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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 24, 2014

To: Members of the Education Committee

From: Julia Tse, Policy Associate

Re: Support for LB 834

Voices for Children supports LB 834 because it provides for an expanded approach to improving health and nutrition for more of Nebraska's children so that they are better prepared as students. We believe that academic performance is inseparable from other aspects of a child's life and it is important to ensure that we are maximizing available resources proven to help children succeed.

Nationally, Nebraska is falling behind almost every other state on leveraging the school breakfast program to help students succeed. Nebraska was most recently ranked 49<sup>th</sup> out of 51 on the number of free and reduced price-eligible students participating in school breakfast program. Only 39 of every 100 eligible students participating in the school lunch programs also received school breakfast.

Decades of research supporting the importance of breakfast for young children have shown links to academic, cognitive, health, mental health, psychosocial, and behavioral outcomes.<sup>1</sup> We know that although many are eligible for it, most of the children who come from families who may need it the most are not starting the day off right with a nutritious breakfast.

Over the interim, Voices for Children and Hunger Free Heartland worked with Senator Avery on LR 206 to further examine the issues related to Nebraska's poor ranking on school breakfast participation. During this process, we had the opportunity to consult with Superintendants from around the state and examine what other states are doing to better leverage the federal school breakfast program. We learned of the importance of utilizing alternative models of providing school breakfast and also that many states were making policy changes to incentivize higher participation rates. We also learned about the promising changes happening at Omaha Public Schools (OPS) with Hunger Free Heartland providing incentive funds for increasing breakfast participation. LB 834 is in part based on changes made in West Virginia as well as the promising work happening at OPS.

West Virginia's "Feed to Achieve" bill partners public and private funding to provide universal free breakfasts across the state, and ensures that the meals reach every student through grab-and-go options or in-class delivery.<sup>2</sup>

LB 834 is intended to provide funds for any real financial barriers related to serving alternative breakfast models – such as trash cans or additional equipment – as well as to provide an incentive for schools to switch to alternative models. This bill is the first step in removing the barriers that prevent students from receiving the nutritious breakfast that they need to reach their full potential as students. We believe that this bill would allow greater flexibility in meeting the various needs of Nebraska's children, while also providing our schools with the additional resources that are necessary to best serve their students. We respectfully urge the committee to advance this bill to be considered by the full legislature.

Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> "Breakfast for Learning," Food Research and Action Center. Fall 2011.

<sup>2</sup> "Senate Bill No. 663," West Virginia Legislature. 2013.