

**By Shelby Friesz, et al**

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Senators continued debating bills this week and passed many bills through their final reading. Here is a debrief of the week:

- **LB507:** Sen. Kathy Campbell of Lincoln sponsored this bill to improve the quality of child care centers, which passed on a 27-0 vote Tuesday. It would require certain child care centers to participate in a quality rating and improvement system and change the eligibility for families to get assistance to use child care centers.

Requiring the centers to uphold certain criteria, this bill would make information on the quality of certain centers available for parents, and would provide accountability for the state dollars spent funding these centers, Campbell said.

An amendment was adopted on a 26-0 vote to change the eligibility for families to get assistance from 120 percent of the federal poverty level, which is about \$23,000 for a family of three. The amendment changed the eligibility to 125 percent of the federal poverty level in the 2013-2014 fiscal year and to 130 percent of the poverty level in the 2014-2015 fiscal year.

- **LB44:** Under this bill passed Thursday on a 38-1 vote, juveniles convicted of Class 1A felonies would no longer face a mandatory life sentence without the possibility of parole. The bill, introduced by Sen. Brad Ashford of Omaha, would establish a maximum sentence of life imprisonment and a minimum sentence of 40 years imprisonment for juvenile offenders convicted of the most serious crimes, like murder, rape and kidnapping.

The bill also requires parole boards to consider certain factors—like age at the time of offense—when making determinations about parole. The bill is an attempt to bring Nebraska state law in line with a recent Supreme Court decision that mandatory sentences of life without the possibility of parole are unconstitutional for juveniles under the age of 18.

- **LB354:** Lawmakers suspended debate Tuesday on this bill that would partially privatize the Nebraska Corn Board. Established by the Corn Resources Act of 1978, the Corn Board allocates funds for research, education, market development and promotion to expand the demand for and value of Nebraska corn and corn-based products.

Under this bill, called the Nebraska Corn Promotion Act, the Corn Board would no longer be a state entity, but a “quasi-independent” body, according to Sen. Tyson Larson of O’Neill, who introduced the bill.

The bill would allow Nebraska corn producers—rather than the governor—to elect Corn Board members. It would also give producers a refund option on the half a cent per bushel of corn excise tax—called a checkoff—they pay at the point of initial sale, which funds the activities of the Corn Board.

- **LB545:** Nebraska senators advanced a bill Thursday, May 2, that would streamline the appeals process for the Nebraska Public Service Commission. The bill was introduced by Sen. Annette Dubas of Fullerton who said eliminating district courts, which are the first line of review, from the process would make it more efficient and less costly to ratepayers who bear the expense of appeals. The commission regulates public industries including telecommunications and electric services. Senators advanced the bill to Select File with a 33-8

vote.

- **LB99:** A bill that would change the collection of racial profiling information and Nebraska Crime Victims Reparations Fund requirements advanced to Final Reading Tuesday, April 30. Sen. Heath Mello of Omaha introduced LB99, which would remove the sunset date for the Nebraska Commission on Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice to collect racial profiling data. It would also add requirements for the commission and law enforcement agencies. An amendment to the bill, adopted 29-0, would eliminate a requirement that a victim suffer at least a 10 percent loss of financial resources to qualify for compensation from the Nebraska Crime Victims Reparations Fund.

- **LB423:** This Agriculture Committee bill passed through final reading Thursday on a 41-0 vote. This bill changes the regulations for seizing mistreated livestock to allow police officers to create a compromise with owners to avoid removing the livestock from the owners' possession. If the animal is seized, the owner must pay for its care, but will be reimbursed if found not guilty of animal mistreatment.

A bill (LB544) sponsored by Sen. Tom Hansen of North was adopted as an amendment to LB423. With this amendment, any livestock owner who owns a bull with the venereal disease bovine trichomoniasis cannot transport or sell the infected livestock unless it is for slaughter.

- **LB104 and LB402:** Two bills advanced to Select File in the Nebraska Legislature that would give renewable energy incentives in the state, even with some senators saying the bills were too similar. Sen. Heath Mello of Omaha sponsored LB402 that would encourage local ownership of renewable energy projects.

Sen. Steve Lathrop of Omaha sponsored LB 104 that would give tax incentives to companies producing renewable energy to export to other states, including wind, solar and geothermal energy.

- **LB93:** Nebraska senators advanced a bill from general file Tuesday, April 29, that would let veterans add their veteran status on a driver's licence or state ID. Veterans otherwise would have to show discharge papers or other documents with a Social Security number to take advantage of store discounts, said Sen. Annette Dubas of Fullerton, who introduced the bill.

She said those documents, which aren't photo IDs, contain private information and people wouldn't routinely carry them. At least 34 other states passed or are in the process of passing similar laws, she said.

- **LB240:** Under this bill passed Thursday on a 41-0 vote, continuing education will satisfy work requirements necessary to qualify for public benefits like the Aid to Dependent Children program. The bill, introduced by Sen. John Harms of Scottsbluff, eliminates previous age restrictions in the law and allows a person of any age to fulfill work requirements by pursuing a high school diploma or GED.