



Pete Ricketts
Governor

STATE OF NEBRASKA

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Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, and
Members of the Legislature
State Capitol
Lincoln, NE 68509

Dear Mr. President and Members of the Legislature:

I am returning LB 998 without my signature and with my objections.

While the goal of the bill is noble, the bill in its final form misses the mark. I share concern about the underlying problem LB 998 is trying to address. However, the legislation creates a “one-size fits all” program and a state fund that merely accepts private donations and passes those private dollars on to a political subdivision.

LB 998 is not needed. A private foundation could directly raise and provide funds to the Educational Service Unit Coordinating Council (“ESUCC”) or to individual Educational Service Units (“ESU”s). Those entities would then have more discretion and flexibility to connect with existing state and community resources in their local areas to design locally-tailored programs.

As proposed by the bill, once \$3.6 million in private donations are received, the Educational Service Unit Coordinating Council must hire staff and further distribute funding to individual ESUs to hire social workers. The ESUCC, which is created under existing law as a political subdivision, would receive the money and operate the program that is created in the bill.

LB 998 unnecessarily inserts the State between private funders and the political subdivision receiving those donations. Political subdivisions may already accept donations. Instead of providing additional services, the bill limits how an ESU may use private funding. The bill also creates another separate silo of mental health services that is redundant to the existing efforts of the Department of Health and Human Services Behavioral Health Division at a time when we are trying to better coordinate a system of care for delivery of these services.

Another problem created by LB 998 is that it would set a precedent for the State to assume the obligation of running a private grant program. As proposed by the bill, the State provides no funding for the program and no state agency has a role other than to act as a budgetary pass-through entity. As noted, LB 998 fails to coordinate with existing efforts and funding provided for behavioral and mental health care services.

The bill is also unclear about how parents and guardians would be involved in the consent and care of the student for screening, referral, treatment, and payment for services that would be created by this legislation. Parental rights are paramount and must have a clearly defined role in any state-sanctioned program that impacts a child.

Taxpayers expect efficient and effective state services. Creating duplicative and uncoordinated programs – even with private funds – is irresponsible. We can do better. Currently, several ESUs have staff participating in the implementation of a comprehensive Systems of Care model that is coordinated through the Division of Behavioral Health. Those efforts should be encouraged and not potentially undermined with disparate and disconnected state programs.

I have vetoed LB 998 as it is unnecessary. The bill creates an artificial need for a state cash fund, it fails to require coordination with existing state behavioral and mental health care initiatives, and it does not provide a clear and respectful role for the parents and guardians of a minor child.

Sincerely,



Pete Ricketts
Governor