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Wednesday, September 3, 2025 WHERE YOUR STORY LIVES columbustelegram.com

Nebraska lawmakers to hold hearing over ‘Cornhusker Clink’

ANDREW WEGLEY
Lincoln Journal Star

Nebraska lawmakers will hold a public hearing over Republican Gov. Jim Pillen’s plan to turn a state prison into an immigration detention center after all.

Days after the Republican chair of the Legislature’s Judiciary Committee last week declined to use her post to schedule a hearing over the so-called Cornhusker Clink, a Democrat who chairs the Urban Affairs Committee moved to schedule one of his own.

Omaha Sen. Terrell McKinney, a vocal critic of Nebraska’s overcrowded prison system and of Pillen’s plan to evacuate a 200-bed state prison in McCook to make room for a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement jail, announced Tuesday that the committee he chairs will hold a hearing next week over potential building code issues at the facility.

The hearing is scheduled for 9 a.m. Sept. 12 at the Capitol.

Pillen’s plan is part of ICE’s reported effort to add 41,000 detention beds to the federal system this year, including 300 beds in Ne-

braska, which will join states like Florida and Indiana when it opens an ICE detention center later this year.

In a letter posted to social media Tuesday, McKinney raised concerns over the capacity of the ICE center, which will be located in a state prison with the capacity to hold 125 people, according to state prison data.

Nebraska’s prison system, which was designed to hold 4,059 inmates and houses more than 5,800, is among the most overcrowded in the country.

McKinney suggested housing up to 300 detainees at the prison could present “potential building code issues” — an area that McKinney’s Urban Affairs Committee has jurisdiction over.

His move to schedule the hearing came days after Sen. Carolyn Bosn of Lincoln, who chairs the Judiciary Committee, refused calls from progressive lawmakers to schedule a hearing before that committee to bring “immediate transparency and legislative oversight” of the ICE facility.



CHRIS MACHIAN, THE WORLD-HERALD FILE PHOTO
The Nebraska Department of Correctional Services Work Ethic Camp is located at 2309 US-8 in McCook, on Aug. 21, 2025. The prison will become an ICE detention facility.

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SHINGLE BEST THING



JARED BARTON, THE COLUMBUS TELEGRAM

Members of the Habitat for Humanity Columbus veterans committee, Lightning Exteriors crew and Columbus veteran Carlos Villarreal (center) stand in front of Villarreal’s home on Tuesday, Sept. 2, as the Lightning crew installs a new roof.

Local disabled veteran gets new roof from Habitat, Lightning Exteriors, Owens Corning

JARED BARTON
The Columbus Telegram

Nobody wants to get roof repairs, but it’s especially a drudge when you’re a disabled veteran with a recent cancer diagnosis, like Carlos Villarreal of Columbus. A leaky roof is just one of the many things on his to-do list in a day.

That’s where the Columbus Area Habitat for Humanity, Lightning Exteriors and Owens Corning, a roofing and composite materials company,

stepped in on Tuesday. Habitat brought Villarreal’s story to Owens Corning’s attention, executive director Lori Peters said, and filed the paperwork for the grant to fix it.

“We were able to take that off his plate, so he could concentrate on his health,” Peters said.

Owens Corning reached out to Valley-based platinum-level roofer, Lightning Exteriors to provide the workforce.

With Habitat doing the paperwork

and Owens Corning supplying materials, Lightning brought the labor. The work took just shy of six hours.

Lightning Exteriors owner Shon Thielen said the company tries to give a lot back to the communities in their coverage area, something he and his wife Terese personally value in their business. This is the second veteran roofing project they’ve done in Nebraska this year, Thielen said.

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Nebraska limited to 4 medical marijuana growers

JOSH REYES
Omaha World-Herald

LINCOLN — The Nebraska Medical Cannabis Commission approved Tuesday a new set of emergency regulations that limit the state to four cultivators and establish a three-week window for applications ahead of a state law-imposed deadline of Oct. 1 to begin approving successful applicants for the state’s medical cannabis program.

The new regulations are largely the same as the temporary ones the commission adopted in June. Those are set to expire Sept. 28. The new regulations will be in place for 90 days once the governor approves them.

The vote to approve came immediately after a lengthy closed-door executive session. While the five commissioners approved the regulations unanimously, Bruce Bailey, who serves on the commission through his role on the Liquor Control Commission, said there should be at least six cultivator licenses available.

The previous emergency regulations did not set a limit, and a proposal posted on the commission website Tuesday morning suggested there should be only two cultivators.

Lorelle Muetting said regulators in other states advised starting small and making sure to not over-saturate the market. Bailey said having more cultivators embodies free enterprise principles. He also having only two could leave patients without the supply they need or lead to ballooning costs if one cultivator’s crop fails, giving the other a monopoly.

Four was a compromise among the commission, though Bailey motioned during the vote to increase the total to six. The commission also approved a lottery system if more than four applicants qualify successfully.

The application window for cultivators will go from Sept. 4 to Sept. 23.

There is not an application form on the website, though criteria is in the emergency regulations.

Monica Oldenburg, chair of the commission, said the matrix that commissioners will use to assess applications is in the works.

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