



voices for children

IN NEBRASKA

Telling the whole story.

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February 24, 2014

To: Members of the Business and Labor Committee

From: Aubrey Mancuso, Policy Coordinator

Re: Support for LB 955

Voices for Children wants to express our support for LB 955. Nebraska is a state that values children and families, but we do not do enough to ensure that these values are reflected in our laws. LB 955 would help to establish Nebraska as a leader in ensuring that the value we place on children and families is codified so that workers who need time away from work to care for a new child or ailing family member are truly able to do so.

While the United States takes great pride in family values, it is the only high-income country that does not offer a paid family leave program. The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 was an important step in ensuring job protection for workers who take time to care for a family member, but it does not ensure financial protection for workers who need family leave. Only about 12 percent of employees nationwide have access to paid family leave.¹

Of particular concern to Voices for Children is the time that new parents need to care for a child after birth or adoption. The majority, or about three quarters, of all Nebraskans with young children have all available parents in the workforce.² New parents need time to bond with their child and to adjust to the associated life changes that come with a new child. Families should be able to do this free from additional financial stress. When parents aren't able to take the time they need with a new child, both parents and children can be negatively impacted. Research has found that mothers with at least eight weeks of paid leave are less likely to experience postpartum depression and to be in better overall health than women with less than eight weeks leave.³ In addition, the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of a baby's life due to the positive health impacts of breastfeeding on children. Ensuring paid leave helps more mothers have the capacity to breastfeed.

A new child in the family comes with additional expenses and going without income at a time when expenses will also be increasing is not possible for many of

¹ Institute for Women's Policy Research (2013) Maternity, Paternity and Adoption Leave in the United States

² Kids Count in Nebraska Report (2013)

³ Chatterji, Pinka and Sara Markowitz. 2012. "Family leave after childbirth and the mental health of new mothers." *Journal of Mental Health Policy and Economics* no 15(2) (June):61-76.

Nebraska's working families. What is more, under our current system, those who are most likely to be able to financially manage an income disruption are also those most likely to have access to paid leave. Those with access to paid leave tend to be well-paid people who work in managerial or professional occupations.⁴

Paid family leave is also an important economic issue for women and for the state. One study found that women who take paid leave are 39 percent less likely to receive public assistance and 40 percent less likely to receive food stamps in the year following a child's birth compared to those who do not take any leave. Women who use paid leave are also more likely to still be working nine to 12 months after a child's birth than those who do not take any leave.⁵

LB 955 is a very pro-family policy and ensures that workers have time to commit to the important job of helping to raise the next generation of Nebraskans. We respectfully urge the committee to advance this bill.

Thank you.

⁴ Institute for Women's Policy Research (2013)

⁵ Houser, L. & Vartanian, T. (2012) The Center for Women and Work. Pay Matters: The Positive Economic Impacts of Paid Family Leave for Families, Businesses, and the Public.