



7521 Main Street, Suite 103
Omaha, Nebraska 68127

(402) 597-3100 P
(402) 597-2705 F

www.voicesforchildren.com

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Lloyd Meyer, MArch
President

Tim Hron, MA, LIMHP
Vice President

Donna Hammack, MSED
Secretary

Steve Mitchell, MBA
Treasurer

Eric Nelson, MA
Immediate Past President

Michael Beverly Jr., MBA
Amy Boesen
Lorraine Chang, JD
Yolanda Chavez Nuncio, MEd
Jeremy Fitzpatrick, JD
Bobbi Hawk, MD
Eric Johnson
Daniel Padilla
Michael Socha
Katie Weitz, PhD

Aubrey Mancuso, MSW
Executive Director

February 14, 2017

To: Members of the Health and Human Services Committee

From: Kaitlin Reece, Policy Coordinator

RE: Support for LB 311 – Eliminate an eligibility provision relating to nutrition assistance benefits as prescribed

Child well-being is inextricably tied to the well-being of their parents. Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 311 to strike provisions banning certain persons with drug-related felony convictions from participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) because it removes a barrier to stability for Nebraska children who are already vulnerable.

Many people affected by this provision are parents. In recent months, Voices for Children has organized listening sessions with Nebraskans who have personal experience with parental incarceration to discuss how our justice system has affected the lives of children. What we have learned corroborates a growing body of research that suggests that children have shouldered significant costs as a direct result of decades of punitive public policy decisions.

Children depend on strong relationships with adults, and research has linked parental incarceration to a multitude of adversities that last into adulthood, including antisocial behavior,¹ poor educational performance,² and decreased physical and mental health.³ Most alarmingly, research suggests that altogether, the effects and strain of the incarceration of a family member oftentimes lead children to demonstrate law-breaking behavior and become justice-involved, themselves.⁴

Our current ban creates an additional burden for many children in our state in a time when food insecurity has risen over 67% in the last decade. Last year, over 111,000 Nebraska families struggled to put food on the table.⁵ In our conversations with Nebraskans, financial instability was a constant theme for children who have faced parental incarceration. LB 311 is a first step measure to ensure that our state invests in effective interventions, especially as we continue to navigate meaningful corrections reform. Since its inception, SNAP has been shown to be one of the most effective federal antipoverty programs, lifting an estimated 34,000 Nebraskans

¹ Joseph Murray, David P. Farrington, and Ivana Sekol, "Children's Antisocial Behavior, Mental Health, Drug Use, and Educational Performance after Parental Incarceration: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis," *Psychological Bulletin* 138, no. 2 (2012):175-210.

² John Hagan and Holly Foster, "Intergenerational Educational Effects of Mass Imprisonment in America," *Sociology of Education* 85, no. 3 (2012):259-286.

³ Rosalyn D. Lee, Xiangming Fang, and Feijin Luo, "The Impact of Parental Incarceration on the Physical and Mental Health of Young Adults," *Pediatrics* 131, no. 4 (2013).

⁴ Lauren Aaron and Danielle H. Dallaire, "Parental Incarceration and Multiple Risk Experiences: Effects on Family Dynamics and Children's Delinquency," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 39, no. 12 (2010): 1471-1484.

⁵ *Kids Count in Nebraska 2016 Report*, Voices for Children in Nebraska, www.kidscountnebraska.com.

above the poverty line.⁶ Excluding individuals for a crime for which they have already paid is contrary to the effectiveness of the program and a clear need in our state for programs that strengthen families for successful reentry and reduced recidivism. The current ban makes the process of reentry all the more difficult for parents, and can have collateral consequences for their children.

We thank Senator Morfeld for his leadership in protecting child and family well-being and this committee for their time and consideration. We respectfully urge you to advance LB 311.

⁶ "Nebraska Fact Sheet," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2016, <http://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/7-22-16pov-factsheets-ne.pdf>.