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Thank you Chairman Arch and members of the committee. My name is Julie Erickson and I’m representing Voices for Children in Nebraska in support of LB 108.

Children need access to nutritional foods in order to ensure healthy development. Families working hard to make ends meet should not have to choose between a promotion at work and feeding their family. Sadly, because of the way our public assistance programs are currently structured, this is a reality for many families and a major barrier toward economic stability. Too many Nebraska families get trapped in a “cliff effect” where a small raise at work triggers a much larger loss in work supports like child care or food stamps. The pandemic has exacerbated food insecurity in Nebraska, with around 14% of families with children reporting food insecurity toward the end of 2020. It is long past time to fully leverage public programs like SNAP to ensure that they can effectively support families as they work to get back on their feet.

Most of our federal programs use the federal poverty line to determine eligibility for public programs. The federal poverty line is a measure that was developed in the 1960s based on the cost of food at the time and updated annually for inflation. In 2021, this measure is outdated and not reflective of what families need to get by. In fact, when we look at what families need to make ends meet, it is typically double the official poverty line. This is why we need to update our public programs to ensure that families can transition more gradually between poverty and being able to meet expenses independently.

Fortunately, states can smooth this cliff effect with policies like LB 108 and 31 states, including Iowa, Florida, North Carolina, and North Dakota, have all addressed the cliff effect in SNAP. SNAP is an important work-support that helps prevent children from going hungry and has kept millions of children out of poverty. SNAP participation has been shown to reduce low birth weight and infant mortality in newborns, decrease the likelihood of childhood obesity, and other positive health and educational outcomes. A recent study completed by the University of Missouri found that a $100 increase to SNAP benefits reduces the likelihood of ER visits for low blood sugar, or hypoglycemia, in children by 13%, with an average savings of $1,186 per visit.

LB 108 leaves the net income requirement for SNAP in place, ensuring that only families who really need it receive this type of assistance. Eligibility is then determined based on whether a family’s net income, the income actually available to purchase food, is less than 100% of the federal poverty level.

 Addressing growing rates of food insecurity is critical to supporting families as they work to recover from the economic impact of the pandemic. We urge the committee to advance LB 108. Thank you.