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Thank you Chairman Hansen and members of the committee. My name is Julie Erickson and I am here today on behalf of Voices for Children in Nebraska in support of LB 290.

As Nebraska looks for ways to ensure we have a qualified and diverse workforce, it is important to consider the relationship between caregiving and workforce participation. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the challenge of balancing caregiving, one’s own health and work responsibilities, making the importance of paid leave more critical than ever. We support LB 290 because it ensures that during life’s most precious, stressful, or important moments, Nebraska parents don’t have to choose between the family they love and the job they need.

**First, paid leave bolsters the health of babies and children.** Research shows that time off after the birth of a child is attributed to several positive health outcomes at birth and beyond. One recent study conservatively estimated that the provision of 12 weeks of paid parental leave in the U.S. would prevent 576 infant deaths and 288 post-neonatal deaths annually.[[1]](#endnote-1) Adequate time off after the birth of a new child also results in longer periods of breastfeeding,[[2]](#endnote-2) and yields improvements in maternal physical and mental health and financial well-being.[[3]](#endnote-3) In Nebraska, the lack of licensed child care options for infants under 6 weeks of age means that parents without access to parental leave are left with few options. The benefits of paid leave continue later in life, allowing parents to care for children with a serious illness such as pediatric cancer, to attend to early medical needs, or to identify potential developmental delays and necessary interventions.

**Secondly, children and families who most need paid leave are the least likely to have it.** It is estimated that only 50% of working parents in Nebraska are eligible for unpaid leave through the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). Of those eligible for federal FMLA, it is further estimated that only 41% can afford to take unpaid leave.[[4]](#endnote-4) Access to leave is highly stratified by income, with an estimated 5% of workers in the lowest wage decile having access to paid parental leave.[[5]](#endnote-5) The future of job growth is expected to accelerate in low-wage occupations without leave benefits typically held by women, and especially women of color.[[6]](#endnote-6) Without meaningful intervention, the unmet need for paid leave will grow exponentially.

**Finally, an investment in families is an investment in Nebraska’s workforce.** Demographic and economic shifts have forced impossible decisions upon American workers between a paycheck and caregiving needs. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased these challenges. The increase in single-parent households has resulted in a rise in child care needs, while a rapidly-aging population creates medical and caregiving needs. Employee turnover, the loss of institutional knowledge, absenteeism and presenteeism, and temporary hiring are all already affecting businesses’ bottom line. A recent survey found that 1 in 3 workers have left at least one job due to caregiving responsibilities, and the most experienced and highest-paid workers were most likely to be affected.[[7]](#endnote-7)

Family values are at the heart of Nebraska values, and it’s time for our state to create policies that value families. LB 290 ensures that all Nebraskans can be there for the most important moments in our families’ lives, and that our children will have the best start to life. We respectfully urge the committee the advance LB 290.

Thank you.

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4. “Working Parents Who are Eligible for FMLA Unpaid Leave (Share)” and “Working Parents Who are Eligible for and Can Afford FMLA Unpaid Leave (Share),” diversitydatakids.org calculations of Current Population Survey, 2011-2014 March Annuals Social and Economic Supplement, Public Use Microdata Files, IPUMS-CPS, <http://www.diversitydatakids.org/>. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
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6. Kayla Patrick, Meika Berlan, and Morgan Harwood, “Low-wage Jobs Held Primarily by Women Will Grow the Most Over the Next Decade,” National Women’s Law Center, August 2018, <https://nwlc-ciw49tixgw5lbab.stackpathdns.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Low-Wage-Jobs-Held-Primarily-by-Women-Will-Grow-the-Most-Over-the-Next-Decade-2018.pdf>. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Joseph B. Fuller and Manjari Raman, “The Caring Company,” Managing the Future of Work Project, Harvard Business School, 2019, <https://www.hbs.edu/managing-the-future-of-work/Documents/The%20Caring%20Company%20-%2001.17.19.pdf>. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)