

**MINUTES OF THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE**

**Eighty-second Session
March 28, 2023**

The Senate Committee on Finance was called to order by Chair Marilyn Dondero Loop at 8:08 a.m. on Tuesday, March 28, 2023, in Room 2135 of the Legislative Building, Carson City, Nevada. The meeting was videoconferenced to Room 4412 of the Grant Sawyer State Office Building, 555 East Washington Avenue, Las Vegas, Nevada. [Exhibit A](#) is the Agenda. [Exhibit B](#) is the Attendance Roster. All exhibits are available and on file in the Research Library of the Legislative Counsel Bureau.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Senator Marilyn Dondero Loop, Chair
Senator Nicole J. Cannizzaro, Vice Chair
Senator Dallas Harris
Senator Dina Neal
Senator Rochelle T. Nguyen
Senator Pete Goicoechea
Senator Heidi Seevers Gansert
Senator Robin L. Titus

GUEST LEGISLATORS PRESENT:

Senator Julie Pazina, Senatorial District No. 12

STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:

Wayne Thorley, Senate Fiscal Analyst
Cathy Crocket, Chief Principal Deputy Fiscal Analyst
Patrick Ashton, Principal Policy Analyst
Paul Breen, Committee Assistant
Joko Cailles, Committee Secretary
Marie Bell, Committee Secretary

OTHERS PRESENT:

Ciara Byrne, Chief Executive Officer, Green Our Planet
Alexander Marks, Communications Director, Nevada State Education Association
Paul Moradkhan, Senior Vice President, Government Affairs, Vegas Chamber
Morgan Biaselli, Mariposa Academy; Honors Academy of Literature; High Desert Montessori School
Linda Flaherty, Healthy Communities Coalition of Lyon and Storey Counties
Wendy Madson, Executive Director, Healthy Communities Coalition of Lyon and Storey Counties
Megan Peterson, Deputy Superintendent of Business and Support Services, Nevada Department of Education
Fran Almaraz, President, Nevada Silver Haired Legislative Forum
Kirsten Coulombe, Chief, Long Term Services and Supports, Division of Health Care Financing and Policy, Nevada Department of Health and Human Services
Stacie Weeks, Administrator, Division of Health Care Financing and Policy, Nevada Department of Health and Human Services
Steven Cohen
Doralee Martinez, Nevada Disability Peer Action Coalition
Alex Bybee, Chief Strategy Officer, Communities in Schools Nevada
Kelly Pearsall, Chief Financial Officer, Communities in School Nevada
Nicole Willis-Grimes, Western Nevada Executive Director, Communities in Schools Nevada
Connor Cain, Nevada Bankers Association
Mary Pierczynski, Nevada Association of School Superintendents
Patricia Haddad, Director of Government Relations, Clark County School District
Jhoana Duarte, Southern Nevada Program Director, Communities in Schools Nevada
Eloisa Garcia, Site Coordinator, Communities in Schools Nevada
John Etzell, Executive Director, Boys Town Nevada
Shane Piccinni, Co-President, Nevada Center for Civic Engagement
Andrew Mackay, Treasurer, Nevada Center for Civic Engagement
Elissa Secrist
Sondra Cosgrove, Co-President, Nevada Center for Civic Engagement
Kent Ervin, President, Nevada Faculty Alliance

CHAIR DONDERO LOOP:

We will hear bills, beginning with Senate Bill (S.B.) 244.

SENATE BILL 244: Makes an appropriation to the Other State Education Programs Account for the creation and maintenance of school gardens. (BDR S-557)

SENATOR JULIE PAZINA (Senatorial District No. 12):

Senate Bill 244 provides funding to support the creation and maintenance of Nevada public school garden education programs. Senate Bill No. 167 of the 79th Session appropriated General Fund dollars for the creation and maintenance of school gardens. Senate Bill 244 funds these programs through the 2023-2025 biennium.

School garden programs are powerful learning tools for science, technology, engineering, arts and math (STEAM). An evaluative review of school gardening benefits by a professor at Pennsylvania State University found that when environmental fieldwork is integrated into school curricula, there are measurable and observable changes in student achievement and behavior. Some of the findings indicate that in 9 out of 12 quantitative studies, school gardens increased science achievement and behavioral improvements when they are integrated into learning contexts. In addition, nine qualitative studies unanimously reported positive learning and behavior effects of school gardening and gardening involvement. Studies have shown a positive impact of outdoor gardening or nature programs on higher order cognitive skills. Teacher surveys showed that academic achievement, particularly in science, was the most frequently cited reason for using school gardens. Research finds that gardening helps build a sense of community and belonging within schools and the broader community. That is important after the isolation brought by the pandemic. When students in Grade 3 to Grade 5 who participated in a one year gardening program completed a life skills survey, they showed an increase in self-understanding and the ability to work in groups compared to nonparticipating students. Children engaged in garden programs showed improved health outcomes. These children were more likely to eat fresh fruits and vegetables. Garden programs are tied to mental health improvements and the reduction of anxiety and stress in children.

Senate Bill 244 appropriates \$1.5 million in fiscal year (FY) 2023-2024 and \$1.5 million in FY 2024-2025 for schools to create and maintain

school gardens. The funding would be administered by the Nevada Department of Education (NDE) to provide funding grants to public schools, including charter institutions. The funding generally supports each school in building their garden programs, specifically for activities such as grass removal, making raised vegetable gardens, planting fruit trees and more. The funding can go to providing benches and school curriculum areas. Senate Bill 244 authorizes funding to be used for related teacher travel and professional development, the development of a school site food safety plan and to fund school garden conferences in Nevada.

To qualify for funding under S.B. 244, schools must create and maintain school gardens. They must develop a curriculum relating to the school garden that pertains to Nevada and its desert environment, complies with the academic standards for science and uses experiential learning to teach STEAM topics.

Senate Bill 244 allows for assistance from members of the community that have experience with food education, including local farmers and chefs. It provides students with the ability to operate a farmer's market to sell produce from the school garden. A successful student farmers' market—the largest in the Nation—took place in southern Nevada last year. Senate Bill 244 provides the opportunity for students to see how a meal is cooked using produce from their school gardens. The measure establishes garden teams comprised of teachers and, as practical, parents and members of the community.

CIARA BYRNE (Chief Executive Officer, Green Our Planet):

I support S.B. 244. We have provided the Green Our Planet bill presentation ([Exhibit C](#)). At Green Our Planet, we teach students to love and care for the Earth through school garden and hydroponics programs. Gardens are used as a portal for understanding life on the planet and our place in the universe. Our mission, as shown on page 5 of [Exhibit C](#), is to empower the next generation of scientists, farmers, conservationists, entrepreneurs, engineers and chefs. We have four goals: increase student academic performance in STEAM, connect students to nature, increase students' nutrition education and physical activity, and empower students to create farmer's markets and join the next generation of entrepreneurs.

In 2017, Governor Sandoval faced a problem. A number of leaders from companies like Switch, Tesla and Amazon told him that they have several great job openings, but were not seeing enough Nevadans qualified to fill them.

Governor Sandoval commissioned the science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) pipeline report to examine the issues in K-12 education that led to this employee shortage. Jobs in STEM are created at twice the rate as non-STEM jobs. Jobs in STEM pay an average of \$39 per hour, compared to \$19 for non-STEM jobs. We want students in our communities to be eligible for STEM positions.

The report commissioned by Governor Sandoval found there were three main problems: teachers did not have the resources they needed to teach STEM, they did not have background knowledge in STEM, and they did not have STEM-related training. As a result, teachers were not instructing enough in science, and students were not as exposed to that subject. Students did not pursue careers in STEM. Green Our Planet solves those problems by providing turnkey programs for K-12 hydroponics and outdoor gardens. We trained teachers and provided them with videos on all topics, from biomimicry to climate change, to help them effectively instruct in the classroom.

A comprehensive review of 20 years of literature regarding the impact of school U.S. garden programs has shown that hands on experience of learning improves academic performance. In the literature shown on page 7 of [Exhibit C](#), 93 percent of studies reported improved student performance in science, 80 percent of studies showed improvement in math and 72 percent of studies showed improvement in language arts. In 2015, Dr. Jenny Pharr at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, conducted a study to understand the impact of our school garden programs on Clark County School District (CCSD) students. He found that 92 percent of surveyed Nevada educators reported the gardens improved nutrition knowledge; 80 percent reported the gardens were a powerful teaching tool for STEM, nutrition and conservation; 87 percent reported the gardens made school more fun and engaging for students and teachers; and 78 percent reported the gardens increased community engagement within the schools.

We built our first school gardens in 2013. Today, we are in more than 200 CCSD schools where the outdoor gardens impact more than 100,000 students. Our programs are located throughout the State, including in Mesquite, Ely, Las Vegas and Pahrump. We are in over 260 schools impacting over 150,000 students. We are proud to be the largest school gardens hydroponics program in the Nation here in Nevada. By 2025, we will be in every Title I Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 school in the State,

constituting 400 schools. We are able to do this with funding from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021.

These programs are turnkey as teachers said that did not have the resources. We provide 20 hydroponic systems to every school where we work. We provide STEM-accredited curriculums for K-12 next generation science standards, teacher trainings and video tutorials. Our materials are uploaded to Canvas and accessible by all Nevada teachers.

We have a manual and startup supplies. Every school gets coached for a year. The large system grows 216 crops at a time. Page 14 of [Exhibit C](#) shows a photo of students from Dayton getting ready for their farmer's market.

The outdoor garden program is also turnkey. We have a curriculum that is accredited by STEMworks and up to next generation standards. We provide teacher trainings, the school garden manual and coaching. These materials are available on Canvas, a platform used by the NDE. They are also available on the Green Our Planet portal.

As shown on page 17 of [Exhibit C](#), teacher training surveys indicate 92 percent of attendees felt more confident teaching in the outdoor school garden, and 89 percent felt more confident teaching with hydroponics. Page 18 of [Exhibit C](#) shows photos of our garden portal. Our videos have been watched by over eight million students. Senator Julie Pazina mentioned our student farmers' market, which was the largest of its kind in the United States last year.

We have a financial literacy and entrepreneurship curriculum for K-12 students. They write business plans for their gardens, analyze profit and loss, run marketing campaigns and sell their produce to parents at their schools. They will participate in a giant student farmers' market twice a year.

Our next farmers' market will be in downtown Summerlin on April 21, 2023. We will also host a farmers' market with northern Nevada schools near the Legislature. I ask lawmakers to imagine the day where all schools in the State have a farmers' market on Earth Day. We will be the first State to do that.

CHAIR DONDERO LOOP:

These programs are exciting for kids. Harvey Dondero Elementary School in Las Vegas has a garden program. My grandkids are involved with school

gardens on their campuses. This is a great way to teach students math, science and reading.

SENATOR TITUS:

I appreciate that this program helps communities throughout Nevada, including rural communities. It is important for me and other rural legislators to help students learn that food does not just come in cellophane wrappers from grocery stores. Having a hands-on experience is important.

SENATOR NEAL:

The presentation said banks are helping teach students about marketing and entrepreneurship. Is that aspect embedded in all schools that have garden programs or just select schools?

MS. BYRNE:

There is a K-12 entrepreneurship curriculum. In elementary schools, the curriculum covers fifth graders, our farm entrepreneurs. Students learn how to write a business plan for gardens. Teachers begin teaching this in February, and by April, students have done all the work. The work encompasses profit and loss sheets and pricing. Students compete for best green product, best marketing campaign and heaviest vegetable. Middle and high school students have a more sophisticated curriculum. Bankers coach students in market skills.

SENATOR NEAL:

This should be tied to financial literacy programs in schools that do not seem to perform as well. These can be connected.

SENATOR GOICOECHEA:

Our curriculum has come a long way. When I was a kid, our curriculum was "making sure you got over the garden fence before you got a load of rock salt." This is a great program.

CHAIR DONDERO LOOP:

It is clear kids understand and are interested in what they are doing with the school garden programs. This is rewarding for them.

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ALEXANDER MARKS (Communications Director, Nevada State Education Association):

The Nevada State Education Association supports S.B. 244. We have supported similar measures in the past. School gardens have been shown to improve academic achievement. They increase a student's connection to their natural environment. Gardens boost student achievement in science, physical health, and the consumption of fruits and vegetables. We saw that schools with a garden program tend to have greater teacher satisfaction and a connection to the community.

PAUL MORADKHAN (Senior Vice President, Government Affairs, Vegas Chamber):

The Vegas Chamber supports S.B. 244 for its student health components, the promotion of STEAM education and the entrepreneurial spirit.

MORGAN BIASELLI (Mariposa Academy; Honors Academy of Literature; High Desert Montessori School):

Mariposa Academy, the Honors Academy of Literature and High Desert Montessori School all support S.B. 244. They recognize school gardens as an excellent form of STEM education that has the opportunity to connect families to students' learning and creating intergenerational change.

LINDA FLAHERTY (Healthy Communities Coalition of Lyon and Storey Counties):

I am speaking in neutral for S.B. 244. I have worked in schools for 30 years, half of that time as an administrator and the other half as a science and special education teacher. As of last year, I am working with the Healthy Communities Coalition of Lyon and Story Counties.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture is finally realizing that there are not many future farmers in its pipeline. This is similar to the deep teacher shortage. We need to cover all K-12 aspects. Senate Bill 244, on lines 9 through 14, states its provisions are for K-5 students. I strongly encourage legislators to make it cover kids from Grades 7 through 12, so kids learn financial literacy. This literacy is interdisciplinary, not isolated.

Kids understand project-based learning. The Healthy Communities Coalition is focused on rural and low-income kids. I have seen the benefits of hands on learning from personal experience. The school gardening program can help the marketing and commercial advertising workspaces. I know a high school culinary arts teacher who would like to teach the farm-to-table process.

CHAIR DONDERO LOOP:

I encourage you to speak with the sponsor of S.B. 244. I am sure they would be happy to expand its provisions.

WENDY MADSON (Executive Director, Healthy Communities Coalition of Lyon and Storey Counties):

The Healthy Communities Coalition has been inspiring the next generation of growers and healthy food consumers. We have been engaging kids in school gardens for over 15 years with a focus, in part, on food security. Areas of rural Lyon County reside in a food desert, and they face high rates of poverty.

We know not every student will become a farmer, though that would be amazing. Nevada is experiencing a shortage of farmers. At the very least, everyone should understand where their food comes from and make healthy choices about how to fuel their bodies. We should create a community of teachers, community health workers, community members and administrators who share a common goal of helping our kids develop healthy eating habits and engage in hands-on learning that connects students to the Earth and each other.

School gardens should be integrated with classroom concepts and subjects such as language arts. We understand the importance of STEAM education and how school gardens align with efforts on that front. We see the amazing work Green Our Planet has done. We understand the importance of other valuable factors that school gardens provide to our youth and families.

Students who participate in school gardens are likely to choose fruits and vegetables. They learn to grow food and to respect land. School gardens facilitate the social and emotional learning process with the help of school-based community health workers. This is part of the multi-tiered system of support approach. Gardens provide benefits in mental and behavioral health, trauma-informed engagement and nourishment, and the provision of interactive activities that build connections to self and community. We know the power of getting our hands in the dirt, working the soil and growing our own food. When paired with community health workers, counselors and teachers trained in social and emotional learning, our school gardens can provide so much more.

The Healthy Communities Coalition is neutral on S.B. 244. Education in STEM is important, and gardens are a great fit for that. We understand that not all communities, schools and school gardens are alike, and there should not be

a one-size-fits-all approach for students. To echo Senator Titus, we have a lot of poverty and food insecurity in our communities. School gardens are a beneficial piece to food security work.

MEGAN PETERSON (Deputy Superintendent of Business and Support Services, Nevada Department of Education):

I will speak to the fiscal note on S.B. 244. The NDE supported the school gardens programs when they were housed in our Agency. Based on the appropriation provided, we anticipate we would need half of a full-time equivalent (FTE) in our grants management team, half of an FTE to support monitoring and risk assessment before providing awards to subrecipients, and half of an FTE for an education program professional to provide technical assistance and support for applicants.

No funding effect was identified in future biennia as S.B. 244 only funds the program for the 2023-2025 biennium. The NDE is looking for temporary staff rather than full-time positions as it anticipates the program would end by the next biennium.

CHAIR DONDERO LOOP:

When you say the program would end at the close of the 2023-2025 biennium, is that your opinion? I do not think this program is ending. I think the program will continue.

MS. PETERSON:

Our initial interpretation of S.B. 244 was that the program would end at the close of the 2023-2025 biennium and that funds would revert.

CHAIR DONDERO LOOP:

Would the fiscal note be different if the program were continued in future biennia?

MS. PETERSON:

Yes.

CHAIR DONDERO LOOP:

Can the NDE provide an updated fiscal note? I anticipate this program will continue. Some testifiers today even requested an expansion of the program for middle schools and high schools.

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MS. PETERSON:
We can provide an updated fiscal note.

CHAIR DONDERO LOOP:
Please work with Legislative Counsel Bureau, Fiscal Analysis Division staff to do so.

SENATOR PAZINA:
I would love to include all K-12 students in the school garden programs. I encourage the Committee to move this important legislation forward.

CHAIR DONDERO LOOP:
We will now hear S.B. 45.

SENATE BILL 45: Establishes the amount for the personal needs allowance provided to certain recipients of Medicaid. (BDR 38-295)

FRAN ALMARAZ (President, Nevada Silver Haired Legislative Forum):
Senate Bill 45 would increase the monthly personal needs allowance for certain Medicaid recipients residing in skilled nursing facilities, making the amount equal to that received by Medicaid Waiver recipients living in group home settings.

There is a template letter ([Exhibit D](#)) from the Nevada Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Division of Welfare and Supportive Services (DWSS) sent to group home operators last fall 2022, informing them about the increase in supplemental Social Security income payments for 2023.

The Nevada Silver Haired Legislative Forum was created in 1997 to identify and act upon issues of importance to aging persons. It is comprised of 21 members, 60 years of age or older, nominated by Senators for appointment to the Legislative Commission. The Forum may submit one bill draft request for each regular Legislative session.

At our Forum meeting in June 2022, members learned from a DHHS presentation that there are two care options for long-term care services and supports for certain Medicaid recipients including senior, institutional care, and Home- and Community-Based Services. We learned the Social Security Act provides for the personal needs allowance (PNA) for Medicaid recipients residing in nursing facilities and group home settings. If a Medicaid recipient lives in

either of these settings, federal law requires an allowance to be deducted from their monthly income to reserve some funds to cover costs of care not reimbursed by Medicaid. The rest of their monthly income goes to the nursing facility or group home for room and board. These Medicaid recipients depend on their PNA for items such as clothing, grooming needs, toiletries, snacks, writing utensils, stationary, essential personal items and other incidentals. Federal statute sets the minimum monthly PNA at \$30. However, states can allow a higher monthly PNA.

The challenge for Nevada is that seniors receiving Medicaid and living in nursing facilities or group home settings receive a PNA at different rates of \$35 and \$149, respectively. The difference in the PNA between a person living in a group home setting and nursing facility is \$114. A senior living in a group home receives an allowance more than four times the amount of a senior residing in a nursing home.

Based on information provided by the DWSS, the PNA rate for residents of nursing facilities has not changed since 1991. That was over 20 years ago. Nevada is one of seven states that have maintained PNA rates of less than \$40. This means that seniors residing in a nursing home must save their personal needs allowance for several months to replace basic clothing items. This issue has only worsened with inflation increasing the costs of everyday items over the past 32 years.

In contrast, seniors living in group homes and receiving Medicaid Home- and Community-based Waiver Services have their PNAs annually increased based on the federal Social Security administration cost-of-living adjustment (COLA). Beginning in January 2023, Waiver recipients received a total Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payment of \$1,300 monthly. This is split as follows: a federal payment of \$914 and a supplemental State payment of \$391. Waiver recipients may keep an allowance of \$149. The remaining \$1,156 goes to group home operators to cover room and board costs. The PNA is increased proportionate to the SSI COLA adjustment. The PNA for group home residents increased by about 8.7 percent in 2023 from \$137 to \$149.

How would S.B. 45 fix this discrepancy? The core policy of the measure is in section 1, subsection 1 of S.B. 45 requires that the monthly PNA for Medicaid recipients residing in a skilled nursing facility must be no less than the PNA received by Medicaid Waiver recipients living in a group home setting.

Increasing the PNA from \$35 to \$149 for Medicaid recipients residing in skilled nursing facilities would impact the recipient's share of the nursing facility stay. If the PNA increases, the recipient's share decreases. This means the cost covered by Nevada Medicaid would increase by \$114 per recipient.

The actual costs for State and county funds are less than \$1 million each for the 2023-2025 biennium. This is because the federal medical assistance programs would cover the majority of the cost for this increase.

Senate Bill 45 is important for improving the facets of quality of life for seniors and other dependents in long-term care services and support. Supporting this measure is an acknowledgement of our responsibility to care for vulnerable senior citizens.

SENATOR CANNIZZARO:

The DHHS fiscal note pertaining to Medicaid expenses says the increase in the allowance was from \$35 to \$149. We received a letter from the DHHS—which may also have been sent to people in the adult group home facilities—indicating the PNA was \$149. Was this the result of the 2023 COLA increase for SSI payments? Is this going away? Am I incorrectly understanding the fiscal note?

PATRICK ASHTON (Principal Policy Analyst):

[Exhibit D](#) addresses this topic. Every year, the DWSS adjusts rates based on the COLA increase. That is separate from residents in skilled nursing facilities. A representative from Medicaid could better answer what that looks like.

SENATOR CANNIZZARO:

Would the PNA be increased by \$114?

MR. ASHTON:

Yes. The current rate for recipients in skilled nursing homes is \$35. The amount would increase to \$149.

CHAIR DONDERO LOOP:

Can a representative from Medicaid address the question?

KIRSTEN COULOMBE (Chief, Long Term Services and Supports, Division of Health Care Financing and Policy, Nevada Department of Health and Human Services):

Yes. Mr. Ashton's summary was accurate. The DHHS fiscal note is requesting funding to offset the increase needed in the PNA adjustment for residents in skilled nursing facilities.

SENATOR TITUS:

When I was a long-term care medical director, the funds that patients received would stay in their own account and not revert to anything. It does not go to the hospital. If they do not use the funds, the money carries forward so they can save. Is this still the case?

MS. COULOMBE:

Yes. The money goes into a patient trust fund managed by the facility. However, the income resources limit for Medicaid eligibility is \$2,000. With the PNA increase from \$35 to \$149, a patient could put themselves over the Medicaid eligibility limit if they never withdrew money from their account after around 13 months.

SENATOR TITUS:

What if they exceeded the \$2,000 limit?

MS. COULOMBE:

They would have to spend down the money to remain eligible for Medicaid.

SENATOR TITUS:

This money is important. My patients sometimes ran out of money in their accounts, and we would chip in. The funds can be used for things like hair appointments or trips downtown. Thank you for bringing the measure forward.

SENATOR GOICOECHEA:

The fiscal note shows a county contribution. Does that come out of their indigent funds? If not, where does the money come from?

MS. COULOMBE:

It would be set up in the same fashion as for those who qualify for county institutional services. I cannot speak in much detail as to how those county funds operate. There would be an impact.

SENATOR GOICOECHEA:

Would there not be any change in the county's contribution amount?

Ms. COULOMBE:

I believe so, but it is best to confirm that with the counties.

SENATOR GOICOECHEA:

The counties would not have an option, would they? The fiscal note indicates \$944,000 is from the General Fund and \$863,074 from county funds. I am curious about the mechanisms for accessing the county share.

STACIE WEEKS (Administrator, Division of Health Care Financing and Policy, Nevada Department of Health and Human Services):

There are intergovernmental transfers we engage in with the counties. We enter into contracts with counties regarding these services. We are not concerned that they would not put up the extra share.

STEVEN COHEN:

I support S.B. 45. I am confused with the DHHS fiscal note. If a person has more assets, it would seem to reason their patient liability would increase, and the insurance portion would decrease.

DORALEE MARTINEZ (Nevada Disability Peer Action Coalition):

The Nevada Disability Peer Action Coalition supports S.B. 45.

Ms. ALMARAZ:

Please consider the vulnerability of seniors in nursing homes, and how long it takes them to save money to buy a new set of pajamas or whatever they need.

CHAIR DONDERO LOOP:

We will now hear S.B. 189. The measure makes an appropriation to Communities in Schools of Nevada (CISN). There are no fiscal notes but S.B. 189 contains a General Fund appropriation of \$6.9 million.

SENATE BILL 189: Makes an appropriation to Communities In Schools of Nevada for the purpose of providing integrated student support services.
(BDR S-499)

SENATOR NICOLE J. CANNIZZARO (Senatorial District No. 6):

The CISN provides an evidence-based model of integrated student support services, also referred to as wraparound services, which have been discussed repeatedly in the Legislature. The services support the basic social, emotional and academic needs of students. These supports help students with some of the highest needs in Nevada stay in school and graduate.

Students face challenges at school and home that affect their academic achievement. These challenges were exacerbated by the pandemic. Absenteeism increased while academic engagement decreased. The persistence of these issues negatively affects student academic performance and graduation rates. A 2022 report indicated high school graduation rates dipped in at least 20 states after a full school year was disrupted by COVID-19. This measure aims to address the significant barriers that students experience in accessing needed supports and services. The CISN has demonstrated an efficient and sustainable use of funds with a 12:1 return on their investments.

The CISN program model of integrated student supports is the only evidence-based intervention for wraparound services approved by the NDE. The model meets requirements of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act for student level outcomes, with independent evaluations confirming these conclusions. The supports offered by the CISN alleviate pressures placed on educators by meeting students' needs through supports on campus. The CISN operates in over 80 elementary, middle and high schools across four school districts: the CCSD, Elko County School District, Humboldt County School District and Washoe County School District. These schools serve over 80,000 students. There is still a great need to expand services to more schools in a greater number of counties.

I am a graduate of Chaparral High School in the CCSD. I have toured the CISN program at that campus and was impressed with what they provide to students. When we discuss wraparound services, it is not enough to put a kid in a classroom and say we hope that you learn everything we are telling you. We hope you will go home and practice. We hope you are going to have enough support for food and clothing. We hope you will have emotional support so you can sit in class and concentrate. Many kids have that, but others do not.

When you do not have those basic needs met, the idea of sitting in the classroom, paying attention to what is going on, and utilizing the information

becomes extremely hard. The CISN provides resources to kids, even those whom you might not know need services. One day, a kid can show up and ask, “Can I get a backpack with some food for the weekend?”

There are so many unmet needs of students. It is not necessarily because parents, schools or educators do not care, but the demand exists. To give kids a place to come with someone checking on them and providing support is critical. It makes a difference.

Students from families who use free or reduced-price lunch (FRL) services may not have much money to pay for things growing up. Sometimes the difference is they had encouragement at home. Even if their parents did not know how to do math homework or write, having encouragement can help a student succeed and beat the odds.

This is one of the best things we can do to help students succeed. We talk about graduation rates and school successes. There are so many things that educators have to be focused on in the classroom. To provide additional supports through a program like the CISN gives a return on investments.

ALEX BYBEE (Chief Strategy Officer, Communities in Schools Nevada):

We have provided a slide presentation ([Exhibit E](#)). Senate Bill 189 is a wise use of tax dollars as it leverages money to secure additional private funds and meet the needs of our kids. The CISN serves 92 Title I and high needs schools in Clark County, Elko County, Humboldt County and Washoe County.

Title I and high needs are terms that are used interchangeably in [Exhibit E](#). Title I is a designation to understand need in a school. There is a distinction between Title I eligible schools and Title I served schools.

Page 2 of [Exhibit E](#) lists concerns that helped form our priorities. The inequities that existed before schools were closed during the pandemic became more apparent. The role of education in students’ lives beyond academic instruction became clear when there was increased demand for social services across the nonprofit sector as some of those functions were typically performed at school. The pandemic brought an increase in chronic absenteeism, reduced academic engagement and lowered graduation rates. Although graduation rates rebounded last year, they dipped the year prior. Given the shocks to our education system,

it would not be unreasonable to anticipate further years where declines are witnessed.

There are historic rates of vacancies amongst teaching and support professionals. When you have more adults in the building providing centralized support, you allow educators to worry about one less thing. Educators know that if there is not a given program on campus, a teacher will find a way to get students the support they need, requiring additional time outside academic instruction.

We need more skilled workers, which means students need to graduate career, college and community ready. Ensuring students stay in school is a top priority for the CISN and the State.

There is an ongoing crisis of mental health and well-being among youths. The supports we provide are evidence based. The CISN does the vital work of ensuring there is a caring adult on campus who students can consistently rely upon to build a sense of belonging on campus and boost academic engagement.

Page 3 of [Exhibit E](#) helps make the case for wraparound supports. The number of students on FRL is a moving target, particularly after the pandemic when several schools were provisionally offering all students FRL. An overwhelming majority of Nevada students are eligible for FRL. Barriers to access necessary supports continue to cause systemic issues. Communities of color and low income families disproportionately experience the brunt of those problems. The cause of this is a broad lack of resource availability in both public education and health and human services. The CISN does its work in school buildings; we are the bridge between social supports, health and human services, and our educational partners to help ensure the whole needs of the child are met. These dollars are an investment, not only in education, but in the welfare of children and their families.

On social supports and health and human services, economic pressures on families leave them with less resources to provide for their children. Although there are supports and services available, the web of services and agencies that provide them is decentralized. To navigate any single bureaucracy can become a full-time job. Imagine a family who needs to navigate several bureaucracies just to get the services and resources they are entitled to.

The CISN has site coordinators, full-time employees, who report to school campuses every day to centralize the network of supports and services. This ensures families do not have to navigate these systems alone to get the resources they need. The solution is a one-on-one relationship with caring site coordinators, and there are 120 of them across Nevada. Centralizing this network of partner agencies removes barriers to access and increases equity.

Communities in Schools is a national organization, and the CISN is an independent 501(c)(3) corporation. We are our own legal entity registered in Nevada. The money we fundraise stays here. One of the benefits the CISN has through its partnership with the national Communities in Schools organization is that they invest in us instead of charging us fees to be a member. That is a distinction from other federated nonprofit models.

As illustrated on the map on page 4 of [Exhibit E](#), Communities in Schools operates in 26 states and the District of Columbia. It has performed 40 years of impact. The national organization shares best practices from throughout the Nation and ensures we go through a rigorous accreditation process every three years. The Legislature can be assured that the funds invested in the CISN will have oversight, not only by this Committee and other public entities, but also the national Communities in Schools organization.

The CISN has been in Nevada for 20 years, delivering consistent results. We are a shovel ready program. If the Legislature determines that the mental health of students and providing wraparound services in schools are priorities for investments, we will take the funding to expand our impact over the 2023-2025 biennium. We can quickly and effectively help students recover from the effects of the pandemic.

Page 5 of [Exhibit E](#) provides a breakdown of the districts the CISN is in. We have programs in Elko County, Humboldt County, Clark County and Washoe County. [Senate Bill 189](#) would enable an expansion into an additional rural district that has yet to be identified. The identification would be done in partnership with the State and school district superintendents to see where the need is greatest.

In particular, [S.B. 189](#) is essential because philanthropic dollars are not as concentrated in rural Nevada as they are in our urban cores of Washoe County

and Clark County. Legislative support will be critical in helping us expand our reach to more students in rural communities.

Page 6 of [Exhibit E](#) shows our approach to services. Each time the CISN enters a campus, we conduct a rigorous needs assessment in collaboration with the school administration and partners to identify community needs. We identify the assets of the community that are not being leveraged or centralized in the school building to support students. The CISN then develops an individual school support plan. Although we have an evidence-based model, the model is responsive to the specific community contexts we operate in. School support plans in Elko County look different than in Clark County, and plans in Clark County differ from those in Washoe County.

Often, our site coordinators serve on multi-tiered system of support teams in schools and coordinate with school counselors, social workers and others who are dedicated to student well-being and success. We have a three-tiered model illustrated on page 7 of [Exhibit E](#). Tier 1 encompasses schoolwide supports and services that all students can access. When we say we serve over 90,000 students, we refer to Tier 1 supports. Any student can go to our resource room and ask for what they need, including a tangible item they need to succeed.

Tier 2 supports are targeted services typically provided in a group setting. Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports students who are case managed. Our site coordinators manage approximately 55 students each. On high school campuses, we have at least two site coordinators, but we have more in some instances. Our caseload varies by school. Our most intensive intervention entails working with students with the most need, whether that arises from acute trauma in the home, chronic poverty or high rates of absenteeism.

For both Tier 1 and Tier 3 supports, we set schoolwide and individual goals. We measure progress against those goals for schoolwide performance and individual student success. The goals set are based on attendance, behavior and course performance. These are early warning indicators for student likelihood to disengage from academics or drop out of school. By monitoring attendance, behavior and course performance, we can bring quick interventions and supports to ensure a student stays the course to graduation.

The CISN has over 120 partners across the State. Page 8 of [Exhibit E](#) shows a cross section of them and our three regional affiliates. Each regional affiliate has its own executive director who serve as leaders for their work on the ground. Our site coordinators work with these organizations to bring necessary resources and support to campus. By investing in the CISN, you are investing in a broader economy of scale or broader efficiencies, bringing services to students. There is a multiplying effect on the social safety net.

Senator Cannizzaro references we have evidence-based interventions. Page 9 of [Exhibit E](#) shows two independent evaluations we conducted on the CISN several years ago, and we can share results with legislators.

The CISN has reviewed the *Statewide Plan for the Improvement of Pupils* and measures passed by the Legislature to determine how our work aligns with State priorities and goals. We are one organization operating in a broader context. We want to be good partners in identifying how we are leveraging our resources to help Nevada meet its objective of ensuring every student graduates career, college and community ready.

Page 11 of [Exhibit E](#) shows results from CISN work. In the previous academic year: 70 percent of students' cases we managed made progress on or met their attendance goals, 83 percent of students made progress on or met their behavior goals, 79 percent of students made progress on or met their course performance goals, 99 percent of students were promoted to the next grade level and 94 percent of the students graduated from high school. The graduation figure is substantially higher compared to the Statewide average for that student subgroup. The results demonstrate that when you meet student needs and have high expectations, people will succeed.

Our academy program is an intensive intervention offered to high school juniors and seniors who are extremely credit deficient and are not on track to graduate; 97 percent of participants graduated in the last academic year.

As shown on page 10 of [Exhibit E](#), the CISN's work is aligned to State and federal policy. The U.S. Department of Education, in its reopening handbook and guidance to state and local education agencies, encouraged investment in Communities in Schools and integrated student supports as an effective use of public funds to help students recover from the closure of school buildings. Assembly Bill No. 275 of the 79th Session required the establishment of a

Statewide framework for integrated student supports. During the 2019-2021 interim, the Legislature's Interim Committee on Education unanimously approved two reports indicating that when funding is available, money should be considered for wraparound support.

There are over 400 Title I schools in Nevada. Although the CISN is in 92 schools, there is a long way to go until all children have access to our resources and supports. The appropriation in S.B. 189 would help us fund 78 site coordinator positions serving approximately 65,000 students. This would enable our expansion in districts we already serve and new districts across the State.

A handout ([Exhibit F](#)) provides a financial breakdown of how the appropriation would be allocated across the 2023-2025 biennium in each regional affiliate.

SENATOR NEAL:

The CISN received Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) dollars from the American Rescue Plan Act. Are you eligible for more ESSER funding? Have you requested more ESSER dollars? The NDE has \$200 million in ESSER III monies. The Clark County School District has some ESSER dollars remaining, including in ESSER II.

KELLY PEARSALL (Chief Financial Officer, Communities in Schools Nevada):

The CISN did receive ESSER II funding, and part of the funds we are paid from the CCSD is from ESSER. We received ESSER funds for college and career readiness. We received less than we originally asked for.

SENATOR NEAL:

What did you initially ask for? Did you request this money from the NDE or the CCSD?

MS. PEARSALL:

The request was made to the NDE. We asked for \$1.5 million.

SENATOR NEAL:

What time period was the funding requested for?

MS. PEARSALL:

It was for the pandemic.

SENATOR NEAL:

Have you asked for ESSER funds for the 2023-2025 biennium? Are you eligible?

MR. BYBEE:

We applied for several different iterations of ESSER funds. We applied through the State fund made available through the Office of the Governor and the initial competitive grant issued by the NDE. We were awarded about \$1.1 million in the first round of ESSER funding through the NDE. We applied through a career and college readiness competitive grant, referenced by Ms. Pearsall, from which we received partial funding. We received significant funds from the CCSD to enable expansion throughout the Las Vegas area. We have had varied success on receiving funding from our requests to those multiple jurisdictions. We have also put in requests to different local and county governments. The CISN did a full-court press to take advantage of different funding sources.

Senate Bill 189 is meant to bring the State to the table as a partner and help us with sustainability beyond ESSER. This would help expand support over the 2023-2025 biennium and beyond.

SENATOR NEAL:

I understand the measure is to bring the State to the table, but this is a one-shot appropriation. The ESSER dollars would be the equivalent of a one-shot appropriation received over the 2023-2025 biennium. My concerns are rooted in the amount of money the NDE has not spent.

For school budgets, schools pay or give a portion of their dollars for the CISN to provide services. How is that money used? Some schools in my Senate district might have \$60,000 taken from their budget for the CISN to provide services. How is that built into your budget?

MS. PEARSALL:

We have a cost model that essentially breaks down for one site coordinator for one year. That amount is primarily their salary, benefits, supervision and data management. In that funding model, 40 percent is paid by the school and 60 percent is paid by philanthropic sources. The school fees paid go toward a portion of that salary.

SENATOR NEAL:

Can you talk more about academic gains from the CISN's work? You have interventions, but how do you perform the work given that the CCSD does not have or is not fully implementing a framework for students in its urban core? There is an absence of CCSD influence. Can you discuss the academic gains seen in Title I schools?

MR. BYBEE:

I believe Senator Neal is referencing the coursework goals of students. These goals vary depending on the needs of individual students. They may, for example, set a goal to increase their grade in a particular content area from a D to a B. Another student may want to do better on their standardized tests compared to his or her results from the previous year. There are multiple ways we can measure students' progress to their goals.

The particular interventions we offer vary depending on the academic content area or the partners we deploy to support a given student. Sometimes engagements go beyond academic interventions and entail mental health supports. Increased mental well-being and academic engagement can lead to grade increases.

The CISN is a partner of the CCSD. We know the CCSD cannot do this work alone. We are grateful to bring partners from the community to help students reach their goals.

SENATOR TITUS:

The State transitioned from the Nevada Plan to the Pupil-Centered Funding Plan, in part to move away from appropriating funds in tranches. We are being asked to give a tranche of \$6.9 million to a separate entity, essentially an outside contractor, to do things schools should be doing themselves. This especially goes for social services.

How is S.B. 189 different from the tranche-based funding we are moving away from? If an individual school is given the funds, why is it not deciding whether to contract with you as opposed to the Legislature giving a one-shot appropriation?

MR. BYBEE:

It is our understanding that school administrators would have discretion to use the at-risk weight to support their funding match for the CISN. Our efforts to scale up and reach every Title I school in Nevada require shared partnership across individual schools, districts, the State and the federal government through Title I dollars and other funding sources.

This is about diversifying our revenue to the greatest possible extent and having a braided funding strategy. If there is a particular shift in funding streams, we would be able to go to our philanthropic partners and ask for their support. We are looking to go from supporting 92 schools to 400 schools. We are looking for State support to, in particular, expand to rural districts that need assistance.

SENATOR TITUS:

When rural schools receive their appropriations, could they choose to contract with you if they do not have the services you provide?

MR. BYBEE:

Yes. A school district could choose to pay the contracted rate at the district level. A district could use a cost-sharing model where it pays for a portion of the costs and the school allocates the portion of its budget for the costs. This is the discretion of the district superintendent and school principal.

When Communities in Schools first entered the State, we provided 100 percent of our program's cost to the schools. We found through the program's success in keeping kids in school and helping them across the finish line that if we wanted to expand into more campuses, we would have to diversify and shift to a public-private model. This is the core approach behind why we fund the work the way we do. There is greater engagement with our school administration teams through having this level of investment.

SENATOR TITUS:

Can you explain the 12:1 return on our investment?

MR. BYBEE:

That was calculated through an independent study that the Communities in Schools conducted based on a variety of factors. The figure was calculated over the average lifetime earnings an individual generates as the result of having a high school degree and the decreased reliance on particular social services

that a student who does not complete high school are more likely per research to rely on.

For every dollar the State invests, the CISN would pursue funding through competitive grants or philanthropy, doubling the impact of investment. Thus, there are two returns on investment. One is the immediate dollar-for-dollar impact. You then have the long-term 12-to-1 return on investment over the lifetime of a student.

SENATOR TITUS:

I had wondered if you leveraged these dollars to apply for other grants. I appreciate the clarification.

SENATOR NGUYEN:

The Subcommittees on K-12/Higher Education/CIP heard the NDE had spent \$1.6 million out of \$200 million in ESSER funds. Did the CISN apply for NDE funds and not receive the full request?

MR. BYBEE:

The particular ESSER funds we applied for and partially received was for the college and career readiness grant. That was a competitive grant process. It was a matter of whether we scored in the rubric for our full funding, how much funding was requested and how much was allocated for that particular grant.

We were fully funded by the NDE in our initial ESSER I request under their wraparound services competitive grant. It was under the college and career readiness grant where we received partial funding.

SENATOR NGUYEN:

Do you have the ability to reapply for additional funds? I do not refer to college and career readiness grant funds, but in other areas.

MR. BYBEE:

If the NDE chose to have another competitive grant process wherein providers of wraparound services were eligible to apply, the CISN would pursue those funds.

I go back to Senator Titus' question on, philosophically, what the role of a school and a school budget is to provide for kids and families? The CISN is

addressing the broader health, human services and social services needs of our kids in an educational setting by colocating those services. It would be at the pleasure of the Legislature to determine the most effective use of funds for our program. We believe our work requires partners, in addition to the school system, to meet the ever diversifying needs of kids and families.

Families living in poverty face challenges accessing services ranging from housing to the justice system to health care and beyond. It is our opinion that the education system cannot address those issues alone.

SENATOR NGUYEN:

I agree solving these issues does not fall solely on schools. Even if we had a policy that fully funded these services, there is still a need for nonprofit agencies to provide assistance. We get frustrated when we know there is so much unused money out there that could be used to fully fund organizations such as the CISN.

MR. BYBEE:

Th CISN would welcome oversight, suggestions and accountability from the Legislature if we receive this appropriation. We serve many families and constituents in your districts. We appreciate conversations on how we can be effective in accessing funds we may not be aware are available.

CHAIR DONDERO LOOP:

Speaking as a teacher, many of our students need more assistance than a classroom instructor can provide during the day. Additional supports are not only welcome from the viewpoint of families and students, but also from the viewpoint of educators. The school I taught at had an 85 to 90 percent FRL rate at the time. In each classroom, more than one student needed help.

SENATOR NEAL:

How do you use your dollars for parents? There has always been a gap between how interventions are done and how parents in the households can help carry those interventions out. How does the CISN use its money to engage parents and teach them about the intervention you conduct with their kids?

MR. BYBEE:

On the matter of family engagement and the two-generation approach, we understand the value of ensuring that when a student leaves the school

building, parents have additional supports and the understanding to support their kids. Which partners we engage to assist those families depends on the school and affiliates we are working through.

Often, a student may come to a site coordinator for immigration assistance. We can refer them to the Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada. That helps not only the student, but the whole family. Students and families may need rental assistance or utility assistance.

The child, in these cases, expresses the need to their CISN site coordinator. However, the support we or our partners render helps their entire household. The secondary benefit to the household is helping educate parents on available resources. This engagement is contingent on individual schools, community partners, and what is identified in their needs assessment. The CISN can provide examples of family engagement and what that looks like on school campuses.

NICOLE WILLIS-GRIMES (Western Nevada Executive Director, Communities in Schools Nevada):

The CISN Western Nevada affiliate serves 13 schools in Washoe County. Our services reach the urban core in the Reno-Sparks area, Sun Valley and Natchez Elementary School. The Natchez campus is closer to Fernley than Reno. Many of those students end up attending the Lyon County School District or Pyramid Lake High School.

To answer Senator Neal's question on family engagement, since I come from the affiliate level, we do a lot of work in collaboration with our schools and community partners on family outreach. The Western Nevada affiliate has been in touch with Medicaid managed care organizations in providing additional information, being a partner and creating opportunities for families to learn more about their benefits. Navigating Medicaid is a daunting task, even for the most well-equipped people. We can use the relationships we develop to pass along information and encourage families to attend events where they can learn about benefits.

Our site coordinators work closely with staff who focus on school climate engagement. We interact at cultural events, engage with parents after school and connect students to different resources throughout the community. We offer students bus passes. Transportation is a hindrance to accessing care and

resources. We may have families who are aware resources exist but cannot get to them. The CISN can provide support to the whole family, not just students, with bus passes and other forms of transportation. I support S.B. 189 through my position.

MR. MORADKHAN:

The Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce supports S.B. 189. The Chamber supports programs throughout the State. We view the CISN as an integral community partner. They do phenomenal work and are respected. They have achieved great things for Nevada students.

CONNOR CAIN (Nevada Bankers Association):

The Nevada Bankers Association supports S.B. 189. We believe in the evidence-based model that the CISN uses to support Nevada students.

MARY PIERCZYNSKI (Nevada Association of School Superintendents):

The Nevada Association of School Superintendents supports S.B. 189. The CISN currently operates in four Nevada school districts. I am most familiar with the programs in Elko, where the CISN has helped many kids.

PATRICIA HADDAD (Director of Government Relations, Clark County School District):

The CISN has been an excellent partner of the CCSD. It provides students that attend our schools with the additional supports they need. We support S.B. 189.

MR. BYBEE:

I will read a letter ([Exhibit G](#)) into the record on behalf of Elaine Wynn, a founding partner of the CISN.

JHOANA DUARTE (Southern Nevada Program Director, Communities in Schools Nevada):

I speak in support of S.B. 189, which appropriates money to the CISN to provide integrated student support services. I always remind myself why I applied to join the Southern Nevada affiliate of the CISN and why I guide site coordinators with their programming at their respective school sites. If I did not have a village of educators and mentors who believed in me and taught me, I would not have started my career as a site coordinator for the CISN at Desert Pines High School.

I do not perform this work because it makes me feel better about myself; rather, I want to be a part of the village that surrounds students with the community, support and empowerment they need to stay in school and pursue their dreams. The CISN is dear to my heart because I know our work is essential for these children, their families and their communities. I think about a student like Leo who was able to graduate from high school with high honors. Leo's story is familiar among many other students born into challenging circumstances. His family decided to move back to Colombia from the United States. But Leo was not satisfied with the education he was receiving. At age 17, he returned to the United States. Leo was referred to the CISN at the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year for credit deficiency and being off track for graduation. Leo started this year with 7 out of 22.5 credits he needed to graduate. He was determined to do what was necessary to graduate. His first obstacle was getting the vaccinations he needed to attend school. Leo did not have the insurance or money to afford vaccinations. A CISN site coordinator worked diligently to help Leo attain services and apply for Medicaid to accommodate his limited finances. Once vaccinated, Leo returned to school and continued his education.

Leo, who may be considered to be an unaccompanied minor, was referred to the Title I Homeless Outreach Program for Education services to maximize the resources available to him. Leo faced many challenges, including substantial financial stressors that meant a lack of access to basic needs and ongoing instability. Leo had to seek employment for living expenses. But through his commitment and perseverance, as well as the assistance of site coordinators helping with his resume and job search, Leo secured a job at a restaurant that paid him a living wage.

Many wrong turns could have occurred for a 17-year old deficient in high school credits that had to navigate the school system and life on his own. Leo was determined to achieve his goal. Communicating with CISN site coordinators helped instill confidence to pursue higher education. He is now a college sophomore studying business administration.

When I think about Leo's success and the part the CISN played in his journey, I know how beneficial it would be to have caring adults in multiple schools helping students. To quote Malala Yousafzai, "Let us remember one book, one pen, one child and one teacher can change the world."

ELOISA GARCIA (Site Coordinator, Communities in Schools Nevada):

I have been with the CISN for 11 years. I have case managed 100 students and worked with school principals. I support S.B. 189. I live by a quote: "Be the adult you needed when you were a kid." This perspective changed my life and made me realize the opportunity I have to serve others in need.

I know firsthand how it feels to not have your basic needs met at home and have to function at school as if everything is alright. As a site coordinator, I help both students and their families. I try to provide a community of support for them. It takes a village to raise a child. We help families meet their basic needs by partnering with community organizations. The aim is to ensure basic needs such as food, housing, health care, clothing and other things are available. This reduces stress, helping children grow into healthy adults.

I will never forget a student I serve who became homeless overnight. He and his parents were in shock, overwhelmed and in tears to see their world upside down. I reached out to the landlord to negotiate their ability for them to stay in their home but had no luck. The landlord said the family needed to leave the residence. I reached out to lawyers for assistance. I was advised to complete a form for a judge render a decision. I helped the parents complete the form and meet the judge. To our surprise, the judge gave the family only three days to stay at the residence with the condition they move out. The parents got into action and were lucky to find a home within their student's school zone so that he was able to continue attending the same school.

The family needed assistance with their down payment. As a site coordinator, I requested funds for down payment assistance and referred the family for additional support. I was able to advocate for my student and his family. Having the CISN on our campuses makes a positive impact on students, parents, teachers and school staff.

JOHN ETZELL (Executive Director, Boys Town Nevada):

I am testifying in support of S.B. 189. The CISN fills an important gap in education which highlights that schools cannot do everything for everyone. The work they do fits into early intervention services and prevention, supporting the academic needs of Nevada students. Boys Town Nevada is a similar organization that works in many of the same schools. We value our partnerships and work with groups like the CISN in referring students to best support their needs and the needs of their families.

MS. MARTINEZ:

The Nevada Disability Peer Action Coalition supports S.B. 189. We are people with disabilities or who have relatives with disabilities. A lot of us are struggling to find the proper assistance for ourselves and our family. We hope this measure becomes law.

SENATOR CANNIZZARO:

The CISN is an important group that provides support for students. It helps with graduation and success rates. I know there are concerns about other funding that could be used for these types of programs. We will look into additional funding streams. I hope S.B. 189 continues to move through the process.

As Vice Chair, I will open the hearing on S.B. 285.

SENATE BILL 285: Makes an appropriation for civics education programs.
(BDR S-86)

SENATOR MARILYN DONDERO LOOP (Senatorial District No. 8):

Senate Bill 285 makes an appropriation to the Nevada Center for Civic Engagement (NCCE) to support civic education programs such as the We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution program in Nevada elementary, middle and high schools. The NCCE opens the door to democracy by providing support to teachers, empowering students and engaging the community for a more educated Nevada.

The NCCE provides the We the People program with funding to promote civic competency and responsibility among Nevada students. We the People complements the standard curriculum by providing an innovative course of instruction on the history and principles of the United States Constitution and democracy. Program participants score higher on tests of civic knowledge and disposition. This means students will become more civically engaged, politically attentive, tolerant and more likely to be involved in their communities. As we consider different programs that are involved in schools, note that we have different ways to reach out to students, whether through gardens or through civic engagement.

Senate Bill 285 makes an appropriation of \$250,000 in FY 2023-2024 and \$250,000 in FY 2024-2025 to the NCCE for the purpose of civic education programs for students and adults. The Legislature made a similar appropriation

for the past three Legislative Sessions for programming for students. Senate Bill 285 adds in additional funding so the NCCE could expand their civics programs to our adult population. Upon acceptance of the money the NCCE agrees to prepare an annual report describing each expenditure, to be delivered to the Interim Finance Committee. Upon request of the Legislative Commission, the NCCE shall make any of the accounts, books, claims, reports, vouchers and other records available to the Legislative Auditor.

SHANE PICCINNI (Co-President, Nevada Center for Civic Engagement):

We have a packet ([Exhibit H](#)) with program information. The NCCE has been doing its mission since the bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution in 1987, while using several different funding models. Our mission is to open the door to democracy by supporting teachers, empowering students and engaging the community for a more educated Nevada. Over the last two years, we supported just over 60 teachers and impacted 7,000 students. We have had over 100 community members engaged in our programs as judges, participants and learners.

Page 2 in the packet [Exhibit H](#) shows a list of the programs we support. These include the We the People program, Project Citizen, National History Day and Law Day. Project Citizen teaches students and adults how to influence public policy. The pandemic brought new opportunities for us to present these programs in Nevada schools and communities. We presented our work in a true hybrid manner with in-person and remote opportunities for participation.

When it comes to working with our adult learners, we are most excited for a program called Ask The Expert. This is hosted once a month during the academic year. We talk about everything from the clarity of Lake Tahoe to Women's History Month to the history of gaming in Nevada. All of these programs are on our website. We dig into the history of our State and how people can engage. The NCCE started a podcast. We are focused on opportunities for adult learners and developing platforms that would allow people to engage in online civics learning.

As shown on page 3 of the packet [Exhibit H](#), the NCCE intends to create 3 regional models in which we collaborate with 20 new teachers through the northeast, northwest and south in Nevada. Since I became involved with the NCCE in a leadership role, we have engaged in virtually every Nevada county.

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Throughout the years we have been in Nevada, we have committed to maintaining a Statewide presence.

The illustration on page 3 of the packet [Exhibit H](#) shows the distribution of funds; 28 percent will go to community investment, with the biggest share, 38 percent, of that going to teachers in the program. The NCCE has a small staff. We support education programs as a people-centered and service-based organization. Helping teachers and schools is our mission. We do not contract our work out. We do not purchase our curriculums from anyone else. Much of our materials are developed in-house, and we distribute them on our own. Of the funds, 34 percent goes to support the students.

The NCCE is committed to making sure our professional development for teachers and adult education programs moves forward. We have supported civic engagement and democracy going back to the Reagan administration.

SENATOR NEAL:

Does this appropriation cover travel for students?

MR. PICCINNI:

The funds can be used for travel.

SENATOR NEAL:

We the People hosts on-campus competitions where students debate each other. There is a final competition students can be invited to.

MR. PICCINNI:

There is a mock congressional hearing held at the National level. Three schools from Nevada are going in April 2023.

SENATOR NEAL:

A high school in my district asked me for financial support for team travel. I wondered if these dollars could help students so they do not have to dial for dollars.

MR. PICCINNI:

Even when this Program was federally funded, there were dollars individual schools were required to match for travel. That would still be the case under the legislative appropriation. The NCCE is committed to providing as much financial

support as possible to send schools to competitions. These are expensive programs, and we aim to manage the dollars as responsibly as possible. There will always be a need for schools to put their own dollars into travel. We help schools raise money so they can travel to events.

SENATOR SEEVERS GANSERT:

A number of schools in Reno have made it to the Washington, D.C., competitions. They have impressive results thanks to the materials provided by the NCCE and your partnerships with teachers.

MR. PICCINNI:

Going back to 1988 when this program started, we have shown what public-private partnerships should look like. We want to diversify our funding streams as the NCCE grows. What we do would not be possible without your support.

ANDREW MACKAY (Treasurer, Nevada Center for Civic Engagement):

I am supporting S.B. 285 with the NCCE and as the Executive Director of the Franchised Auto Dealers Association. We appreciate civic programs being placed in communities such as McDermitt, Nevada.

MR. MARKS:

The Nevada State Education Association supports S.B. 285.

ELISSA SECRIST:

I support S.B. 285. I am a coach for the We the People program at Reed High School. The program is a life-changing opportunity which provides them valuable experience in public speaking, teamwork and persistence. My experience is that this program brought me out my shell, taught me self-confidence and fostered research skills which have aided me in my career field. I have coached Reed High School students since 2017. Through documents such as the United States Constitution and Declaration of Independence, and through the wisdom of political philosophers such as Hobbes and Locke, students are taught how to understand and engage with American democracy. By supporting this program, legislators are supporting a brighter future for the next generation and the health of our democracy.

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MR. MORADKHAN:

The Vegas Chamber supports S.B. 285. Civic engagement is an important part of Nevada culture and allows students to have a better understanding of how their State and federal governments work.

MS. PIERCZYNSKI:

The Nevada Association of School Superintendents supports S.B. 285.

SONDRA COSGROVE (Co-President, Nevada Center for Civic Engagement):

I teach at the College of Southern Nevada, and I support S.B. 285. I give my time and effort to the NCCE because students who participate in programs like We the People graduate ready for college. They know how to meet due dates, follow instructions, persevere and do presentations. They can address challenges. The students learn about the *Federalist Papers* and how the Constitution has been amended over the years. They learn why we have to struggle sometimes to resolve important issues, such as First Amendment issues or the right to privacy.

CHAIR DONDERO LOOP:

We will now hold a work session on Assembly Bill (A.B.) 268.

ASSEMBLY BILL 268 (1st Reprint): Makes appropriations for the payment of retention incentives to certain employees of the State Government.
(BDR S-1037)

WAYNE THORLEY (Senate Fiscal Analyst):

Assembly Bill 268, in its first reprint, makes an appropriation of just under \$21 million for the payment of retention incentives to Executive Branch employees, with the exception of Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) professional positions, positions not included in the Executive Budget, or positions considered temporary, intermittent, or seasonal.

Assembly Bill 268 also provides funding for the Judicial Branch to provide \$500 bonuses. Section 2 of A.B. 268 provides \$325,000 for the Legislative Branch for \$500 bonuses. Section 3 of A.B. 268 provides for a \$81,000 appropriation to the Public Employees' Retirement System for the \$500 bonuses.

Bonuses would be distributed twice in FY 2022-2023. Employees who are in their positions on March 31, 2023, would be eligible for the first \$500 bonus. Employees in their positions on June 16, 2023, would be eligible for the second \$500 bonus.

There were 21 people who provided testimony in support of A.B. 268, including Secretary of State Cisco Aguilar; representatives from the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees; representatives from the Vegas Chamber and several State employees. There were five people who testified in opposition to the first reprint of A.B. 268, including representatives from the Nevada Faculty Alliance, some University of Nevada faculty members and representatives from the College of Southern Nevada Faculty Senate. There was no testimony provided in neutral. There were no amendments to A.B. 268 presented during its hearing by the Committee.

SENATOR CANNIZZARO:

One of the issues with A.B. 268 is around NSHE professional staff. There is not an animus towards higher education professional staff. We appreciate the work they do. We are in the process of determining how we provide retention bonuses for NSHE professional staff. We do not mean to slight those who educate our students and other professionals who work in our college system. They do important work that prepares Nevada graduates for future careers and the rest of their lives.

When the Committee looks at legislation, it wants to make sure measures are funded appropriately. The \$20 million recommended by the Office of the Governor for Executive Branch employee retention bonuses was to cover NSHE professional staff, but the numbers did not add up for that coverage. That issue was exacerbated by differing views and associated numbers of who qualifies as a professional staff member and who in NSHE would qualify for these particular bonuses. There was the idea there was also a proposal for additional retention bonuses over the 2023-2025 biennium that has not yet been heard by this Committee. The Committee is going through budgeting for the 2023-2025 biennium, understanding that if we are to award retention bonuses, we are going to have the discussion again.

For both years of the 2023-2025 biennium, retention bonuses are slated to be double what is seen in FY 2022-2023. As that multiplies over the biennium, it becomes closer to \$20 million that is not accounted for in the budget. The

Committee has not received budget amendments or suggestions for how to pay that figure for the entire 2023-2025 biennium.

We are discussing a bill from the Assembly. We recognize we want to do something soon for State employees for retention bonuses. Assembly Bill 268 is moving faster than other legislation to get that done in time for it to be paid in FY 2022-2023. There were several questions as to how to accomplish retention bonuses for NSHE employees that did not make it in A.B. 268 as transmitted by the Assembly. This point was overlooked, with the impression made that there was an attempt to isolate a particular group of persons from bonuses without further discussion. That was not the case.

After discussions on the employee group in NSHE for professional staff, there should be money accounted for with the understanding that, if we have this discussion about retention bonuses, we have to think about the impact on the 2023-2025 biennium. That is more money than allotted in A.B. 268 in its current form.

People thought: "We can absolutely afford this. It is just \$3 million, \$4 million or somewhere in that vicinity." When we discuss this matter as a Committee, we have to take into account the fiscal effect the action would have on the 2023-2025 biennium.

After a series of discussions aimed at attaining more accurate information and giving money for NSHE professional staff employee bonuses, I would propose Amendment No. 53 ([Exhibit I](#)) to A.B. 268 for a \$3.5 million allocation for NSHE to give retention bonuses to their employee group within the professional classification as they see fit. We will further ask that NSHE provide reporting and data on how employees were determined eligible for the bonuses, and how much each employee received. We will continue to have discussions as they relate to future retention benefits.

We heard from Chancellor Dale Erquiaga that NSHE would be able and willing to facilitate giving retention bonuses to professional staff if we gave them a sum of money. After discussion with members of the Assembly, the Chair and Legislative Counsel Bureau Fiscal staff, I believe this is something we can do for the remainder of FY 2022-2023. We will have further discussions on appropriate budgeting for the remainder of the biennium.

We owe it to State workers to ensure they feel supported at a time when we have extra funds. It is imperative to invest in them. Their critical services would not exist without them.

SENATOR SEEVERS GANSERT:

Amendment No. 53 proposed by Senator Cannizzaro makes sense. Professional staff from NSHE and classified staff have worked hard through the pandemic. I understand Amendment No. 53 could entail more spending later because we have two years to cover, and Amendment No. 53 only covers half a year.

SENATOR TITUS:

I was prepared to vote no on A.B. 268 before Amendment No. 53 and appreciate Senator Cannizzaro's proposal. I will support the measure with the clarifications in Amendment No. 53.

MR. THORLEY:

Amendment No. 53 would fund an additional \$3.5 million General Fund appropriation to NSHE for FY 2022-2023 to provide for bonuses for professional staff. The Nevada System of Higher Education would provide details of their bonus program to the Interim Finance Committee after the close of FY 2022-2023.

SENATOR CANNIZZARO:

That is correct.

SENATOR NGUYEN MOVED TO AMEND AND DO PASS AS AMENDED A.B. 268 WITH AMENDMENT NO. 53 IN EXHIBIT I PRESENTED BY SENATOR CANNIZZARO.

SENATOR SEEVERS GANSERT SECONDED THE MOTION.

THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

* * * * *

KENT ERVIN (President, Nevada Faculty Alliance):

The Nevada Faculty Alliance empowers members to be fully engaged in our mission to help students succeed. As amended, A.B. 268 will give NSHE faculty a morale boost. We support the measure.

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CHAIR DONDERO LOOP:
I adjourn this meeting at 10:46 a.m.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

Joko Cailles,
Committee Secretary

APPROVED BY:

Senator Marilyn Dondero Loop, Chair

DATE: _____

EXHIBIT SUMMARY				
Bill	Exhibit Letter	Introduced on Minute Report Page No.	Witness / Entity	Description
	A	1		Agenda
	B	1		Attendance Roster
S.B. 244	C	4	Ciara Byrne / Green Our Planet	Green Our Planet Presentation
S.B. 45	D	11	Fran Almaraz / Nevada Silver Haired Legislative Forum	Nevada Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Welfare and Supportive Services Template Letter
S.B. 189	E	17	Alex Bybee / Communities in Schools Nevada	Communities in Schools Nevada Slide Presentation
S.B. 189	F	22	Alex Bybee / Communities in Schools Nevada	Communities in Schools Nevada Cost Allocation Breakdown
S.B. 189	G	29	Alex Bybee / Communities in Schools Nevada	Elaine Wynn Letter in Support of S.B. 189
S.B. 285	H	33	Shane Piccinni / Nevada Center for Civic Engagement	Packet form Nevada Center for Civic Engagement
A.B. 268	I	38	Senator Cannizzaro	Amendment No. 53 to A.B. 268