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January 21, 2016

Senator Kathy Campbell, Chairwoman – Health and Human Services Committee
Room 1510, State Capitol Lincoln NE, 68509

Re: Support for LB 690 – Change provisions relating to eligibility for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

Dear Chairwoman Campbell and Members of the HHS Committee,

Voices for Children supports LB 690, which would strike provisions banning certain persons with controlled substance-related felony convictions from receiving SNAP. We believe that child well-being is inextricably related to the well-being of parents and that this bill can address food insecurity and financial instability for many families in our state.

Many people affected by our existing laws prohibiting participation in SNAP for those with certain drug-related felony convictions are parents. A 2005 Government Accountability Office report estimated that in the Midwest region, **nearly 70% of female drug offenders and 67% of male drug offenders are parents of minor children.**¹ While eligible families may still apply for benefits on behalf of their children, the reduction of the household number significantly changes their benefits, and all the while the reality remains that the family budget is insufficient.

In 2014, 106,196 families were food insecure in our state, which has significantly increased from 67,000 in 2006. When structuring our state systems, we must ensure that we fund effective interventions. Since its inception, SNAP has been shown to be one of the most effective antipoverty programs.² **In 2013, SNAP moved 11,232 Nebraska families above the poverty line, and nearly half of all recipients were children.**³ Excluding a population for a crime for which they have already paid is contrary to the effectiveness of the program and the research showing that public safety nets are essential in ensuring successful reentry into society and reducing recidivism.

Our current ban makes the process of reentry all the more difficult for parents, many of whom may be struggling with their own past traumas, and **can have collateral consequences for their children, putting them at increased risk of experiencing homelessness, hunger, neglect, or other adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).** We thank Senator Morfeld for his leadership in protecting child and family well-being and the work of this committee, and would urge you to advance this legislation.

Sincerely,

Julia Tse, Policy Associate

¹ *Drug offenders: Various factors may limit the impacts of federal laws that provide for denial of selected benefits*, U.S. Government Accountability Office, September 2005.

² Dorothy Rosenbaum, "SNAP is effective and efficient," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, March 11, 2013.

³ *Kids Count in Nebraska 2015 Report*, Voices for Children in Nebraska.