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February 27, 2017

**To:** Chairman Groene and Members of the Education Committee

**From:** Kaitlin Reece, Policy Coordinator for Economic Stability and Health

**Re: Support for LB 521-Change provisions related to early childhood education in the Tax Equity and Educational Opportunities Support Act**

All children deserve the chance to start their educational careers with the academic tools they need to be successful. Sadly, we know that the opportunity gap between children of color and low income children and their peers appears as early as Kindergarten. When our youngest students get off their school buses in August, African American and Hispanic children are already 9-10 months behind in math and 7-12 months behind in reading compared to their peers.<sup>1</sup> While this data is alarming on its face, we also know from research that academic skills such as math and reading at Kindergarten are better predictors of later success, even if the student goes on to display behavioral or social problems.<sup>2</sup>

Quality preschool and pre-Kindergarten programs ensure our youngest students start school ready to learn. **Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 521 because it has the potential to grow the number of school-sponsored preschool and pre-kindergarten programs in Nebraska.**

Other states and localities across the country have invested in early childhood education and results from these programs demonstrate gains in reading and math skills as well as decreasing the need for special education and the likelihood of grade retention years after the completion of the program.<sup>3</sup> The dividends from investments in quality preschool do not end in the classroom, however. Quality preschool programming has demonstrated savings in child welfare, public assistance programs, juvenile justice and corrections. For example, children enrolled in a quality preschool program in Chicago were 20 percent less likely to serve jail or prison time by age 24.<sup>4</sup> What's more, the return on investment for these programs is high: in one study, Michigan received \$16.14 for every dollar invested in its Perry Preschool program.<sup>5</sup>

The Nebraska Legislature has made key investments in early childhood education in recent years, including the Step Up to Quality program and early childhood education tax credit. LB 521 builds upon these successes for students as they

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<sup>1</sup> "How Much Can High-Quality Universal Pre-K Reduce Achievement Gaps?" *National Institute for Early Education Research*. April 11, 2016. Accessible online at: <http://nieer.org/research-report/much-can-high-quality-universal-pre-k-reduce-achievement-gaps>

<sup>2</sup> "Early Academic Skills, Not Behavior, Best Predict School Success." *Science Daily*. November 19, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> "I'm the Guy You Pay Later."

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> "The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40." Schweinhart, et al.

[http://www.highscope.org/file/research/perryproject/specialsummary\\_rev2011\\_02\\_2.pdf](http://www.highscope.org/file/research/perryproject/specialsummary_rev2011_02_2.pdf)

prepare for Kindergarten and a lifetime of learning. For these reasons, Voices for Children in Nebraska thanks Senator Walz for sponsoring this important bill and encourages the Education Committee to advance LB 521 to General File.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kaitlin Reece". The script is cursive and fluid.

Kaitlin Reece, Policy Coordinator