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January 23, 2017

To: Members of the Education Committee

From: Kaitlin Reece, Policy Coordinator for Economic Stability and Health

RE: LB 235-clarify grant requirements for the Summer Food Service Program

Although it is only January, many of Nebraska students are likely already looking forward to summer break. For many children in families struggling to make ends meet, however, summer is a time of uncertainty and dread. Access to regular meals at school either through free or reduced-price school breakfasts or lunches can end abruptly. The Summer Foods Service Program helps ensure that millions of children living in low-income areas across the country do not go hungry when the school year ends.

Nebraska continues to lag in its participation in summer nutrition programs: there are only 8.5 summer nutrition participants for every 100 participants in the free or reduced-price school meals program. Not surprisingly then, Nebraska ranked 46th in our level of participation in the Summer Foods Service Program in 2016.¹ This poor ranking has real consequences for Nebraska's families: 1 in 7 Nebraska families don't know where their next meal is coming from.²

In 2012, the Nebraska Legislature created a summer nutrition grant program to respond to child hunger in summer months. The grant program, operated through the Nebraska Department of Education, provides one-time grants to schools, governmental entities such as local health departments, and nonprofits who are seeking to start or expand their summer nutrition program. The grant program has had some major successes, such as the Food Bank for the Heartland's mobile canteen whose innovative approach to bring meals to children in their own neighborhood. However, the program has not reached its full potential due to the current requirement for prorated expenses. Currently, a would-be sponsor must come up with ¾ of the cost of equipment such as a refrigerator from other sources. For many nonprofits and government agencies interested in feeding hungry kids in the summer, this just isn't possible and programs never get off the ground.

LB 235 represents a simple, common sense solution to address artificial barriers and red tape that currently prevent many of Nebraska's hungry children from accessing nutritious meals during summer months and allows the program created in 2012 to work as intended.

Childhood hunger has a serious and long lasting impact on children's development and academic performance and has been linked to a variety of adverse outcomes

¹ Food Research and Action Center. "Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation: Summer Nutrition Status Report." June 2016. Available online: http://www.frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2016_summer_nutrition_report.pdf

² Kids Count 2016. Available online at: <http://kidscountnebraska.com/juvenile-justice/>

from physiological to behavioral. Although consistent access to food is related to poverty, research tells us that the two operate independently. Children in households that are both low-income and food-insecure demonstrate poor outcomes at significantly higher rates than low-income children who did not experience hunger.³

Most concerning, particularly in light of our state's investments in juvenile justice reform over the past few years, research regarding food insecurity in older children demonstrates young adults experiencing hunger often cope by making choices that offer short-term survival but are self-sabotaging in the long-term. These include failing classes to qualify for summer school (and therefore summer meals), stealing, and engaging in survival sex. As one young girl stated, "a lot of people are choosing to be in jail rather than be on the street."⁴

Increased access to summer nutrition programming means fewer kids go hungry while also bringing additional dollars and economic opportunities to Nebraska communities across the state. Estimates show that if summer nutrition programs reached just 40% of free and reduced-lunch participation during the school year, local communities would see an infusion of resources totaling over \$2.8 million in federal reimbursements.⁵

Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 235 because of its potential to increase access to nutritious meals for Nebraska's children by allowing more sponsors or would-be sponsors to apply for the funds to start or expand summer food programs. We see LB 235 as an important part of addressing childhood hunger in Nebraska, particularly when the school year—and school meals—end.

³ Ronald E. Kleinman, et al., "Hunger in Children in the United States: Potential Behavioral and Emotional Correlates," *Pediatrics* 101, no. 1 (1998), 4-5.

⁴ Susan J. Popkin, Molly M. Scott, and Martha Galvez, "Impossible Choices: Teens and Food Insecurity in America," *Urban Institute and Feeding America*, September 2016, <http://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/alfresco/publication-pdfs/2000914-Impossible-Choices-Teens-and-Food-Insecurity-in-America.pdf>, 21.

⁵ Voices for Children in Nebraska. "Food for Thought: School Nutrition for Student Performance." 2016 Issue Brief.