



Nebraska Association of Service Providers



**Understanding
Our Unique
Unicameral**

Advocacy is public support for a particular cause or policy.

Political Advocacy is an act of supporting a change or creation of an issue on a local, state, or federal level.

When participating in political advocacy, people voice their opinions (through emails, letters, calls, social media posts and more) directed towards their elected officials.



Why Is Advocacy So Important?

HCBS services are almost exclusively funded through Medicaid. States determine the scope and payment for HCBS services and the federal government provides matching funds at a predetermined rate. This combined funding is then used to reimburse HCBS IDD providers.

The reimbursement rate set by the Nebraska state legislature must cover every expense necessary to provide support for people with I/DD: operational costs, facility and vehicle maintenance, program development, and all employee-related expenses.

**Elected officials determine how much funding our services receive.
Advocacy is how we increase access, improve quality, and raise wages.**

In order to be successful, political advocacy needs to have meaningful and well-planned content.

- Advocates must be able to effectively highlight and explain why elected officials should care about our issues.
- **Advocates must be able to articulate clear recommendations (actions) desired from the elected officials.**
- The most successful advocates do not work alone; they develop a network of passionate champions - **that's us!**



ALL ROLES ARE IMPORTANT!

There is no 'right' or 'wrong' way to advocate - only effective or ineffective.

We are most effective when we combine our strengths and work together.



The Nebraska Legislature

Understanding Our Unicameral





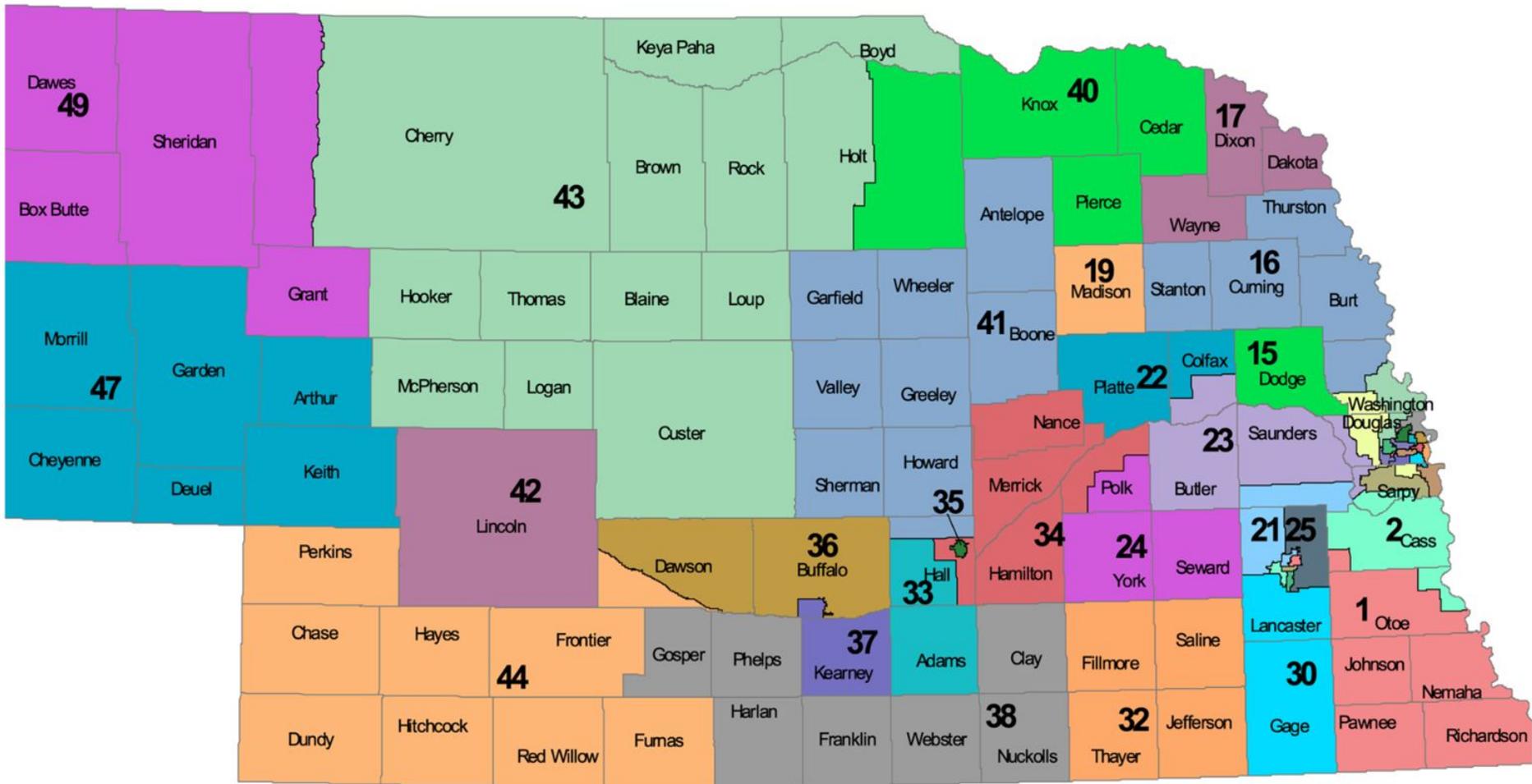
There are 49 senators in the Nebraska Legislature.

Each senator represents one district which has about 35,000 people living in it.

Senators serve four-year terms. They are limited to two consecutive terms.

It is a part-time, citizen legislature, which means most of its members have other jobs.

Senators receive \$12,000 a year for serving in the Legislature.



The Nebraska Legislature uses a biennium structure.

- That means it works **in two-year increments** with a “long” 90-day session the first year and a “short” 60-day session the second.
(We are currently in the short session of the 109th Legislature)
- Both sessions of the two-year biennium cycle start in early January, ending somewhere between April and June depending on the session.
- If time sensitive or pressing matters arise outside of the time when the legislators are in session, they are able to convene for a “special session.”
- Nebraska’s state fiscal year runs from July 1st-June 30th.
- Laws approved during the session take effect July 1st

nebraskalegislature.gov/calendar/calendar.php



The Law-Making Process

The lawmaking process in Nebraska **officially** begins when a senator introduces a bill into the Legislature at the beginning of session.



But the process **unofficially** begins much earlier, when a senator first begins to formulate ideas for new laws (e.g. over the Interim).

- An idea for a new law may be suggested by anyone: concerned citizens, special interest groups, state agencies or the governor.
- Senators are currently limited to no more than 20 bills per session.

Maximize the Interim

In the months leading up to a new session (~Aug-Dec) it's critical for community advocates to strategize together.

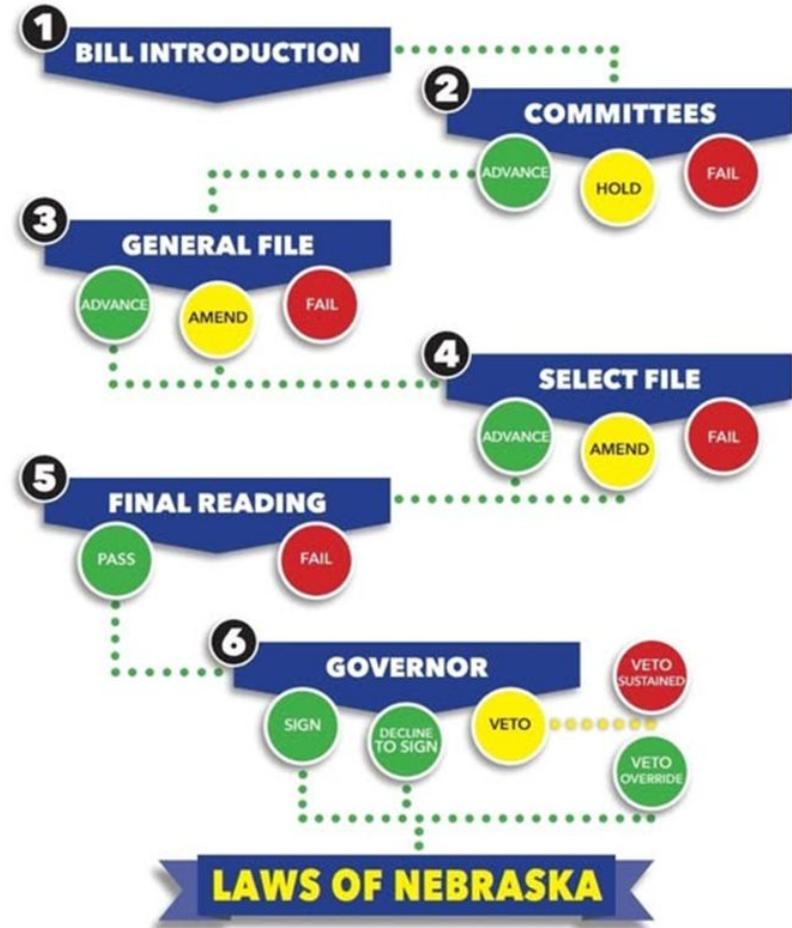
- What issues need to be prioritized?
- Which senators are willing to carry bills for us?
- And most importantly: **Relationship-building!**

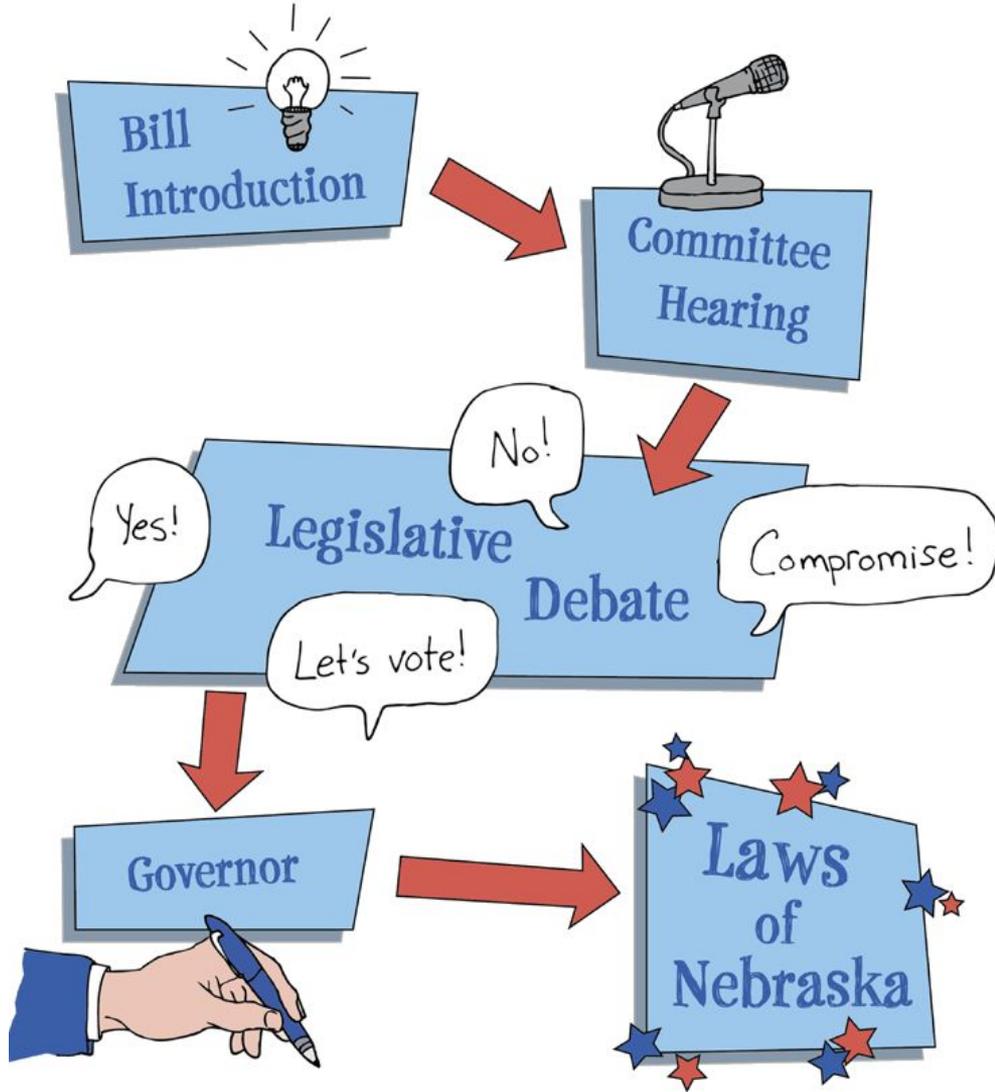
The interim is a critical time to meet with as many senators as possible and educate them on our issues.



- Before the Legislature can formally consider an idea, it must be introduced as a bill by a senator or legislative committee.
- Roughly 500 – 800 bills are introduced each session
- Committees debate and propose amendments to bills, and the full Legislature has an opportunity to debate each bill at least two times before its final passage.
- Senators may propose amendments to alter a bill at each stage of debate.

HOW LAWS ARE MADE IN THE UNICAMERAL





Legislative Committees

A listing of the committees and their meeting information is here:

<https://nebraskalegislature.gov/pdf/committees/roster.pdf>



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



A Public Committee Hearing

Public Committee Hearings

- After a bill is introduced, it is sent to a committee which will conduct a **public** hearing on that bill in which citizens have a chance to express their opinions on record to committee members.
- After the public hearing, the committee members consider what action they want to take on the bill.

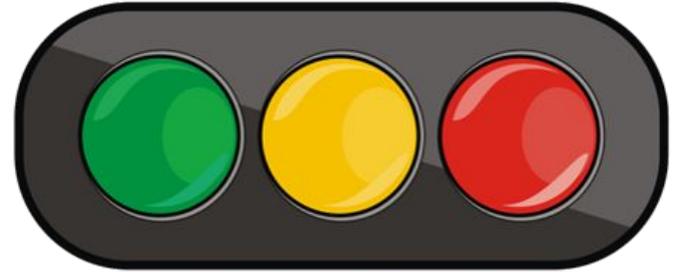
Committee Options:

- **Advance** the bill to General File “as is”
- **Advance** the bill to General File with amendments
- **Indefinitely postpone** the bill
- **Take no action** on the bill

Testifying at a Committee Hearing

- Public testifiers are usually limited to 3 or 5 minutes.
- Prepare written copies of your testimony (12-15)
- Complete a testifier form (stacked by the room entrance).
- After the sponsoring senator finishes their introduction, the committee chair will ask testifiers to come forward.
- You must state and spell your full name for the record.
- Committee members may ask questions. It's OK to say you don't know - this gives you an opportunity to follow-up with more information after the hearing.

Testifying Tips



- Try not to repeat testimony offered by previous testifiers.
 - If you know other people planning to testify, strategize ahead of time who will cover what points.
 - This helps maximize the 3 or 5 minute time limit.
- Prepare your testimony in advance and time yourself reading it aloud.
- If auxiliary aids or reasonable accommodations are needed for you to attend a hearing, please call the Office of the Clerk of the Legislature, (402) 471-2271.
- Advance notice of seven days is needed when requesting an interpreter.

“General File” (Round 1)

- If the committee advances a bill, it goes to the *General File* stage.
- General file is the first time the full Legislature has the opportunity to debate and vote on a bill.
- **Senators also can propose amendments in General File.**
- It takes a majority vote of the Legislature (25 votes) to adopt amendments and to move a bill from General File to Select File
- **Emergency Clause requires 33 votes**

“Select File” (Round 2)

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

“Final Reading” (Round 3)

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

The Governor

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



How to Read a Proposed Bill

A **legislative bill (LB)** is a proposed **law**.

A **legislative resolution (LR)** is a proposed **rule** for how the Unicameral is administered.

A resolution does not have a direct impact on Nebraskans, but it can do things like get rid of supermajority requirements or remove the ability to filibuster.

How to Read a Proposed Bill

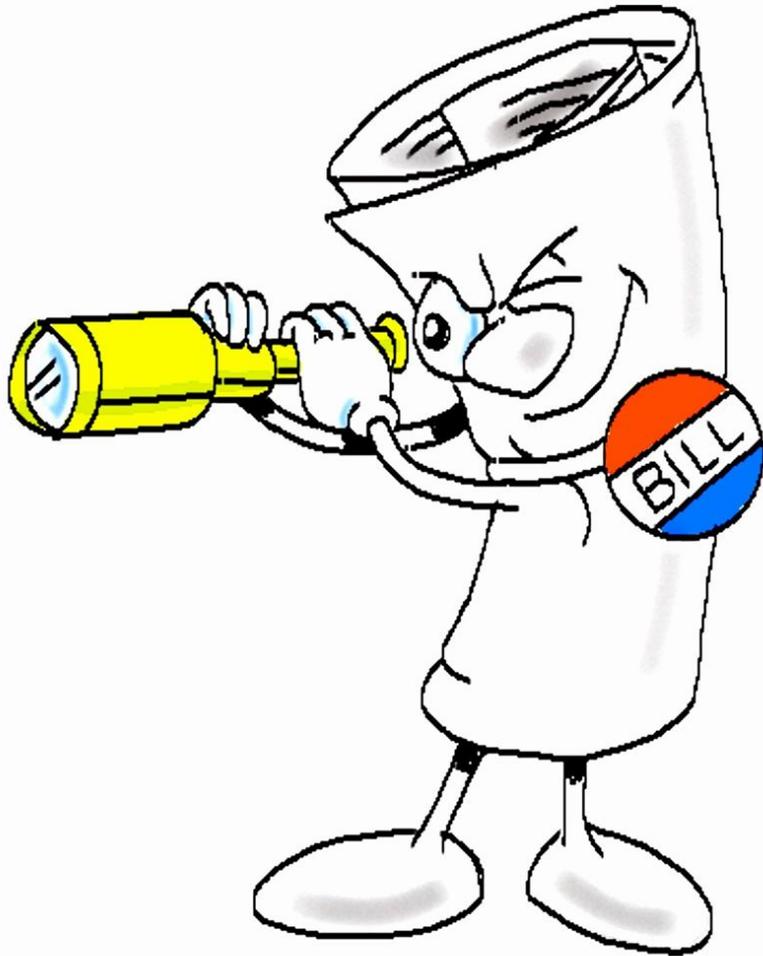
Often a bill is changing something that is already in state law. Proposed legislation is formatted to help the reader identify what is existing law, what is being added, and what is being removed.

Everything in normal formatting is existing law (no changes)

Anything underlined is being added

~~Anything stricken through is being removed~~

Example: [LB958.pdf](#)



Bill Tracking

You can track up to 15 bills for free:

[Nebraska BillTracker](#) | [Nebraska Legislation](#) |
[NE.gov](#) | [Main Page](#)

Resource: The Unicameral Update

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

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



NEBRASKA LEGISLATURE

The official site of the Nebraska Unicameral Legislature



- Home
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- Legislative Divisions
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108th Legislature, 2nd Regular Session - Day 60

View Day 60 Activity

The Legislature is in session

Recent Legislative Information

- The online Nebraska statutes have been updated as of June 28, 2023.
- 2024 Legislative Session Calendar**
- Introduced Legislation**
- 2024 Appropriations Committee Recommendation Report
- Senator List (Print Friendly)
- Committee on Committee Report
- Priority Bill Listing**
- 2023 Annual Tax Rate Review Committee Report
- 2023 Biennial Budget Report
- 2023 Carryover Bills and Resolutions (8/14/2023)
- 2023 Interim Study Resolutions (7/21/2023)
- Interim Study Listing
- 2023 After Adjournment Journal (6/6/2023)
- 2023 Final Worksheet (6/6/2023)
- After Adjournment Worksheet (6/1/2023)
- LFO Directory of State Agency Programs and Funds
- 2023 Subject and Section Indexes for Introduced Legislation (5/3/2023)
- 2023 Subject and Section Index for Passed Legislation (7/25/2023)
- Hearing schedules
- Public Input Options
- Special Fund Financial Status

News from the Unicameral Update

Unicameral Update

Search Current Bills

LB #

Search Past Legislation

Search Laws

browse statutes by Chapter

Live Video Streaming

Nebraska Public Media

PBS FOX

Streaming video provided by Nebraska Public Media

Find Your Senator

Enter Street Address, City State Zip

Legislative Calendar

April

18 Today

April

1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30

Public Input Options

There are several options for the public to [provide input](#):

1. Testify In-Person at public hearing
2. Submit Online Comments / ADA written comment
3. Send letter/email to individual senators
4. Phone calls to senator's office
5. Meet in person with senator or staff (in office or district)

Resources: Contacting Senators



Mail

Senator _____
District # _____
State Capitol
PO Box 94604
Lincoln, NE 68509-4604



Phone

Senator Roster
(with phone #'s)
<https://nebraskalegislature.gov/pdf/senators/roster.pdf>



Email

It's typically like this:
asmith@leg.ne.gov
But doublecheck the
webpage to be sure

Submitting Online Comments

- The link to submit a comment is on each individual bill's landing page.

[Example: Nebraska Legislature - Legislative Document](#)

- Comments must be submitted **no later than 8:00am** the day of the public committee hearing.
- Must confirm your submission via email (two step process).
- Comments can be in support, opposition, or a neutral capacity.
- If you reference your profession/expertise, be sure to clarify whether your comment is on behalf of your organization or you speaking as a private citizen.

Glossary of Legislative Terms:

<https://nebraskalegislature.gov/about/glossary.php>



Review Handouts



- Advocacy Toolkit
- Storytelling Worksheet
- Contact Information

www.neserviceproviders.org