

00:00:06:01 - 00:00:40:24

Beth Blick

I would like to introduce Darrius, our sign language interpreter. And introduce Nikki Villavicencio from the Maplewood City Council and the Council on Disability, who was at the State Council on on disability, who would like to talk about.

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Beth Blick

Some of the stuff that was discussed the other day, you know, from the hook up. From that that that was put on by the Minnesota State Council on Disability. For the issues that we want to take the Legislature.

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Beth Blick

Such as. Chemical restraints on people in nursing homes or or any kind of chemical restraint on any kind of person with a disability. Yes, that makes sense. Yeah, I thank you so much, Bass my for that great introduction.

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Nikki Villavicencio

Yeah, I do happen to chair the Minnesota State Council on Disability, but disability rights activist for over. Well, let's see about over twelve years now. And I just wanted to kind of talk about some of the legislative agendas that the disability community will have in the Minnesota 2022 legislative session.

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Nikki Villavicencio

And so the first issue that many disability organizations and individuals will be working on is accessible and affordable housing. And I just I think you and I both know how important housing is for people with disabilities, not only accessible and affordable housing, but as in your your journey to home ownership.

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Nikki Villavicencio

And so are there a lot of talk in legislative groups around how to make housing more affordable for people with disabilities? And I know one of the things that is that I've worked on personally is a concept called universal design.

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Nikki Villavicencio

It's not a perfect design, but it would allow for if more if cities and counties had a universal design plan in in their strategic plans, then when new buildings would come in, they would be universally designed to have accessibility.

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Nikki Villavicencio

And then it would increase the ability for folks such as like my partner and I, who are both disabled and have a daughter to live independently because it's really hard for folks with disabilities to find housing that's affordable, accessible and where we want to live.

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Nikki Villavicencio

I think a lot of times the way that especially public housing is set up is that it's it's not where people necessarily want to live. So it's a big aspect to it. I mean, know, I certainly understand. Yeah, and I know you have a lot of experience in that, and I think, you know, when you get to

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Nikki Villavicencio

be able to be a first time homeowner best, I think we should really celebrate that win and make it a big story. So I'm ready for that with you. In another important issue that I know that you would appreciate that too is inclusive higher

education issues.

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Nikki Villavicencio

So higher education options for Minnesotans with intellectual or developmental disabilities are limited in the state of Minnesota. There are only four higher education institutions that offer programs for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. And so I know that the Minnesota Department of Education and the arc of Minnesota is working on bills to combat that.

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Nikki Villavicencio

And I think that's really the. I think training, education and especially higher education is really important to have for everyone. Hmm. And then my third issue is inclusive K-12 education, you know, with everything that's happened with COVID. A lot of kids with disabilities have really suffered because they haven't had the correct supports.

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Nikki Villavicencio

It's it's very difficult to give supports to students with disabilities virtually a lot of times, and sometimes it's not even happening at all in many situations. And so I know it's true. Yeah. And I know that the Department of Education has said they're committed to working on this issue.

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Nikki Villavicencio

And I know the the State Council on Disability is committed to working on that issue. And so as we go through the session, I will have more bill numbers for you. So that's kind of why right now, I'm kind of doing it just by subject because a lot of the bills are still in in in the creation

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Nikki Villavicencio

mode. But another issue that is been close to my heart is parenting with a disability. I worked with Darrell Paulsen, which you know very well, but who is my partner. Yeah. And we worked on a pilot program to serve parents with disabilities.

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Nikki Villavicencio

Well, because of our full forward motion of wanting parents with disabilities to have rights, there are other groups now who have legislation around parenting. And one of that is the guardianship of people with disabilities. So a lot of folks with especially developmental and intellectual disabilities, if they become parents, they get their parental rights taken away almost immediately

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Nikki Villavicencio

. And oh, I know. Yeah. And so I know the Autism Society of Minnesota and the arc is going to be working on some of that issue. And so it'll be interesting to see that come into action. Another step is close to some is the Hearing AIDS Affordability Act, or I don't know if it's called Affordably Act

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Nikki Villavicencio

, but I know there is a lot of government agencies right now trying to figure out a solution for better affordability for hearing aids because they have over-the-counter hearing aids. But they are obviously than they're paid for, but out of your pocket.

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Nikki Villavicencio

And so the state of Minnesota is trying to create a tax credit or a voucher program for Minnesotans use so that they can apply that to the purchase of their hearing aids. And so sure. Yeah. And so another issue that I will be working on with other folks in the disability community this session is.

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Nikki Villavicencio

Is waivers, and I don't know about if you have ever been on a waiver, but I believe you have. You get waivers. Yeah, waiver services. I have received. This is before in the county. Yeah. And so has my partner.

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Nikki Villavicencio

And so, you know, I feel that in especially in these days of COVID and folks with disabilities having to be at home more, I think that the waiver services need to go through an upheaval of revamping the program to meet the 21st century, as you could say, because the process enabled in order to get like, for instance

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Nikki Villavicencio

, you back, you're going to own a house someday and you may want to write some renovations to your house, right? And you're waiting on it and need some of that. And but the process of getting that is really, really challenging.

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Nikki Villavicencio

And so I and many other disability advocates would like to work on that issue. And I think that's a it's a multi-level, multi-agency type of issue that we have to do to solve the problem because it also comes in housing.

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Nikki Villavicencio

And and I just want to, you know, just so those were my main issues that I wanted to talk with you about. I thought it would be really cool to maybe come back like half way through legislative session and talk about like where some of these issues are and and where where we can push to have more

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Nikki Villavicencio

people, you know, jump on the bandwagon and help advocate for these issues. Like anybody who wants to get involved like myself, yeah, or anybody who wants to listen to your podcast. They could.

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Nikki Villavicencio

Oh, absolutely. Yeah, they could listen to some of the issues and hopefully get more involved and call their legislator and say, Hey, I know about this issue going on and I'm a person with a disability or I know people with disabilities and I could, and I want to tell you, my legislator, how this affects my life.

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Nikki Villavicencio

And it's a good way to dip your toes into public policy. Sure. Oh, another issue that I forgot that I was going to talk about is also the reform medical assistance for its the MAEPD, medical assistance for employed persons with disabilities.

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Nikki Villavicencio

I think there's going to be some. Yeah, there's I think there's going to be some reform limits or reforms on that subject this session. I think they're going to try to eliminate the asset limits, which would be really fabulous because the issue is that

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Nikki Villavicencio

If you're disabled and you work, you pretty much have to stay in poverty because you can't have assets. You can't save so much money. And oh yeah, and you're punished for it. Right? And then you have to know, and it's only just so you can keep your services, right?

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Nikki Villavicencio

So like, right, right. So I work. And then if I work so much, then I have to pay back the government so that I can keep my home care services, which basically keeps me in poverty. So, you know, and that's not good.

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Beth Blick

Yeah, right, right. The point in the book is. Yeah, and I think you might be aware that on a national level and they may be showing it may sound like I'm trying to change the subject, but I think you know what happens nationally for such.

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Beth Blick

On the state level is that Sherrod Brown and Bernie Sanders are nationally working. Who and other senators are progressive. Senators are working to change having Social Security for being so poverty stricken so that people are having to choose between taking their medication and, you know, eating their meals, for example.

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Beth Blick

Maybe you're aware of that. Yes, I'm definitely aware of that. And you're absolutely right. We're working on that on Capitol Hill. Yeah. You know, I watched a lot of time, you know, also this morning, what is your last?

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Beth Blick

Elizabeth Warren Yep, I know deep down with the devil you see, you know, in on that as well. Yes. I think that'd be great. Are you referring to the Build Back Better Act, or are you referring to a different legislation?

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Beth Blick

I'm going to a different kind of legislation. OK. I mean, build back, build back better action would be great too, but I'm not sure what. Sherrod Brown from Ohio and Bernie Sanders and and and the other progressive are calling this bill to.

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Beth Blick

Make it so that Social Security isn't so. You know, poverty stricken will move on. Right? Yup, it's the same, it's the same exact issue with the MAEPD. It's like in order to receive our services, we have to stay in poverty, which is extremely inequitable and challenging way too little on our school.

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Beth Blick

You know, and and I, you know, I mean, it's yes. It's already stigmatizing enough, and when it was started, you know, ideally it was not meant to be. You know, poverty, a poverty stricken.

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Beth Blick

Oh. Program, I mean, it wasn't meant to be something where a person, you know, someone lives in poverty. Right. You know, where a person, and they have a well, it's someone you used to be close friend of mine that, you know, having you know what Martin Luther King called a guaranteed income.

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Nikki Villavicencio

Martin Luther King always talked about a guaranteed income, even to those who were disabled. Yes, definitely. I'm all for that, and I think, you know, if any of the senators kept some of that vision, it's Bernie Sanders, probably.

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Nikki Villavicencio

Yeah, he definitely is real good about that. Right. Yeah. Like the whole free college thing, I think. Yeah, I still support of that create equity for the most marginalized, I think free college is the way to go you.

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Beth Blick

Yeah, I just, you know, when I was. You know, of college age and, you know, wanted to, you know, I didn't know, you know what I wanted to major in college and I lived right, you know, I was living in a group home.

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Beth Blick

You know, when I was living there what was then Hewitt House across From Hamline University, which, of course, was terribly expensive, you know, I found a way to be involved socially there on campus. I had, you know, a social worker helped me find a way to get involved with an arts group there, but I just could not

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Beth Blick

afford college here. And you know, I was on the welfare rolls of. You know, before I was on Social Security, I you know and you know, and I just could not, you know, if you. Yet, you know, I think it.

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Beth Blick

You know, if you were getting. Social, I mean, if you were getting. You know, financially, you know, when the you know, then the system considered. You know, some bullshit like. Oh, you know, getting. Oh. Yields, you know, welfare or you know who you know, they you know, if you were getting financial aid, then they consider that money

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Nikki Villavicencio

that that you would get cut off from. Yeah. Yep, that's that's it's challenging for a lot of folks with disabilities to manage through college, and so any way we can make it better or make it easier would only be better getting \$40 from my father per month.

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Beth Blick

You know, so I I couldn't even afford going to the U of them. The two of them was just as expensive in the eighties. Yeah, I'm I bet. Way back when. And I didn't have a G.E.D., and I was trying to get a GED and I just could not do the math, and I was so lucky, you

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Beth Blick

know, being as resourceful as I am when I found. Oh, you know, through the Department of Education about the place on County Road B in Roseville, which I wish you would been able to come to my graduation party in 2010, which, you know, my aunt and my cousin and her husband and another cousin of mine and a

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Beth Blick

former friend had gone to. You know, with. You know where I was able to get a nice regular high school diploma and and you know, and I wasn't, you know, pressured to work on something, you know, that I just wasn't going to be any

good at it, you way.

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Nikki Villavicencio

Right? Yeah. And it felt so much better. Yeah, I understand. I was just thinking about, you know, when I was in college, the voc rehab was like they decided to change their whole formula of how they helped fund people with disabilities going to college.

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Nikki Villavicencio

And it totally like turned everything upside down for me because it went from they went from like literally paying for everything of my education, whatever my grants were to. To me, owing like over \$8,000 each semester, and it was like and then I tried to get a job to help pay for it, which only made it more

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Nikki Villavicencio

difficult for me to keep up with my classes. And it was really challenging. And so, yeah, it's it's a hard it's a it's definitely a challenge for many people. I think we all have our different, especially being folks with disabilities.

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Nikki Villavicencio

We all have our kind of like trauma education, whether it's from when we were little and not getting the supports we need to being possibly institutionalized or not being able to go to college. We're not allowed to be in college or I had a guidance counselor in high school say that that I wasn't I wasn't college material

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Nikki Villavicencio

. And oh yeah, it's just assumptions about people that others make about us, right? That's really I never was considered college material. I mean, no counselor said that to my teachers, but I certainly wasn't encouraged. Right, right. Well, I had one that actually said it to me and my parents.

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Nikki Villavicencio

So that was nice. Oh yeah, that's true. I'm glad to get my paperwork from her. When I when I got admitted to college, that was it felt good to get those papers from her, from the counselor. Yeah. When I was admitted to college, it's good for you.

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Nikki Villavicencio

I yeah, I got to go back to her and be like, Yeah, in the when you said I couldn't go to college, I need those transit transfer papers to get to college. So thank you. But she added, like, she didn't know what I was talking about, but, you know, she did.

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Nikki Villavicencio

Oh yeah, right? You know exactly what you said. You're just pretending you didn't otherwise. Yeah, but also, you know, one thing that I didn't mention about the Minnesota Legislature this year is, you know, most of it's probably going to be virtual, which has, you know, good points and bad points to it.

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Nikki Villavicencio

Sure, some say that it's kind of it's good because there's more equal access because everybody kind of has to access the legislators the same way, like calling or emailing. You know, the difficult part is we we lose any ability to like see what the legislators are doing in between all their meetings in person.

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Nikki Villavicencio

Yeah, in-person. And you know, in my advocacy experience that that's where a lot of the juice of the Legislature comes from is in between meetings and who they meet with and which lobbyists they meet with and who's waiting at their door to talk to them is what shapes true decisions.

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Nikki Villavicencio

And so but you know, it's still we still have the ability to testify. So if there are folks out there that are wanting to testify or wanting to know what that process is, maybe they never did it before.

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Nikki Villavicencio

I or I know other folks that I can kind of direct you to. If there is anybody who wants to learn how to testify. I taught a lot of people or done it with them, rather not really taught them, but did it with them.

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Nikki Villavicencio

I'd be willing to do that with anybody. And. Matt, I don't. Or Beth? I don't know if there's a way know we could like put my email in the information or something, but it's. Go ahead, Matt. So yeah, we can.

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Matt Thiede

We can add any contact information that you want to add directly to the description for the podcast episode. If that works for you. Sure. Yeah, just mind, Nikki, we'll go for it first. And gmail.com, you know, I think I'll do that.

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Beth Blick

OK, great. Yeah. You know, just to break in to change the subject just for a minute. I heard that you're probably interested in bowling with us on Fridays. You know, when you don't have other things going on. Yeah, definitely, I want to figure out a bowling Friday for sure.

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Nikki Villavicencio

Yes, my uncle used to have a bowling alley. And so I've done a lot of bowling in my life It's a good it's a good hobby for sure. Yeah. So, you know, do you know when you want to get started or.

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Nikki Villavicencio

Um, well, I don't know exactly I'd have to first, I have to talk to Darrell about it and figure it out right now. I haven't been going out too much. Last week, my daughter was in distance learning and okay, all my meetings lately have been virtual.

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Nikki Villavicencio

Sure, I. But I'll talk to Matt and Darrell and figure it out. Another issue is we're trying to figure out how to get our van working in which working again. Yeah, then we could all go together, possibly, which would be fun, too.

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Nikki Villavicencio

So there's a couple I we're working on, but actually, I'll definitely figure it out. It's a new year and Happy New Year. Oh, thank you. Yeah, happy. Yeah, definitely. Yeah, I'm going to be seeing Brittanie this coming Sunday.

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Beth Blick

I mean, coming. Sunday or Saturday, and I couldn't see if she's still interested in the bowling stuff, and I think she will be, and I can, you know, mention that I talked with you about it too. Sure. Yeah.

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Beth Blick

And, you know, and I'll tell you. Yeah, that's the fun part of bowling is it's like is the more people you got, the more fun it can be. Right? Oh yeah. Yeah, definitely. Yeah. You know, I'm kind of active with one through Minnesota atheists, but I only have time to go on the fifth.

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Beth Blick

Oh, Saturday of the month when that comes up, so. I mean, I might, you know, if I can, you know, start, you know, going on the fourth Saturday of the month because it's usually now the. There's another group that which was meeting on the phone every Friday.

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Beth Blick

I mean, every Saturday, which now just goes now, just weeks on the second Saturday. You know, which will open up some more time. It's it's the bowling group meets usually on the last Saturday of the month. And so it.

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Beth Blick

It. You know, I'm just thinking that, you know, because it meets on the last Saturday of the month, it, you know, when it doesn't, we, you know, we. You know, when there is the first Saturday of the month, then it does what we in the fourth Saturday, the month is how that works.

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Nikki Villavicencio

So, OK, I'll be able to spend more time with that. Yeah, there's always different leagues going on, so I know there's you can always jump into a league with somebody or watch it. Yeah. You know, because there are phone books around anymore.

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Beth Blick

I can't just call bowling alleys anymore. Yeah. The other one that I'm telling you about is Memory Lanes in Minneapolis. But you know, now now that I have a Lyft you know, it'll make it a lot easier than spending money on a cab.

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Nikki Villavicencio

Right? That makes sense. What we should do a workshop sometime that's on on like how to Google search stuff because you could use your iPad and just like, say, Hey, show me bowling alleys and it'll show you all kinds of bowling alleys on your iPad.

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Nikki Villavicencio

five. Yes. Forces. So it's a really good resource to be able to look up all that stuff, just like the phone book. Rights groups are. All right. All right, everyone, well, thanks so much for a wonderful conversation and so many important things here that we will be sure to keep abreast of, especially with all of us in

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Beth Blick

the room. So do you want to say any closing remarks, Beth, for the episode? Oh yeah. Thank you, Nikki, for bringing up some more. Stuff that I didn't know was going on because here, I mean, especially, you know, my not being aware.

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Beth Blick

I mean that, you know, the. The that there aren't more colleges that I guess I was aware that there are some colleges that. That has been accepting of people with developmental disabilities. Coming in their doors, you know, some of the other quote unquote normal students.

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Nikki Villavicencio

But on the other hand, I saw that, you know, that that it was. You know, here I thought that. That it wasn't a problem anymore. Right. Yeah. Well, it's hard to know all the things that are happening. I don't know all the things that are happening either, but if we stick together, we will know more and we'll

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Nikki Villavicencio

be stronger. So thank you. All right, exactly. Thanks so much for having me. And any time you want me to come back and do another legislative update, just let me know. You know, I would. Yeah. Well, thank you.

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Unknown

Thanks everyone. Thanks, Darrius. I have a good evening. Good night.