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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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March 11, 2015

To: Members of the Health and Human Services Committee
From: Aubrey Mancuso, Policy Coordinator – Economic Stability and Health
Re: Support for LB 411

Voices for Children supports LB 411 because it takes steps to improve the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in a way that encourages steps toward longer term financial security. The SNAP program is an important work-support that helps prevent children from going hungry when their parents are struggling financially. About half of all SNAP participants in Nebraska are kids.¹ Adequate nutrition is particularly important for children because it plays a critical role in healthy development. SNAP also helps to lift families above the poverty line. In 2012, SNAP lifted over 10,000 Nebraska households above the poverty line.²

We know that there is a gap between the poverty line and what it takes for a family to meet all of its basic needs. This bill is another mechanism for addressing the “cliff effect” in our public programs that serves as a disincentive to improve one’s financial circumstance. The “cliff effect” refers to a small increase in income that results in a much larger loss of financial assistance. LB 411 improves the SNAP program by ensuring that work and upward financial mobility are rewarded.

As I mentioned to this committee previously, we recently conducted approximately 300 surveys and 4 focus groups with lower income women in Nebraska. One woman, Debra, described her experience with the cliff effect in the SNAP program. She said, “When all of my kids were in school, things had gotten so bad that I wouldn’t take a raise at my job. It’s more important to me right now to hold on...to my food stamps. As long as I keep (the food stamps) and what I’m already making, I’m okay...I can at least keep my head above water. If I take an increase (in income) you’re going to take my benefits and I still lose...”

Finally, as this committee is aware, our eligibility for child care assistance remains among the lowest in the nation and child care costs remain high. The dependent care deduction in the SNAP program was created by Congress in 1980 to help buffer the impact that out-of-pocket child care expenses can have on family food budgets.³ LB 411 will assist low-income families who have high child care costs by allowing them to still qualify for the SNAP program if they receive a small increase in gross income. This is a practical programmatic change because it encourages working families to increase their earning

¹ Kids Count in Nebraska Report (2014)

² Characteristics of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Households: Fiscal Year 2012, USDA, Food Nutrition Services, The Office of Policy Support.

³ The Food Stamp Dependent Care Deduction. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (March 2010).

potential while ensuring that their children are fed as they make the transition to increased financial stability.

We urge the committee to advance this bill. Thank you.