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Thank you Chairman Arch and Members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Julie Erickson and I am representing Voices for Children in Nebraska in support of LB 485.

Nebraska families are working and working hard. Nebraska has always had both low unemployment and high rates of parental employment. In 2019, 76% of Nebraska kids under the age of 6 had all available parents in the workforce, meaning that they are likely to require child care.

Prior to 2002, Nebraska set initial eligibility for child care assistance at 185% of the federal poverty level, currently just over $48,000 per year for a family of four. In 2002 during a budget shortfall, then-Governor Johanns line-item vetoed a portion of funding for child care assistance and implemented regulatory changes that reduced initial eligibility to 120% of the federal poverty level. At the time, it is my understanding that promises were made to restore the cuts once the state was in a stronger financial position. In the nearly 20 years since that time, initial eligibility has only increased slightly to 130% of the federal poverty level through legislative action in 2013.

Over this same time period, child care costs for families have continued to grow as has our knowledge about the importance of child care in providing a quality foundation in a child’s earliest years that is critical to future success. LB 485 is an investment in our workforce and an investment in the next generation of Nebraskans. It restores the broken promise to Nebraska’s kids and families that has kept thousands of families living closer to the poverty line and prevented parents from meaningful employment.

We urge the committee to advance LB 485. Thank you.