February 1, 2022

To: Senator Wayne and Members of the Urban Affairs Committee

From: Alfonso Vaca-Lubischer, Research Coordinator

Re: Support for LB 1024

All our children deserve every opportunity to thrive regardless of the circumstances they are born into. Unfortunately, in Nebraska right now access to opportunity is often determined by the zip code where a child lives. Voices for Children supports LB 1024 because it would be a historic investment in a community that we have underinvested in for many years.

In Nebraska, there are 68 Qualified Census Tracts (QCT) as defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Of those, 24 are located in North Omaha (the area north of Dodge Street, east of 72nd Street, and south of I-680). Around two thirds of the population of North Omaha lives in a QCT; that is 70,000 people, of which 20,000 are children. Despite accounting for only 5% of Nebraska’s population, African Americans make up 41% of North Omaha’s QCTs. The median household income in these census tracts is $35,760, almost half than the rest of the state. Both the unemployment rate (9.1%) and the poverty rate (30.7%) are about three times higher than the state averages (3.3% and 11%, respectively).

These statistics have both historical implications and influence on future outcomes. All the redlined neighborhoods in North Omaha—where African Americans were denied federally-backed mortgages until 1969—are all located in QCTs. Today, a person born in a redlined neighborhood in North Omaha is expected to live around 8 years less than someone born elsewhere in the state (71.6 years vs. 79.3 years, respectively).

An important thing to note regarding these statistics is that they are based on data collected prior to the pandemic. While no data currently exists to depict the post-COVID-19 experiences of families and children living in North Omaha QTCs, it is a fact that these communities went into the pandemic with pandemic-like outcomes, making them much more vulnerable to the ongoing health and economic crises.

The federal funding currently available is an opportunity to make transformative investments in the next generation of kids in North Omaha and make progress toward making Nebraska a place where opportunity is no longer defined by zip code.

We urge the committee to advance LB 1024. Thank you.