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February 17, 2020

To: Members of the Education Committee  
From: Julia Isaacs Tse, Policy Coordinator for Economic Stability and Health  
**RE: Support for LB 1039 - Adopt the Hunger-Free Schools 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. Hunger during the school day means that children are unable to learn, more likely to be absent or tardy, and are more likely to have behavioral issues in the classroom.<sup>i</sup> Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 1039 because it would ensure that every student in our state’s public schools is nourished during the school day.

Today, over 17 percent of Nebraska’s children do not have reliable and adequate access to nutritious food.<sup>ii</sup> Since 1946, school meals have provided an effective solution to hunger as a barrier to learning. Federal child nutrition programs provide funds for each breakfast and lunch served in participating schools, with higher reimbursement rates provided for meals served to students from low-income households and schools with higher levels of poverty receive a higher reimbursement per meal. These federal reimbursement levels are referenced in LB 1039 to offset the cost of providing free meals to every student:<sup>iii</sup>

| Reimbursement per meal | Federal Reimbursement |                 | LB 1039 Reimbursement |                 |
|------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
|                        | Breakfast             | Lunch           | Breakfast             | Lunch           |
| Free                   | \$1.84 - \$2.20       | \$3.41 - \$3.50 | None                  | None            |
| Reduced-Price          | \$1.54 - \$1.90       | \$3.01 - \$3.10 | \$0.30                | \$0.40          |
| Paid                   | \$0.31                | \$0.32 - \$0.41 | \$1.53 - \$1.89       | \$3.09 - \$3.09 |

Building on the successes of the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs, LB 1039 would ensure that every public school student is ready to learn every school day. Although Nebraska parents are working hard, more and more families are struggling to make ends meet and the daily cost of school meals can easily add up for lower-income families. No student should have to worry about being singled out for not having enough funds in their meal account during mealtimes or feel ashamed to receive a free or reduced-price meal. LB 1039 eliminates lunchroom stigma, ensures that no child is turned away from a meal in school, and reduces administrative burdens for school nutrition staff.

Similar policies adopted in other states result in increased meal participation. Schools in Nebraska have historically struggled with some of the lowest breakfast participation rates in the country. During the 2018-2019 school year, Nebraska was ranked 48<sup>th</sup> for lowest breakfast participation among low-income students.<sup>iv</sup> The anticipated increase in breakfast participation as the result of LB 1039 would allow more schools to achieve economies of scale in breakfast programs, which is essential for smaller and rural schools.<sup>v</sup>

More and more states are leaving behind policies that would deny children a meal during the school day because of paperwork. At least 12 states have eliminated the reduced-price co-pay for students,<sup>vi</sup> while Florida, Texas, and the District of Columbia provide funding to schools to offer free universal breakfast to students.<sup>vii</sup> Fueled by the federal Community Eligibility Provision, several large cities offer all school meals at no cost to every student, and in the last few years, states have caught on. West Virginia created a public-private fund to offer free breakfast and lunch to all students, building on a pilot that started in 2011.<sup>viii</sup> Last year, Oregon raised eligibility for free school meals from 130% of the federal poverty level (FPL) to 300% of FPL, in alignment with eligibility for the state's public children's health insurance program.<sup>ix</sup>

We appreciate that the fiscal note for LB 1039 is substantial and would urge this Committee to weigh that the note does not capture administrative savings or savings from the school meal debts accrued by local school districts, ranging from the thousands to the hundreds of thousands annually. LB 1039 would allow schools and educators to better focus on providing a quality education to every child, while ensuring that more children are ready to learn. We thank Senator Cavanaugh for her leadership on this issue and respectfully urge the committee to advance LB 1039. Thank you.

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<sup>i</sup> Council on Community Pediatrics and Committee on Nutrition, "Promoting Food Insecurity for All Children," *Pediatrics* 136, no. 5 (2015), doi: 10.1542/peds.2015-3301. Food Research and Action Center, "Research Brief: Breakfast for Learning," October 2016, <http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/breakfastforlearning-1.pdf>.

<sup>ii</sup> Voices for Children in Nebraska, *Kids Count in Nebraska 2019 Report*, 56.

<sup>iii</sup> *Federal Register*, Vol. 84, no. 212, 58678-58681, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/fr-110119>.

<sup>iv</sup> "School Breakfast Scorecard: School Year 2018-2019," Food Research & Action Center, February 2020, [https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/Breakfast-Scorecard-2018-2019\\_FNL.pdf](https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/Breakfast-Scorecard-2018-2019_FNL.pdf).

<sup>v</sup> Voices for Children in Nebraska, "Food for Thought: School Nutrition for Student Performance," November 2016, <http://voicesforchildren.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Nutrition-IssueBrief.pdf>.

<sup>vi</sup> Colorado, the District of Columbia, Minnesota, Maryland, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Vermont, and Washington have eliminated the reduced-price co-pay for breakfasts or breakfasts and lunch. *Ibid.*

<sup>vii</sup> In Florida and Texas, funding is limited to certain high-poverty schools, while all schools are required to offer free breakfast to all students in the District of Columbia. "School Meals Legislation and Funding by State," Food Research & Action Center, February 2020, <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/School-Meals-Legislation-and-Funding-by-State-February-2020.pdf>.

<sup>viii</sup> Anduamlak Meharie et al., "Universal Free Meals Pilot Project: Evaluation Report," West Virginia Department of Education, Division of Teaching and Learning, Office of Research, February 2013, <https://wvde.us/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/UniversalFreeMealsPilotEvaluation2013.pdf>.

<sup>ix</sup> "School Meals Legislation and Funding by State," Food Research & Action Center.

**SY 2018-19 Free- and Reduced Price-Eligible Students by School Districts within Selected Legislative Districts**

| LD        | School District                       | Enrolled      | Free         | Free %       | Reduced      | Reduced %    | Free and Reduced | Free and Reduced % |
|-----------|---------------------------------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------------|--------------------|
|           | Arnold Public Schools                 | 175           | 28           | 16.0%        | 12           | 6.9%         | 40               | 22.9%              |
|           | Brady Public Schools                  | 175           | 55           | 31.4%        | 14           | 8.0%         | 69               | 39.4%              |
|           | Eustis-Farnam Public Schools          | 172           | 43           | 25.0%        | 25           | 14.5%        | 68               | 39.5%              |
|           | Gothenburg Public Schools             | 883           | 259          | 29.3%        | 45           | 5.1%         | 304              | 34.4%              |
|           | Hershey Public Schools                | 523           | 74           | 14.1%        | 37           | 7.1%         | 111              | 21.2%              |
|           | Maxwell Public Schools                | 523           | 74           | 14.1%        | 37           | 7.1%         | 111              | 21.2%              |
|           | Maywood Public Schools                | 166           | 65           | 39.2%        | 14           | 8.4%         | 79               | 47.6%              |
|           | McPherson County Schools              | 65 *          | *            | *            | *            | *            | *                | *                  |
|           | Medicine Valley Public Schools        | 234           | 31           | 13.2%        | 25           | 10.7%        | 56               | 23.9%              |
|           | North Platte Public Schools           | 4,230         | 1,582        | 37.4%        | 556          | 13.1%        | 2,138            | 50.5%              |
|           | Paxton Consolidated Schools           | 219           | 76           | 34.7%        | 26           | 11.9%        | 102              | 46.6%              |
|           | Perkins County Schools                | 414           | 92           | 22.2%        | 49           | 11.8%        | 141              | 34.1%              |
|           | Stapleton Public Schools              | 207           | 39           | 18.8%        | 22           | 10.6%        | 61               | 29.5%              |
|           | Sutherland Public Schools             | 338           | 64           | 18.9%        | 32           | 9.5%         | 96               | 28.4%              |
|           | Wallace Public School District        | 184           | 50           | 27.2%        | 18           | 9.8%         | 68               | 37.0%              |
| <b>42</b> | <b>Sen. Groene</b>                    | <b>8,508</b>  | <b>2,532</b> | <b>29.8%</b> | <b>912</b>   | <b>10.7%</b> | <b>3,444</b>     | <b>40.5%</b>       |
|           | Ainsworth Community Schools           | 429           | 160          | 37.3%        | 39           | 9.1%         | 199              | 46.4%              |
|           | Alliance Public Schools               | 1,385         | 627          | 45.3%        | 143          | 10.3%        | 770              | 55.6%              |
|           | Anselmo-Merna Public Schools          | 292           | 100          | 34.2%        | 18           | 6.2%         | 118              | 40.4%              |
|           | Arnold Public Schools                 | 175           | 28           | 16.0%        | 12           | 6.9%         | 40               | 22.9%              |
|           | Arthur County Schools                 | 125 *         | *            | *            | *            | *            | *                | *                  |
|           | Bridgeport Public Schools             | 456           | 185          | 40.6%        | 71           | 15.6%        | 256              | 56.1%              |
|           | Chadron Public Schools                | 920           | 321          | 34.9%        | 75           | 8.2%         | 396              | 43.0%              |
|           | Cody-Kilgore Public Schools           | 168           | 66           | 39.3%        | 29           | 17.3%        | 95               | 56.6%              |
|           | Crawford Public Schools               | 204           | 84           | 41.2%        | 23           | 11.3%        | 107              | 52.5%              |
|           | Gordon-Rushville Public Schools       | 616           | 303          | 49.2%        | 61           | 9.9%         | 364              | 59.1%              |
|           | Hay Springs Public Schools            | 201           | 50           | 24.9%        | 34           | 16.9%        | 84               | 41.8%              |
|           | Hemingford Public Schools             | 449           | 134          | 29.8%        | 44           | 9.8%         | 178              | 39.6%              |
|           | Hyannis Area Schools                  | 159           | 57           | 35.8%        | 19           | 11.9%        | 76               | 47.8%              |
|           | Keya Paha County Schools              | 86            | 29           | 33.7%        | 15           | 17.4%        | 44               | 51.2%              |
|           | Loup County Public Schools            | 70 *          | *            | *            | *            | *            | 38               | 54.3%              |
|           | McPherson County Schools              | 65 *          | *            | *            | *            | *            | *                | *                  |
|           | Mullen Public Schools                 | 159           | 41           | 25.8%        | 25           | 15.7%        | 66               | 41.5%              |
|           | Rock County Public Schools            | 242           | 70           | 28.9%        | 32           | 13.2%        | 102              | 42.2%              |
|           | Sandhills Public Schools              | 90            | 34           | 37.8%        | 11           | 12.2%        | 45               | 50.0%              |
|           | Sargent Public Schools                | 170           | 66           | 38.8%        | 32           | 18.8%        | 98               | 57.7%              |
|           | Sioux County Public Schools           | 100 *         | *            | *            | *            | *            | 19               | 19.0%              |
|           | Stapleton Public Schools              | 207           | 39           | 18.8%        | 22           | 10.6%        | 61               | 29.5%              |
|           | Theford Public Schools                | 128           | 52           | 40.6%        | 11           | 8.6%         | 63               | 49.2%              |
|           | Valentine Community Schools           | 608           | 182          | 29.9%        | 51           | 8.4%         | 233              | 38.3%              |
| <b>43</b> | <b>Sen. Brewer</b>                    | <b>7,504</b>  | <b>2,628</b> | <b>35.0%</b> | <b>767</b>   | <b>10.2%</b> | <b>3,452</b>     | <b>46.0%</b>       |
|           | Elkhorn Public Schools                | 9,857         | 513          | 5.2%         | 254          | 2.6%         | 767              | 7.8%               |
|           | Millard Public Schools                | 24,104        | 3,805        | 15.8%        | 1,243        | 5.2%         | 5,048            | 20.9%              |
| <b>31</b> | <b>Sen. Kolowski</b>                  | <b>33,961</b> | <b>4,318</b> | <b>12.7%</b> | <b>1,497</b> | <b>4.4%</b>  | <b>5,815</b>     | <b>17.1%</b>       |
|           | Arlington Public Schools              | 700           | 120          | 17.1%        | 46           | 6.6%         | 166              | 23.7%              |
|           | Bennington Public Schools             | 2,931         | 236          | 8.1%         | 52           | 1.8%         | 288              | 9.8%               |
|           | Douglas County West Community Schools | 970           | 257          | 26.5%        | 65           | 6.7%         | 322              | 33.2%              |
|           | Elkhorn Public Schools                | 9,857         | 513          | 5.2%         | 254          | 2.6%         | 767              | 7.8%               |
|           | Fremont Public Schools                | 4,732         | 2,400        | 50.7%        | 472          | 10.0%        | 2,872            | 60.7%              |
|           | Gretna Public Schools                 | 5,492         | 375          | 6.8%         | 145          | 2.6%         | 520              | 9.5%               |
|           | Millard Public Schools                | 24,104        | 3,805        | 15.8%        | 1,243        | 5.2%         | 5,048            | 20.9%              |
| <b>39</b> | <b>Sen. Linehan</b>                   | <b>48,786</b> | <b>7,706</b> | <b>15.8%</b> | <b>2,277</b> | <b>4.7%</b>  | <b>9,983</b>     | <b>20.5%</b>       |

| LD        | School District                         | Enrolled       | Free           | Free %       | Reduced       | Reduced %   | Free and Reduced | Free and Reduced % |
|-----------|---|----------------|----------------|--------------|---------------|-------------|------------------|--------------------|
|           | Lincoln Public Schools                  | 42,020         | 15,903         | 37.8%        | 3,388         | 8.1%        | 19,291           | 45.9%              |
|           | Raymond Central Schools                 | 685            | 119            | 17.4%        | 29            | 4.2%        | 148              | 21.6%              |
|           | Waverly School District 145             | 2,122          | 317            | 14.9%        | 122           | 5.7%        | 439              | 20.7%              |
| <b>46</b> | <b>Sen. Morfeld</b>                     | <b>44,827</b>  | <b>16,339</b>  | <b>36.4%</b> | <b>3,539</b>  | <b>7.9%</b> | <b>19,878</b>    | <b>44.3%</b>       |
|           | Adams Central Public Schools            | 1,005          | 154            | 15.3%        | 74            | 7.4%        | 228              | 22.7%              |
|           | Alma Public Schools                     | 353            | 126            | 35.7%        | 29            | 8.2%        | 155              | 43.9%              |
|           | Amherst Public Schools                  | 390            | 81             | 20.8%        | 20            | 5.1%        | 101              | 25.9%              |
|           | Axtell Community Schools                | 286            | 49             | 17.1%        | 23            | 8.0%        | 72               | 25.2%              |
|           | Bertrand Public Schools                 | 252            | 74             | 29.4%        | 32            | 12.7%       | 106              | 42.1%              |
|           | Blue Hill Public Schools                | 339            | 94             | 27.7%        | 15            | 4.4%        | 109              | 32.2%              |
|           | Bruning-Davenport Unified School System | 190            | 47             | 24.7%        | 14            | 7.4%        | 61               | 32.1%              |
|           | Deshler Public Schools                  | 52 *           | *              | *            | *             | *           | 24               | 46.2%              |
|           | Doniphan-Trumbull Public Schools        | 473            | 82             | 17.3%        | 49            | 10.4%       | 131              | 27.7%              |
|           | Elm Creek Public Schools                | 357            | 84             | 23.5%        | 42            | 11.8%       | 126              | 35.3%              |
|           | Franklin Public Schools                 | 281            | 94             | 33.5%        | 45            | 16.0%       | 139              | 49.5%              |
|           | Gibbon Public Schools                   | 589            | 251            | 42.6%        | 56            | 9.5%        | 307              | 52.1%              |
|           | Harvard Public Schools                  | 293            | 178            | 60.8%        | 25            | 8.5%        | 203              | 69.3%              |
|           | Holdrege Public Schools                 | 1,101          | 310            | 28.2%        | 105           | 9.5%        | 415              | 37.7%              |
|           | Kearney Public Schools                  | 5,905          | 1,905          | 32.3%        | 451           | 7.6%        | 2,356            | 39.9%              |
|           | Kenesaw Public Schools                  | 276            | 73             | 26.4%        | 16            | 5.8%        | 89               | 32.3%              |
|           | Loomis Public Schools                   | 235            | 48             | 20.4%        | 29            | 12.3%       | 77               | 32.8%              |
|           | Minden Public Schools                   | 834            | 209            | 25.1%        | 82            | 9.8%        | 291              | 34.9%              |
|           | Overton Public Schools                  | 298            | 92             | 30.9%        | 55            | 18.5%       | 147              | 49.3%              |
|           | Pleasanton Public Schools               | 303            | 67             | 22.1%        | 24            | 7.9%        | 91               | 30.0%              |
|           | Red Cloud Community Schools             | 251            | 122            | 48.6%        | 28            | 11.2%       | 150              | 59.8%              |
|           | Shelton Public Schools                  | 298            | 84             | 28.2%        | 30            | 10.1%       | 114              | 38.3%              |
|           | Shickley Public Schools                 | 163            | 11             | 6.7%         | 11            | 6.7%        | 22               | 13.5%              |
|           | Silver Lake Public Schools              | 247            | 83             | 33.6%        | 31            | 12.6%       | 114              | 46.2%              |
|           | South Central Nebraska School District  | 686            | 240            | 35.0%        | 82            | 12.0%       | 322              | 46.9%              |
|           | Sumner-Eddyville-Miller Schools         | 207            | 97             | 46.9%        | 17            | 8.2%        | 114              | 55.1%              |
|           | Superior Public Schools                 | 430            | 160            | 37.2%        | 33            | 7.7%        | 193              | 44.9%              |
|           | Sutton Public Schools                   | 410            | 116            | 28.3%        | 29            | 7.1%        | 145              | 35.4%              |
|           | Thayer Central Community Schools        | 475            | 135            | 28.4%        | 22            | 4.6%        | 157              | 33.1%              |
|           | Wilcox-Hildreth Public Schools          | 231            | 66             | 28.6%        | 23            | 10.0%       | 89               | 38.5%              |
| <b>38</b> | <b>Sen. Murman</b>                      | <b>17,210</b>  | <b>5,132</b>   | <b>29.8%</b> | <b>1,492</b>  | <b>8.7%</b> | <b>6,648</b>     | <b>38.6%</b>       |
|           | Lincoln Public Schools                  | 42,020         | 15,903         | 37.8%        | 3,388         | 8.1%        | 19,291           | 45.9%              |
| <b>28</b> | <b>Sen. Pansing Brooks</b>              | <b>42,020</b>  | <b>15,903</b>  | <b>37.8%</b> | <b>3,388</b>  | <b>8.1%</b> | <b>19,291</b>    | <b>45.9%</b>       |
|           | Arlington Public Schools                | 700            | 120            | 17.1%        | 46            | 6.6%        | 166              | 23.7%              |
|           | Fremont Public Schools                  | 4,732          | 2,400          | 50.7%        | 472           | 10.0%       | 2,872            | 60.7%              |
|           | Howells-Dodge Public Schools            | 250            | 71             | 28.4%        | 15            | 6.0%        | 86               | 34.4%              |
|           | Logan View Public Schools               | 547            | 159            | 29.1%        | 46            | 8.4%        | 205              | 37.5%              |
|           | North Bend Central Public Schools       | 611            | 123            | 20.1%        | 56            | 9.2%        | 179              | 29.3%              |
|           | Oakland Craig Public Schools            | 465            | 163            | 35.1%        | 45            | 9.7%        | 208              | 44.7%              |
|           | Scribner-Snyder Community Schools       | 204            | 112            | 54.9%        | 19            | 9.3%        | 131              | 64.2%              |
|           | West Point Public Schools               | 736            | 331            | 45.0%        | 110           | 14.9%       | 441              | 59.9%              |
| <b>15</b> | <b>Sen. Walz</b>                        | <b>8,245</b>   | <b>3,479</b>   | <b>42.2%</b> | <b>809</b>    | <b>9.8%</b> | <b>4,288</b>     | <b>52.0%</b>       |
|           | <b>STATEWIDE</b>                        | <b>364,620</b> | <b>120,325</b> | <b>33.0%</b> | <b>28,955</b> | <b>7.9%</b> | <b>151,015</b>   | <b>41.4%</b>       |

Source: Voices for Children in Nebraska analysis of data from the Nebraska Department of Education, available for download here:

[https://cdn.education.ne.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/2018-19\\_Free\\_and\\_Reduced\\_Lunch\\_Counts\\_by\\_School.xls](https://cdn.education.ne.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/2018-19_Free_and_Reduced_Lunch_Counts_by_School.xls).

\*Indicates masked data. The masking of data for less than 10 students or greater than 99% of enrolled students is required by federal and state laws. Therefore, totals including masked data generally represent an underestimate of actual eligibility.