

OTOC STATE ISSUE INFORMATION SHEET

Expanding Professional Licensing for Qualified Immigrant Practitioners

Omaha Together One Community (OTOC) recognizes that Nebraska's growing healthcare shortages require practical solutions that unlock the untapped skills of our residents. Enacted in April 2026, Nebraska's LB1212 established a landmark pathway for qualified, internationally trained physicians to practice in shortage areas without duplicating a U.S. residency. Overseen by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Board of Medicine and Surgery, physicians first practice under a provisional license for three years, advance to a transitional license for another 3 years, and can ultimately apply for a full, unrestricted medical license after the minimum of six years of practice. Nebraska can expand this successful framework to additional essential professions, such as dentistry and veterinary medicine, to address severe shortages across our state.

The Impact of Bureaucratic Barriers on Rural Health

- **The Problem:** Onerous relicensing rules force skilled immigrant professionals into severe underemployment or entirely different fields, leaving critical gaps in local services. In dentistry, roughly 44 to 52 of Nebraska's 93 counties are designated as dental shortage areas, with 20 counties lacking a full-time practicing dentist. This lack of preventive care forces rural residents into hospital emergency rooms for non-traumatic dental issues, straining emergency department staff and incurring costly, preventable medical expenses.
- **The Solution:** Duplicate the bipartisan framework of LB1212 to create supervised, provisional credentialing pathways for foreign-licensed healthcare, dental, and veterinary professionals.
- **The Impact:** Modernizing professional licensing puts qualified immigrant talent to work in their trained professions, alleviates severe healthcare shortages in rural counties, reduces emergency room burdens, and delivers timely care to underserved communities.

Candidate Commitment Question: *"If elected, will you support legislation to expand provisional professional licensing frameworks, ensuring skilled immigrant Nebraskans can utilize their foreign-earned professional qualifications to serve communities across our state?"*

Ensuring Unemployment Insurance Access for Work-Authorized Nebraskans

Omaha Together One Community (OTOC) recognizes that a fair, resilient economy requires equal treatment for all legally employed workers. Nebraska remains one of the few states that prevents certain work-authorized residents, including individuals with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and Temporary Protected Status (TPS), from accessing state Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits if they lose their job. Even though local businesses pay state unemployment taxes on behalf of these employees into the state UI Trust Fund, statutory barriers currently exclude these workers from drawing the safety net benefits their labor helps fund.

The Economic Case for Workforce Access

- **The Problem:** Employers continuously contribute to the Nebraska Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund, which maintains a strong surplus of over \$500 million. However, narrow state definitions restrict benefits for DACA and TPS holders. Excluded workers facing temporary layoffs are left without earned income support, which increases financial instability and drives skilled talent away from the state.
- **The Solution:** Update state statutory language to ensure that all individuals with federal work authorization can access state unemployment benefits when involuntarily unemployed.
- **The Impact:** Expanding access protects Nebraska's labor pool across key industries, stabilizes local family finances during economic shifts, and costs an estimated \$1.2 million, a minimal draw on a half-billion-dollar fund. This change carries broad coalition support from 70 organizations statewide under the Nebraska Alliance for Thriving Communities.

Candidate Commitment Question: *"If elected, will you vote to ensure access to unemployment insurance for all work-authorized Nebraskans?"*

Prepared by:



Protecting Student Safety and Education Access in Nebraska Schools

Omaha Together One Community (OTOC) believes that every child in Nebraska deserves a safe, welcoming school environment dedicated to learning. Under the landmark 1982 U.S. Supreme Court decision *Plyler v. Doe*, public schools are legally mandated to educate all children regardless of immigration status. For over a decade, federal policy prohibited immigration enforcement actions, including arrests, interviews, and surveillance, at sensitive locations like K-12 public schools. The recent rescission of these federal protections creates severe fear and confusion across local school districts. Clear state guidelines requiring a valid judicial warrant before federal agents enter school property ensure schools comply with constitutional protections while upholding every student's right to an education.

The Impact of Immigration Enforcement Concerns on Children and Schools

- **The Problem:** Immigration enforcement creates fear, and directly harms student well-being and school engagement. Nationwide, 1 in 4 children lives in an immigrant family. Over 40% of adults in these families report worrying about immigration enforcement, over 20% report avoiding essential daily activities, and more than 1 in 7 report their children experiencing increased emotional distress.
- **The Solution:** Nebraska state leaders can pass proactive policy ensuring school personnel ONLY allow federal immigration enforcement access to school grounds or student records when presented with a valid judicial warrant issued by a judge, rather than an administrative document.
- **The Impact:** Requiring judicial warrants restores trust between families and local districts, reduces chronic absenteeism, supports mental health, and protects educators from being thrust into federal civil immigration enforcement roles.

Candidate Commitment Question: *"If elected, will you support legislation requiring federal immigration enforcement officers to present a valid judicial warrant before gaining access to Nebraska public school grounds or student records?"*

Protecting Nebraskans Through Medical Debt Consumer Protections

Omaha Together One Community (OTOC) believes that no Nebraskan should face financial ruin or homelessness simply because they got sick. An estimated 100 million Americans carry medical debt, with half of all adults reporting personal experience with medical bills they cannot afford. Medical debt drives severe economic distress, forcing thousands of Nebraska families into court systems annually and contributing to two out of every three bankruptcies nationally. An estimated 90% of the cases a retired Western Nebraska County Court Judge had on his docket were related to medical debt. When patients fall behind on medical bills, unchecked interest rates and collections can quickly escalate a healthcare crisis into an economic disaster. A recent report described these business practices as creating a medical debt ecosystem that puts unsuspecting patients into poverty and poor health. Passing commonsense consumer protections keeps families housed, financially stable, and able to seek essential care.

The Impact of Medical Debt and Predatory Collections

- **The Problem:** Medical debt directly threatens housing security and discourages necessary healthcare. In 2025 alone, just two collection agencies filed over 7,250 lawsuits for hospital debt in the Omaha area, impacting roughly 2 out of every 100 households in Douglas and Sarpy Counties. Unchecked interest rates, reaching up to 16% under state contract law and exceeding 25% on third-party medical credit cards, rapidly compound past-due healthcare bills into unpayable debts for working families. With 37% of American families unable to cover a \$400 emergency in cash, the median medical debt of over \$1,200 in Nebraska leaves working households at severe risk of property liens, foreclosure, and eviction.
- **The Solution:** Pass legislative protections like LB 779 to cap interest rates on medical debt at 3%, mandate a 90-day grace period after the final invoice before any interest or late fees apply, and protect primary residences from debt-related liens or foreclosures.
- **The Impact:** Enacting these consumer protections prevents housing loss, reduces overburdened court dockets, shields families from predatory interest rates, and ensures Nebraskans can manage necessary medical expenses without risking their homes.

Candidate Commitment Question: *"If elected, will you support legislation to protect Nebraskans by capping medical debt interest at 3%, deferring interest and late fees for at least 90 days, and exempting primary homes from medical debt liens or foreclosures?"*