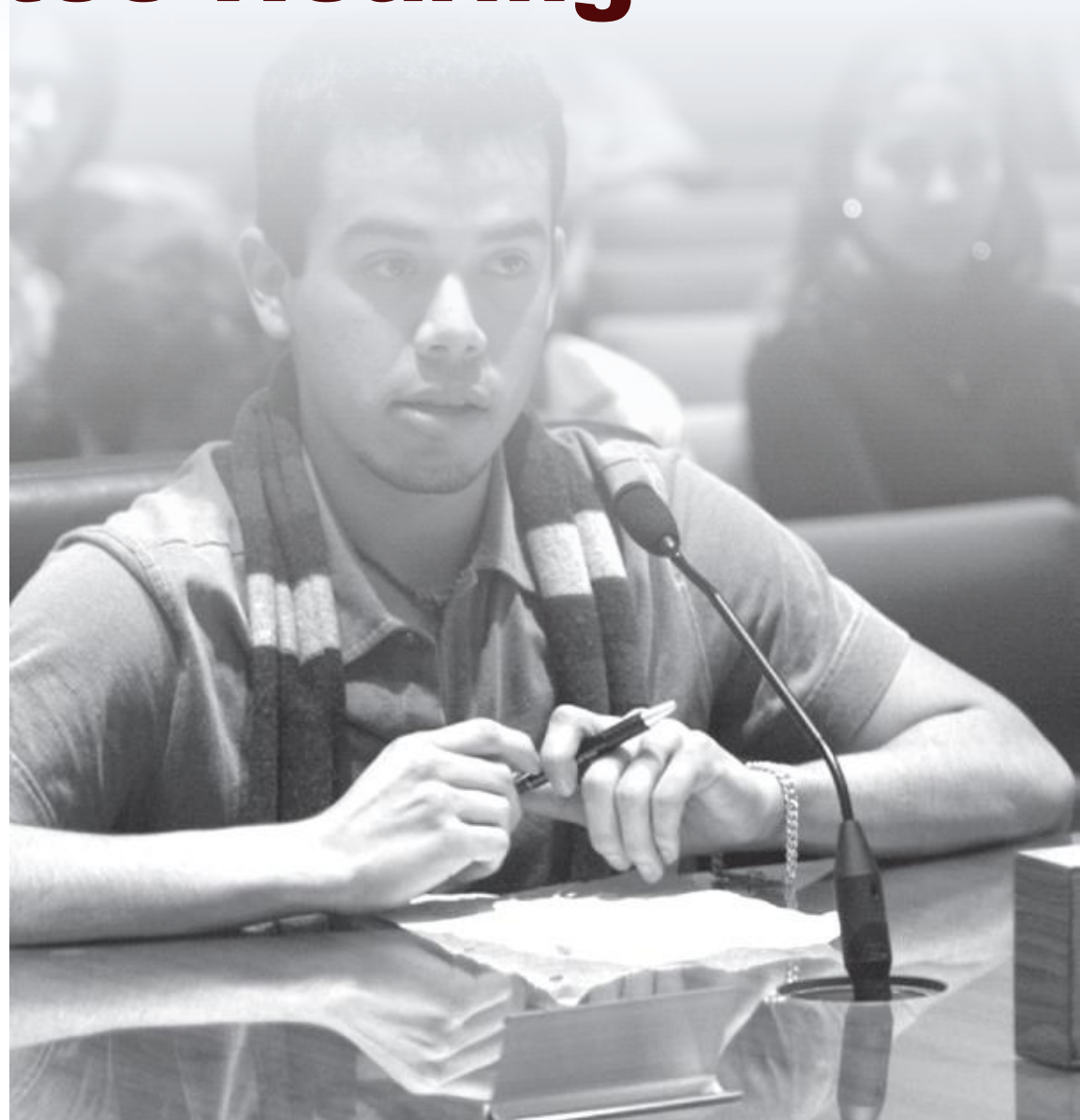
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# Testifying at a Committee Hearing

- Hearings usually begin at 1:30 p.m
- After the sponsoring senator finishes his or her introduction, the committee chair will typically ask proponents of the bill to come forward individually and state their reasons for supporting the measure.
- Then the chair will ask opponents of the bill to come forward and state their opinions.

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# Testifying at a Committee Hearing

- Be prepared to answer questions asked by committee members.
- It is a good idea to prepare written copies of your testimony to distribute to the committee. This helps you get your message across more effectively by making it easy for senators to refer back to what you've said, and also helps to ensure an accurate hearing transcript.

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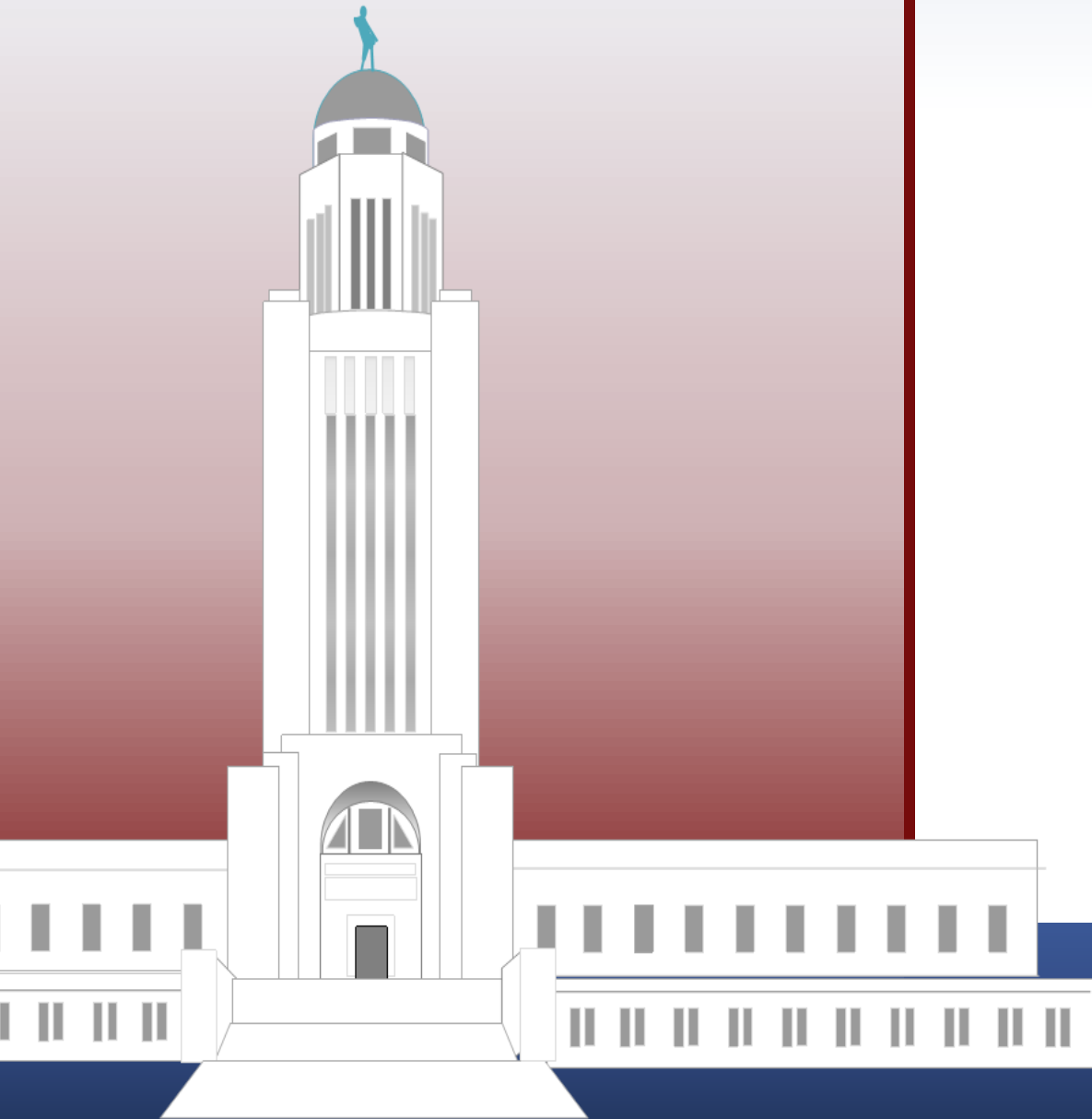


# Testifying Tips

- Be prepared to answer questions asked by committee members.
- Bring enough copies to distribute to all committee members, the two committee staff members, media and the transcribers' office. Fifteen copies is usually enough.
- Addressing committee members or testifiers from the audience is prohibited, and applause and other public demonstrations are not permitted at hearings.
- If auxiliary aids or reasonable accommodations are needed for you to attend a hearing, please call the Office of the Clerk of the Legislature, (402) 471-2271.
- If you have a hearing or speech impairment, please call the Ombudsman's Office at (402) 471-2035 or 800-742-7690. Advance notice of seven days is needed when requesting an interpreter.

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# **Contact Information**

## **Disability Rights Nebraska**

### **Brad Meurrens**

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