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7521 Main Street, Suite 103
Ralston, Nebraska 68127

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

<http://voicesforchildren.com>

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February 6, 2014

To: Members of the Health and Human Services Committee

From: Aubrey Mancuso, Policy Coordinator

Re: Support for LB 1088

Access to affordable child care helps keeps children safe so parents can work. Voices for Children supports LB 1088 because it is another step toward restoring the cut made in 2002 to the child care subsidy program, which is a critical work support for low-income parents and children.

We appreciate the role that members of this committee played in increasing eligibility for child care assistance last year, but even with that increase, Nebraska's income eligibility level still ranks 44th in the nation.

Eligibility for this particular program is of critical importance because of the the relationship between access to affordable child care and ability to work and because of the high cost of child care. Earlier this week, we released an updated version of *the Family Bottom Line* report that looks at what Nebraska families need to makes ends meet without assistance. Attached to my testimony are charts based on the report data that show the minimum average amount a family with two children would spend on child care in different regions of Nebraska and the portion of the family budget devoted to child care.

The regions are based on the USDA rurality codes. Metropolitan counties are the larger counties and counties adjacent to large counties (like Lancaster County). Non-Metropolitan Urban counties have a population of at least 2,500 (like Adams County) and the Rural counties are less than 2,500 in population (like Banner County). The first chart shows child care costs in a single parent family and the second shows a family with two working parents.

In every case, child care is the most significant expense in the budget for families with young children. Child care costs represent from 26-33% of the family budget and the monthly cost ranges from about \$960 per month in rural counties to about \$1350 per month in more urban areas of the state.

Nebraska's current income eligibility level does not reflect the current budgetary circumstances facing families and we still have work to do to restore the cut made to the child care program back in 2002. We respectfully urge the committee to advance LB 1088.

Thank you.

