

Disability Rights Nebraska

Protection and Advocacy for People with Disabilities

**Testimony on LB 864
Before the Urban Affairs Committee
Nebraska Legislature
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Good afternoon Senator Wayne 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 at Disability Rights Nebraska. We are the designated Protection and Advocacy organization for persons with disabilities in Nebraska, and I am here today in support of LB 864.

Bed bug infestations have larger implications for renters than just being a “nuisance”¹. Infestations can be difficult to eradicate, the insects are very hardy, and they spread²; usually requiring assistance from professionals to rid them from a dwelling. An article from Omaha World Herald reports that the advice is not to have the renter exterminate them, but hire an exterminator--which can cost up to \$3,500³. For people living on fixed incomes or who live near (or in) poverty, as many people with disabilities do⁴, hiring an exterminator can be cost-prohibitive.

We are also concerned about the implication for accessing services or even healthcare. While bed bugs may be labeled as a “nuisance”, not a public health threat, the perception and reaction of some social institutions may not reflect this distinction. A

¹ Jeff Van Sant, “Bed bug loophole in renter's agreement”, *Omaha World Herald*, September 28, 2019
<https://www.3newsnow.com/news/investigations/bed-bug-loophole-in-renters-agreement>

² Douglas County Health Department webpage “Bed Bugs”, <https://www.douglascountyhealth.com/vector-pest/bed-bugs>

³ Chris Peters, “Omaha's bed bug problem expected to worsen”, February 4, 2013,
https://www.omaha.com/livewellnebraska/omaha-s-bed-bug-problem-expected-to-worsen/article_5ac86f3d-52e8-5954-95d2-b42206e09703.html

⁴ “The percentage of non-institutionalized persons aged 21 to 64 years with a disability in Nebraska who were living below the poverty line in 2017: 21.5%”. Taken from the American Community Survey, available at <https://www.disabilitystatistics.org/>

school district closed when bed bugs were found⁵, and we are concerned that persons who live in infested apartments or who may carry bed bugs with them (from infested apartments), may be turned away at other service providers or agencies such as a physician's office. This is especially acute for people with disabilities who often have a high need for medical services or more frequent doctor visits.

Avenues toward resolving bed bug infestations should be paved by those entities most aptly suited to implement solutions. Given the significant economic disparity between landlords and tenants with disabilities, we feel the work to alleviate bed bugs in apartments should be borne by the landlord.

We recommend LB 864 be advanced.

⁵ Jennifer Ortega, "Plattsmouth schools close for bed bug infestation", *Omaha World Herald*, February 22, 2019, <https://www.wowt.com/content/news/Plattsmouth-schools-close-for-bed-bug-infestation-506234331.html>