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February 10, 2020

To: Members of the Urban Affairs Committee

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

RE: Support for LB 1116 - Adopt the New School Construction and Water Access Act

Children are Nebraska's greatest resource, and when all children can reach their full potential in adulthood, our state and economy are better off. Adequate water intake improves children's health, and Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 1116 because it ensures that more children can access drinking water during every school day. Adequate water intake improves general and oral health among children,ⁱ and has also been shown to improve brain functioning and educational performance in young minds.ⁱⁱ

Over half of American students have inadequate hydration levels—boys, Black and Hispanic children, and younger children (age 6-11) were much more likely to be inadequately hydrated.ⁱⁱⁱ Boosting healthy water consumption among children should start where children spend much of their day: in schools.

Schools participating in federal school meal programs are currently required to provide drinking water at no cost during mealtimes, but access to water outside of meals varies significantly. One survey of over nearly 1,200 American students found that 40 percent of students reported having only a few drinking fountains or dispensers, while nearly 3 percent of students reporting having no working fountains.^{iv} Another recent survey found that nearly a quarter of American schools did not permit students to carry a water bottle with them during the day.^v

The installation of water fountains and provisions for water bottles in schools increases water intake and healthy hydration habits among students by taking the place of sugary drinks. One study found a triple-fold increase in water consumption after schools installed water jets and provided cups or water bottles.^{vi} Another study found that schools with water dispensers were more likely to have students at a healthy weight, while the installation of water dispensers resulted in a decline in overweight students.^{vii} By establishing a single standard to address water access in new school construction, LB 1116 ensures that more young Nebraskans are healthy and ready to learn every day at school.

Strengthening access to drinking water during the school day is common sense policy, and support for it is strong—a recent national survey found that 96 percent of American adults supported requiring access to water throughout the day.^{viii}

We thank Senator Morfeld for bringing this important issue forward and this committee for their time and consideration. We respectfully urge you to advance the bill. Thank you.

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- ⁱ E. Jéquier and F. Constant, "Water as an Essential Nutrient: The Physiological Basis of Hydration," *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 64 (2010): 115–123, <https://doi.org/10.1038/ejcn.2009.111>. Jason M. Armfield et al., "Water Fluoridation and the Association of Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Consumption and Dental Caries in Australian Children," *American Journal of Public Health* 103, no. 3 (2013): 494-500, doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2012.300889.
- ⁱⁱ Natalie A. Masento et al., "Effects of Hydration Status on Cognitive Performance and Mood," *British Journal of Nutrition* 111, no. 10 (2014): 1841-1852, doi: 10.1017/S0007114513004455.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Erica L. Kenney et al., "Prevalence of Inadequate Hydration Among US Children and Disparities by Gender and Race/Ethnicity: National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, 2009–2012," *American Journal of Public Health* 105, no. 8 (2015): 113-118, doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2015.302572.
- ^{iv} Stephen J. Onufrak, Sohyun Park, and Cara Wilking, "Student-Reported School Drinking Fountain Availability by Youth Characteristics and State Plumbing Codes," *Preventing Chronic Disease* 11 (2014): 130314, <http://dx.doi.org/10.5888/pcd11.130314>.
- ^v Angie Cradock, Sherry Jones, and Caitlin Merlo, "Examining Differences in the Implementation of School Water-Quality Practices and Water-Access Policies by School Demographic Characteristics," *Preventive Medicine Reports* 14 (2019): 100823, doi: 10.1016/j.pmedr.2019.100823.
- ^{vi} Brian Elbel et al., "A Water Availability Intervention in New York City Public Schools: Influence on Youths' Water and Milk Behaviors," *American Journal of Public Health* 105, no. 2 (2015): 365-372, <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2014.302221>.
- ^{vii} Amy Elen Schwartz et al., "Effect of a School-Based Water Intervention on Child Body Mass Index and Obesity," *JAMA Pediatrics* 170, no. 3 (2016): 220-226, doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2015.3778.
- ^{viii} Michael W. Long et al., "Public Perception of Quality and Support for Required Access to Drinking Water in Schools and Parks," *American Journal of Health Promotion* 32, no. 1 (2016): 72-74, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0890117116671253>.