

**March 25, 2010**

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**Send a Letter to the Editor**

The Platte Institute strongly believes in the importance of citizens participating in the public dialogue on issues important to Nebraska. Writing a letter to the editor is an outstanding way to partake in the discussion and have your voice heard by thousands of

# PLATTE CHAT

## Truancy a Problem Across All of Nebraska

Anne Duda  
Platte Institute Senior Policy Analyst

Truancy is a major problem across all of Nebraska, not just the larger cities. Earlier this month the legislature decided to help fix the problem by giving first round approval to Senator Brad Ashford's LB 800. LB 800 addresses numerous juvenile justice issues, not just truancy but also parental involvement and jurisdiction, probation sanctions, and incarceration. The legislature is not doing this alone. The effort is endorsed by numerous education and child advocacy groups as well as law enforcement and social services.

In addressing truancy, the bill standardizes the wording and the process of tracking truants as well as giving police officers the option of taking suspected truant students into temporary custody for the sake of returning them to school. Parental contact is required after five, ten, and twenty absences with no distinction for excused or unexcused absences. Ultimately, the bill requires notification of the county attorney after twenty absences. The county attorney then has to decide the appropriate course of action

people. To make the process easier, the Platte Institute has assembled a list of links which allow you to submit a letter to the editor to nearly all Nebraska newspapers. Simply [CLICK HERE](#) for a listing of the newspapers and follow the appropriate link to submit your letter.

## Contact Us

If you would like to contact someone at the Platte Institute, you are always welcome to give us a call, drop us an email or stop by the office. Our telephone number is 402.452.3737. We are located at 10050 Regency Circle – Suite 120 – in Omaha. Below is a list of staff email address:

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involving both the parents and the student. If the parents refuse to participate they can be fined \$300 the first time, \$500 the second, and finally charged with a class III misdemeanor on the third occasion. All of these penalties can be waived by the county attorney if the parents participate in getting their child to attend school on a regular basis. In addition, the child can lose his or her driving privileges and both parent and child can be ordered to serve community service or attend counseling.

Community service and counseling are some of the new sanctions addressed in the bill. Probation officers would have numerous options for different sanctions they can impose on juvenile offenders instead of seeking revocation of their probation and possible placement in a detention facility. These sanctions include substance abuse counseling, curfews, community service, travel restriction, etc. Some of the strongest language in the bill has to do with keeping juveniles out of detention facilities if possible, and instead placing them in the least restrictive facility possible given their specific circumstances and needs.

Finally, the bill includes procedures for keeping kids records clean. The bill would create a pilot program for civil citation in Douglas County. Civil Citation is defined as "a non-criminal notice which cannot result in a criminal record". This does not include traffic violations, firearms, sexual assault, or domestic disturbance. Police officers would be able to issue a civil citation for non-violent misdemeanors committed by juveniles. These citations require the juvenile to go through the juvenile assessment center within seventy-two hours to receive the appropriate sentencing, which can include counseling and diversion. Secondly, wording has been included in the bill to allow juvenile non-driving offenses to be sealed provided they complete all work requested by the courts. This would allow children with minor offenses to still receive scholarships, enter the military, and be eligible for employment all without mistakes from their youth potentially negatively affecting them.

LB 800 had twenty proponents, zero opponents, and five neutral testifiers at its committee hearing. These proponents included Boys Town, Omaha Police department, the Douglas County Attorney's office, Grand Island Public Schools, Hall County Attorney, Building Bright Futures Nebraska State Education Association,

National Association of Social Workers, the Foster Care Review Board, and Health and Human Services along with several others. These groups having been working together for more than a year to enact legislation that both protects and serves our juveniles, particularly the ones caught up in our juvenile justice system.

The substance of LB 800 is in modernizing language and processes as well as to give support to existing truancy programs like those in Lancaster, Hall, and Douglas County. The bill also includes funding for a Truancy Intervention Task Force, County Juvenile Services Aid Program, and Office of Violence Prevention Grants. Considerable time and effort has gone into this bill to provide better services and care to our troubled youth. It provides ways of identifying them earlier and providing to them identification of problems and appropriate treatment they need so they can continue with school and not end up in a detention facility.

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