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Thank you Senator Linehan and members of the Revenue Committee. My name is Julie Erickson and I am representing Voices for Children in Nebraska in support of LB 459.

Voices for Children supports LB 459 because the revenue generated from the proposed increased tax on cigarettes and tobacco would provide funding to programs that support the health and well-being of Nebraska children.

It is vital to develop new revenue streams to support current and innovative programs for Nebraska families. The revenue generated by a tax increase on tobacco products proposed under LB 459 would benefit programs that support children during critical periods of development.

We know from neuroscience research that most of the key brain infrastructure built in babies’ brains happens during the first few years of life. Connections made or not made during this critical development period become increasingly hard to change as children grow up. Investments funded through LB 459 will help us as a state make key early investments in children that will pay dividends in years to come.

LB 459 designates funding for start-up costs for a paid family and medical leave program. As Nebraska looks for ways to keep our state economy prosperous, we must first think of the important connection between child development and economic development. During life’s most precious, stressful, or important moments, Nebraska parents shouldn’t have to choose between the family they love and the job they need. Adequate time off after the birth of a new child is linked to reduced infant and post-neonatal deaths,longer periods of breastfeeding,and improvements in maternal health and financial well-being.  A state paid family leave program also offers a systemic solution to the significant costs that employers are already paying for in the form of employee turnover, absenteeism and presenteeism, and lost productivity. The COVID-19 pandemic also illustrated the importance of paid leave as health issues and caregiving have been a significant focus for most families over the past year. The bill also contains additional funding to support maternal health, which is another important investment in maternal and child well-being.

We urge the committee to advance LB 459 to provide additional funding to invest in children and families. We thank Senator Cavanaugh for her continued commitment to Nebraska children and this Committee for your consideration.