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March 4, 2019

Senator Matt Williams, Chairman – Banking, Commerce, and Insurance Committee
Room 1507, Nebraska State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509

RE: Support for LB 15 – Adopt the Children of Nebraska Hearing Aid Act

Dear Chairman Williams and Members of the Banking, Commerce, and Insurance Committee,

Access to affordable and quality health care gives children the best start to grow up to be healthy and productive adults. Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 15 because it ensures that children with hearing loss can access interventions necessary to reach developmental milestones.

Without proper identification and treatment, hearing loss can have long-term and negative consequences for children. Hearing aids ensure that children have access to language during critical developmental years. Research shows that children with hearing loss who do not have appropriate hearing aids and treatment suffer delays in cognition, language, and social-emotional development, and consequently, fall behind academically.ⁱ

The cost of ensuring that children have access to hearing aids and professional intervention early on pays dividends to Nebraska taxpayers in the long-term. The economic and social costs of increased special educational expenditures and lost productivity are significant. Educational costs for a child with a hearing loss was twice as expensive as costs for a child without a disability.ⁱⁱ It is estimated that the economic cost of hearing loss in children is \$417,000 per child, or \$2 billion in total nationally.ⁱⁱⁱ

Early intervention ensures that infants and young children can remain developmentally on-track, while also minimizing the cascade of negative outcomes associated with hearing loss. Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 15 because it ensures that hearing aids are treated as any other medically necessary health care need. We thank Senator Blood for her commitment to Nebraska's children and the members of this Committee for their time and consideration. We respectfully urge you to advance LB 15.

Sincerely,

Julia Tse, Policy Coordinator

ⁱ Stephanie J. Limb, et al., "Ensuring Financial Access to Hearing Aids for Infants and Young Children," *Pediatrics* 126, (2010):S43-S51, <http://www.pediatrics.org/cgi/doi/10.1542/peds.2010-0354>.

ⁱⁱ Jay G. Chambers, Jamie Shkolnik, and Maria Perez, "Total Expenditures for Students with Disabilities, 1999-2000: Spending Variation by Disability. Report. Special Education Expenditure Project (SEEP)," American Institutes for Research in the Behavioral Sciences, 2003, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED481398.pdf>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Amanda Honeycutt, et al. "Economic Costs Associated with Mental Retardation, Cerebral Palsy, Hearing Loss, and Vision Impairment --- United States, 2003," *MMWR Weekly* 50, no. 3 (2004):57-59, <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5303a4.htm>.