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February 12, 2018

To: Chairman Stinner and Members of the Appropriations Committee

From: Julia Tse, Policy Coordinator for Economic Stability and Health

RE: Support for LB 985 - Provide for state funding of prenatal care under the medical assistance program

Children are Nebraska's greatest resource, and our early investments in our future generations will see significant returns when children are able to reach their full potential in adulthood. Quality and consistent preventive health care, beginning even before birth, is the foundation of proper child development. Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 985 because it would reinforce state investments in critical prenatal care for pregnant Nebraska mothers.

Research shows that prenatal care, beginning in the first trimester of pregnancy, offers babies the best possible chances in life. Quality prenatal care identifies risks early on, treats medical problems, and educates parents to ensure a healthy birth. Studies show that inadequate prenatal care resulted in an increased risk for prematurity, stillbirth, early and late neonatal death, and infant death.ⁱ

Health care coverage is a primary barrier to adequate prenatal care. In Nebraska, though adequate prenatal care was sought in three in four of all pregnancies, less than half of mothers without insurance received adequate prenatal care.ⁱⁱ For decades, our collective investments in public health insurance coverage for low-income pregnant mothers have ensured that more Nebraska babies have the best opportunity to become healthy and productive in adulthood.

While Nebraska currently ranks highly in the nation for birth and maternal outcomes, data in the state have remained largely unchanged in recent years. In 2005 and 2015, 1.2% of all Nebraska births were to low birth weight babies and 12% of all births were preterm.ⁱⁱⁱ Our efforts to improve outcomes for all babies should target those who are most at risk for inadequate prenatal care. Research and data indicates that poverty, race and ethnicity, and immigration status are highly linked to poor access and utilization of health care.^{iv} A reduction of disparity in access to health care coverage and prenatal care can result in long-term savings in newborn, post-natal, and lifelong health costs.^v

The Nebraska Legislature acted swiftly to this end in 2012, passing LB 599 notwithstanding the veto of then-Governor Heineman to create a separate Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), called 599 CHIP, which would cover prenatal care for the unborn children of mothers who are denied Medicaid coverage due to immigration status. This successful legislative effort was in response to a recent administrative change within the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), which announced in 2010 that it would eliminate prenatal Medicaid coverage for mothers who were incarcerated and those who were undocumented.^{vi} At the time, lawmakers rightfully acted to restore critical prenatal care to unborn Nebraska babies who would ultimately pay the price for this loss of care.

LB 985 is a reaffirmation of Nebraska values. Access to prenatal care for all children is a smart, pro-kid investment in our future economic prosperity. We thank Senator Howard for

her leadership on this issue and this Committee for their time and consideration. We respectfully urge you to advance LB 985. Thank you.

ⁱ Sarah Partridge et al., "Inadequate Prenatal Care Utilization and Risks of Infant Mortality and Poor Birth Outcome: A Retrospective Analysis of 28,729,765 U.S. Deliveries over 8 Years," *American Journal of Perinatology* 29, no. 10 (2012):787-794, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1055/s-0032-1316439>.

ⁱⁱ *2017 Kids Count in Nebraska Report*, Voices for Children in Nebraska, 29, <http://kidscountnebraska.com/health/#births>.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Kids Count Data Center*, Annie E. Casey Foundation, <http://datacenter.kidscount.org>.

^{iv} "6, Health-Related Outcomes for Children, Pregnant Women, and Newborns," Institute of Medicine, U.S. Committee on the Consequences of Uninsurance, *Health Insurance is a Family Matter*, National Academies Press, 2002, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK221019/>.

^v "Prenatal Care Issue Brief," Voices for Children in Nebraska.

^{vi} "Prenatal Care Issue Brief," Voices for Children in Nebraska, June 2010, <http://voicesforchildren.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Prenatal-Care-Issue-Brief.pdf>.