

Disability Rights Nebraska

Protection and Advocacy for People with Disabilities

Testimony on LB 572 Before the Executive Board Nebraska Legislature

**Bradley A. Meurrens, MPA
Public Policy Director
Disability Rights Nebraska**

Good afternoon Senator Hilgers and members of the Executive Board. 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 full support of LB 572.

In the summer of 2017, concerns were raised regarding the health and safety of residents living at the Life Quest facility at the Coolidge Center in Palmer, Nebraska and Life Quest at Bel Amis in Blue Hill. Inspections of the facilities were done by the state Division of Public Health, and both facilities failed to meet standards of Nebraska's Department of Health and Human Services. The 80-page inspection report¹ of the Palmer facility described a chaotic and dangerous environment where residents were "not properly cared for, were unclean and not properly fed. There was not sufficient staff on duty at all times to meet clients' needs and staff was not properly trained. There was evidence clients were abused and neglected and did not get proper medical and mental health care."²

As an organization premised on the protection of persons with disabilities in Nebraska, we find this situation completely unacceptable. We have called for increased oversight,

¹For the Palmer Inspection Report, a timeline of activities, and other resources, see https://www.disabilityrightsnebraska.org/what_we_do/palmer-ne-lifequest-incidents.html

² Joanne Young, "Nebraska assisted-living facility oversight committee approved", Lincoln Journal Star, April 11, 2018, available at https://journalstar.com/legislature/nebraska-assisted-living-facility-oversight-committee-approved/article_40a9f85f-f186-5c13-ab36-53cd55ac70bd.html

accountability, and increased inspections by Nebraska's Department of Health and Human Services (see enclosed letter).

Disability Rights Nebraska strongly supports LB 572. Given the egregious incidents at facilities like LifeQuest and others like them, increased direct oversight is needed and more than is currently provided by the Department. Expanding the authority of the deputy public counsel as outlined in this legislation would go a long way to meet that need. It would provide an additional layer of protection, another avenue for people with disabilities to report incidents, and an entity expressly identified as having direct authority in this area.

We fully endorse the advancement of LB 572.