



7521 Main Street, Suite 103
Omaha, Nebraska 68127

(402) 597-3100
www.voicesforchildren.com

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Eric Johnson
President

Katie Weitz, PhD
Vice President

Donna Hammack, MSED
Secretary

Michael Beverly Jr., MBA
Treasurer

Amy Boesen
Gary Bren
Bobbi Chambers Hawk, MD
Lorraine Chang, JD
Yolanda Chavez Nuncio, MEd
Al Davis
Jeremy Fitzpatrick, JD
Susan Mayberger, MA
Bruce Meyers
Daniel Padilla
Michael Socha
John Stalnaker, JD

Aubrey Mancuso, MSW
Executive Director

January 16, 2018

To: Chairman Groene and Members of the Education Committee

From: Julia Tse, Policy Coordinator for Economic Stability and Health

RE: Support for LB 771 to Adopt the Child Hunger and Workforce Readiness Act

Children are Nebraska's greatest resource, and all Nebraskans have a stake in ensuring that all children are able to reach their full potential in adulthood. Success in the classroom for any individual child hinges on a multitude of factors, none of which is more essential than proper nutrition. Research shows that hungry children are less equipped to learn in the classroom, significantly reducing their chances of becoming productive members of the workforce.ⁱ Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 771 because it would ease hunger among many of our state's most vulnerable students.

Household hunger is at an all-time high in Nebraska, affecting nearly 1 in 5 children in the state.ⁱⁱ Left unaddressed, hunger among children during critical developmental years will threaten future economic prosperity for generations to come. Since 1946, school meals have provided an effective solution to hunger as a barrier to learning. Federal child nutrition programs provide funds for all breakfasts and lunches served in participating public and nonpublic schools, with higher reimbursement rates provided for students from low-income households. Children in households with income less than 130% of the federal poverty level (FPL) are eligible for free school meals, which children in households with income between 130% and 185% of FPL are eligible for reduced-price meals, which is no more than \$0.40 for lunch and \$0.30 for breakfast.ⁱⁱⁱ

Building upon the successes of the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs, LB 771 would:

Ensure that over 27,000 Nebraska students are always ready to learn regardless of their family circumstances. Though the current co-pay required of reduced-price eligible students is seemingly insignificant, data show that families within this income range are struggling to make ends meet now, more than ever. Wages have stagnated for workers in the last few decades, far outpaced by the median cost of raising a family as child care and health care costs skyrocket.^{iv} During the school year, the daily costs of school meals can easily add up for families. These students are particularly vulnerable to the practice of "lunch shaming," in which a student is refused meal service or provided an alternate meal when they are unable to pay.

Allow more students and schools to focus on learning, particularly in high poverty schools. Research has linked school breakfast to better student performance and behavior, including improved attendance, lower levels of hyperactivity, fewer disciplinary referrals, and even fewer visits to the school nurse.^v LB 771 would concentrate the benefits of increased meal participation in higher needs schools by targeting low-income students.

Increase meal participation and enhance financial viability for schools. Similar policies adopted in other states result in increased meal participation. Schools in Nebraska have historically struggled with some of the lowest breakfast participation rates in the country. The anticipated increase in breakfast participation as the result of LB 771 would more easily allow more schools to achieve economies of scale in breakfast programs, which is essential for smaller and rural schools.^{vi}

School meal programs provide a critical safeguard against hunger for many Nebraska children, and LB 771 would strengthen existing protections against child hunger and its adverse outcomes. Ensuring that no needy student will have to worry about missing lunch is an investment that produces immeasurable long-term benefits in the form of improved academic performance, behavior, and overall student wellness.

We thank Senator Walz for her leadership on this issue and respectfully urge the committee to advance LB 771. Thank you.

ⁱ Council on Community Pediatrics and Committee on Nutrition, "Promoting Food Insecurity for All Children," *Pediatrics* 136, no. 5 (2015), doi: 10.1542/peds.2015-3301.

ⁱⁱ Voices for Children in Nebraska, *2016 Kids Count in Nebraska Report*, available online at: <http://kidscountnebraska.com>.

ⁱⁱⁱ For SY 2017-18, 130% of FPL was \$26,546 for a family of 3 and 185% of FPL was \$37,777 for a family of 3.

^{iv} "Household expenditures and Income: Balancing Family Finances in Today's Economy," Pew Charitable Trusts, March 2016, available at: http://www.pewtrusts.org/~media/assets/2016/03/household_expenditures_and_income.pdf.

^v Food Research and Action Center, "Research Brief: Breakfast for Learning," October 2016, <http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/breakfastforlearning-1.pdf>.

^{vi} Voices for Children in Nebraska, "Food for Thought: School Nutrition for Student Performance," November 2016, <http://voicesforchildren.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Nutrition-IssueBrief.pdf>.

Senator	District	Enrolled	Free	% Free	Reduced	% Reduced	% Free and Reduced	Note
Dan Watermeier	1	8,292	2,367	28.5%	412	5.0%	33.5%	*
Robert Clements	2	5,186	1,050	20.2%	390	7.5%	27.8%	
Carol Blood	3	837	68	8.1%	25	3.0%	11.1%	*
Robert Hilkemann	4	2,399	20	0.8%	22	0.9%	1.8%	*
Mike McDonnell	5	741	233	31.4%	91	12.3%	43.7%	*
Theresa Thibodeau	6	1,276	14	1.1%	16	1.3%	2.4%	*
Tony Vargas	7	148	114	77.0%	11	7.4%	84.5%	*
Burke Harr	8	3,102	255	8.2%	81	2.6%	10.8%	*
Sara Howard	9	1,867	240	12.9%	67	3.6%	16.4%	*
Bob Krist	10	1,806	79	4.4%	94	5.2%	9.6%	*
Ernie Chambers	11	400	44	11.0%	19	4.8%	15.8%	*
Merv Riepe	12	383	***	***	***	***	***	*
Justin Wayne	13	690	51	7.4%	34	4.9%	12.3%	*
Jim Smith	14	521	28	5.4%	14	2.7%	8.1%	*
Lynne Walz	15	6,779	2,864	42.2%	624	9.2%	51.5%	*
Lydia Brasch	16	7,049	1,608	22.8%	574	8.1%	31.0%	*
Joni Albrecht	17	8,080	2,522	31.2%	1,120	13.9%	45.1%	*
Brett Lindstrom	18	361	***	***	***	***	***	*
Jim Scheer	19	7,342	2,271	30.9%	736	10.0%	41.0%	*
John McCollister	20	737	48	6.5%	11	1.5%	8.0%	*
Mike Hilgers	21	1,953	177	9.1%	81	4.1%	13.2%	*
Paul Schumacher	22	7,446	2,246	30.2%	886	11.9%	42.1%	*
Bruce Bostelman	23	7,551	2,341	31.0%	733	9.7%	40.7%	*
Mark Kolterman	24	3,725	1,422	38.2%	627	16.8%	55.0%	*
Suzanne Geist	25	3,718	301	8.1%	180	4.8%	12.9%	*
Matt Hansen	26	863	39	4.5%	21	2.4%	7.0%	*
Anna Wishart	27	91	***	***	***	***	***	*
Patty Pansing Brooks	28	1,830	238	13.0%	130	7.1%	20.1%	*
Kate Bolz	29	1,090	14	1.3%	10	0.9%	2.2%	*
Roy Baker	30	6,092	1,354	22.2%	410	6.7%	29.0%	*
Rick Kolowski	31	1,554	***	***	***	***	***	*
Laura Ebke	32	6,871	2,315	33.7%	612	8.9%	42.6%	*
Steve Halloran	33	6,835	2,446	35.8%	669	9.8%	45.6%	*
Curt Friesen	34	3,630	852	23.5%	387	10.7%	34.1%	*
Dan Quick	35	11,962	6,034	50.4%	1,312	11.0%	61.4%	*
Matt Williams	36	8,076	3,482	43.1%	930	11.5%	54.6%	
John Lowe	37	7,402	2,157	29.1%	610	8.2%	37.4%	
John Kuehn	38	6,546	1,917	29.3%	664	10.1%	39.4%	*
Lou Ann Linehan	39	1,072	***	***	***	***	***	*
Tyson Larson	40	6,852	1,769	25.8%	760	11.1%	36.9%	*
Tom Briese	41	6,883	1,746	25.4%	694	10.1%	35.4%	*
Mike Groene	42	6,257	1,865	29.8%	716	11.4%	41.2%	*
Tom Brewer	43	5,891	1,891	32.1%	685	11.6%	43.7%	*
Dan Hughes	44	6,117	1,834	30.0%	744	12.2%	42.1%	*
Sue Crawford	45	553	***	***	***	***	***	*
Adam Morfeld	46	417	104	24.9%	37	8.9%	33.8%	*
Steve Erdman	47	5,598	1,799	32.1%	559	10.0%	42.1%	*
John Stinner	48	6,953	3,129	45.0%	805	11.6%	56.6%	*
John Murante	49	5,090	299	5.9%	183	3.6%	9.5%	**

Note: Lincoln and Omaha metro area districts do not include metro public school districts—see following table for additional data by district.

*Warning: includes masked data as required by student privacy laws.

**Includes Gretna Public Schools only.

***No value due to masked data.

District	Enrolled	Free	% Free	Reduced	% Reduced	% Free and Reduced
Gretna Public Schools	5,090	299	5.9%	183	3.6%	9.5%
Papillion La Vista Public Schools	12,018	2,024	16.8%	691	5.7%	22.6%
Bellevue Public Schools	9,801	2,808	28.7%	1,012	10.3%	39.0%
Omaha Public Schools	52,836	35,048	66.3%	5,457	10.3%	76.7%
Elkhorn Public Schools	9,347	573	6.1%	176	1.9%	8.0%
Douglas County West Community Schools	958	243	25.4%	94	9.8%	35.2%
Millard Public Schools	24,018	3,719	15.5%	1,266	5.3%	20.8%
Ralston Public Schools	3,407	1,418	41.6%	508	14.9%	56.5%
Bennington Public Schools	2,671	201	7.5%	33	1.2%	8.8%
Westside Public Schools	6,066	1,589	26.2%	466	7.7%	33.9%
Lincoln Public Schools	41,737	15,903	38.1%	3,293	7.9%	46.0%

Source: Voices for Children in Nebraska analysis of Nebraska Department of Education, available for download here:

<http://drs.education.ne.gov/quickfacts/Pages/StudentCharacteristics.aspx?RootFolder=%2Fquickfacts%2FStudent%20Characteristics%2FFree%20and%20Reduced%20Lunch&FolderCTID=0x012000A8DC389739F4D240978B268F38756BA1&View={2F47FB49-D472-435C-B7CB-DED2A4D140A2}>.