February 17, 2021

Thank you Senator Arch and members of the committee. My name is Julie Erickson and I am representing Voices for Children in Nebraska in support of LB 121.

Our state policies should support families in building a better future. Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 121 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.



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One group of 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. 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. Several 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, poor educational performance, and decreased physical and mental health.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.

Our current ban creates an additional burden for many children in our state in a time when many families are struggling. Food insecurity was a growing problem in Nebraska prior to the pandemic and many families have faced additional challenges with losses of income or jobs.

Excluding individuals for a crime for which they have already paid is contrary to the effectiveness of a program intended to provide temporary support during challenging times. The current ban makes the process of reentry more difficult for parents and can have serious collateral consequences for their children.

We thank Senator Hunt for her leadership and urge the committee to advance LB 121. Thank you.