Good Afternoon, Chairman Geist and Members of the Committee.

My name is Katie Patrick. Katie K-A-T-I-E, Patrick P-A-T-R-I-C-K

I am the executive director at Catholic Social Services of Southern Nebraska.

– With offices in Lincoln, Auburn, Hastings and Imperial, Catholic Social Services covers 24,000 square miles of the Lincoln Diocese serving all people, regardless of faith.

Our services include emergency cash assistance, food markets and meal services, immigration legal services, refugee resettlement and employment services, and the St. Gianna Program, which provides transitional housing and support to women and children fleeing domestic violence or experiencing a crisis pregnancy. We also maintain a community garden, greenhouse, a car donation program, a recycling program and a warehouse full of donated furniture that we give to those in need. For the homeless and those at risk of homelessness, we provide free and urgent items at our front desk, including blankets, diapers, formula, personal care items and gift cards to our Gift & Thrift Store.

Specific to today’s committee hearing, since the early 1990s, Catholic Social Services is one of three agencies in the state of Nebraska that provides immediate services to refugees, and most recently to humanitarian parolees from Afghanistan and Ukraine. These immediate services are referred to as Reception & Placement, or the R&P period. This service period lasts 90 days.

It can be an overwhelming experience for clients, and case managers. During this time, temporary and permanent housing is secured, utilities are set up, including phone and internet, furniture and households goods are delivered, children are enrolled in school, transportation to and from the schools is arranged by CSS with the help of neighbors and other members of the community, and parents are enrolled in English language classes at partnering agencies. Again, transportation is often arranged by CSS with the help of neighbors and other community members. Any documentation for work authorization, social security, and benefits, including SNAP, is completed at this time. **Typically, driver’s licenses are also applied for at this time.**

A series of three mandatory health appointments are scheduled and transportation is either provided or arranged by CSS. There are also several home visits during this period where direct cash assistance is provided accompanied by conversations on budgeting and paying bills. Community and cultural orientation is ongoing in this 90 day service period. Case managers and CSS volunteers visit with clients about everything from health and safety to U.S. laws and traditions, as well as how various U.S. institutions, like education and healthcare operate.

***While many of these services are provided by our staff, in the first few weeks after arrival, how clients access ongoing services is determined by their ability to drive. Most importantly, of which, are employment services.***

Typically, in conjunction with all that I have just mentioned, is the employment search. Our team of eight refugee program staff are all trained to assist eligible clients in securing employment.

Over the years, Catholic Social Services has developed great relationships with local employers. We created an employment readiness curriculum that specifically addresses the interview process and employment in the U.S. Most of our clients are eager to begin working as a way to provide for their families, and are proud to contribute to the local economy and community that has welcomed them.

***But once again, how clients arrive for interviews and follow up interviews, onsite job training, continuing education and training opportunities, meetings with their employment case managers, is determined by their ability to drive.***

As of today, Catholic Social Services has welcomed more than 30 households who support 84 dependents. If we include the elderly, and those ineligible for work, Catholic Social Services is assisting nearly 120 Ukrainian parolees.

Many of our clients work at local manufacturing plants, construction companies, auto shops, trucking companies, colleges and universities, and elsewhere.

**We have one client, who is married and the father of three children. He works at a local manufacturing plant and relies on others or on alternative ways to get to work.**

**We have another client who is married and the father of two children works for a local construction company and relies on others or on alternative ways to get to work and the grocery store.**

**Yet another client who is single and living with several other Ukrainian men works for another company and relies on others or on alternative ways to get to work, the grocery store, and doctor appointments.**

Without the ability for Ukrainian humanitarian parolees to apply for and receive driver's licenses, or as this bill is proposing, a driving privilege card, it derails their entire resettlement process.

Once established in Lincoln, without the freedom of movement and without the ability to earn an income and provide for oneself and one's family can be extremely discouraging. Refugees, and in this case Ukrainian humanitarian parolees, have overcome *a lot* of obstacles.

***As a community and as a State, we are asking them to join our workforce and become productive members of American society, but not passing this bill would deny them the means to do so.***

This community, much like any other refugee or migrant community, is eager to work and take care of their families. They want to integrate into the neighborhoods where they live. They want to learn about and explore Lincoln, the city they now call home.

I respectfully ask that you advance LB199 from committee, so that the Ukrainian families, which the city of Lincoln has so wonderfully welcomed, have access to the driving privilege card so that they may continue to be active members of our community and providers for their families.