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February 7, 2019

Senator Howard, Chair – Health and Human Services Committee
Room 1510, Nebraska State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509

RE: Support for LB 402 and LB 169

Dear Chair Howard and Members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

Child well-being is inextricably tied to the well being of parents. Voices for Children in Nebraska supports both LB 402 and LB 169 to strike provisions banning certain persons with drug-related felony convictions from participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) because it removes a barrier to stability for Nebraska children.

Many people affected by this provision are parents. It is estimated that 41,000 Nebraska children, or 9% of our total child population are affected by parental incarceration.ⁱ In 2017, Voices for Children organized listening sessions with Nebraskans who have personal experience with parental incarceration to discuss how our justice system has affected the lives of children. A number of Nebraska parents reflected on multiple barriers that they faced upon re-entering society, including accessing food assistance. What we have learned corroborates a growing body of research that suggests that children have shouldered significant costs as a direct result of decades of punitive public policy decisions.

Children depend on strong relationships with adults, and research has linked parental incarceration to a multitude of adversities that last into adulthood, including antisocial behavior,ⁱⁱ poor educational performance,ⁱⁱⁱ and decreased physical and mental health.^{iv} Most alarmingly, research suggests that altogether, the effects and strain of the incarceration of a family member oftentimes lead children to demonstrate law-breaking behavior and become justice-involved, themselves.^v

Our current ban creates an additional burden for many children in our state in a time when food insecurity has risen over 67% in the last decade. Last year, over 111,000 Nebraska families struggled to put food on the table.^{vi} In our conversations with Nebraskans, financial instability was a constant theme for children who have faced parental incarceration. LB 402 and LB 169 are both first steps toward ensuring that our state invests in effective interventions, especially as we continue to navigate meaningful corrections reform. Excluding individuals for a crime for which they have already paid is contrary to the effectiveness of the program and a clear need in our state for programs that strengthen families for successful reentry and reduced recidivism. The current ban makes the process of reentry all the more difficult for parents, and can have serious collateral consequences for their children.

We thank Senator Hilkemann and Senator Hunt for their leadership in protecting child and family well-being and this committee for their time and consideration. We respectfully urge you to advance LB 402 and LB 169.

Sincerely,



Julia Tse, Policy Coordinator

ⁱ “Left Behind by Justice: Children of Incarcerated Parents in Nebraska,” Voices for Children in Nebraska, 2017, <https://voicesforchildren.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/CIP-IB-2017.pdf>.

ⁱⁱ Joseph Murray, David P. Farrington, and Ivana Sekol, “Children’s Antisocial Behavior, Mental Health, Drug Use, and Educational Performance after Parental Incarceration: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis,” *Psychological Bulletin* 138, no. 2 (2012):175-210.

ⁱⁱⁱ John Hagan and Holly Foster, “Intergenerational Educational Effects of Mass Imprisonment in America,” *Sociology of Education* 85, no. 3 (2012):259-286.

^{iv} Rosalyn D. Lee, Xiangming Fang, and Feijin Luo, “The Impact of Parental Incarceration on the Physical and Mental Health of Young Adults,” *Pediatrics* 131, no. 4 (2013).

^v Lauren Aaron and Danielle H. Dallaire, “Parental Incarceration and Multiple Risk Experiences: Effects on Family Dynamics and Children’s Delinquency,” *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 39, no. 12 (2010): 1471-1484.

^{vi} *Kids Count in Nebraska 2018 Report*, Voices for Children in Nebraska, www.kidscountnebraska.com.

