

By Shelby Friesz

Nebraska News Service

More access to emergency funds could be available to school districts under a bill heard in the Education Committee of the Nebraska Legislature.

Sen. Ken Haar of Malcolm presented the bill (LB201) that would allow school districts and educational service units to use more than their available funds in case of an emergency.

Seven people testified in support of the bill and nobody testified against or neutral to it.

Haar cited the fire that destroyed the Lincoln Public Schools district office in 2011 and the tornado that tore apart the Norris schools in 2004 as examples of emergencies that would be covered under the bill.

John Neal, an administrator in Lincoln Public Schools, said that even with the community support and responsive insurance, the school district struggled to have everything running as it should on time after the fire.

He also said that both Lincoln Public Schools and Norris Public Schools were lucky that these emergencies happened while school was out for the summer break.

“Because of our experience, we have insight into what would be beneficial policy for the state,” Neal said.

Brian Hale, with the Nebraska Association of School Boards, said that getting schools back to normal business can take longer than many expect. It is not always just the physical buildings that need repair but also emotional scars left, too, he said.

Members of the committee questioned how much the emergency funds were needed, however, because neither Lincoln Public Schools nor Norris Public Schools had significant financial struggles when facing their emergencies.