January 18, 2020

To: Senator Walz and Members of the Committee

From: Aubrey Mancuso, Executive Director

Re: Support for LB 838

Children are our state’s greatest resource and for too long we have not provided the resources and investments needed to support comprehensive early childhood systems in Nebraska.

Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 838 because of the need to invest in creating a sustainable early childhood workforce.

The majority of Nebraska parents with kids under 6 are in the workforce, creating a great need for early childhood care. Prior to the pandemic, 75% of Nebraska children under 6 had all parents in the workforce. We know that the care provided in the early years of a child’s life, when brain development occurs at a rapid pace, plays a critical role in healthy development.

In spite of the importance of early childhood and great need for child care, professionals in this field are often underpaid and lack access to benefits, with many having to rely on public programs to meet basic needs like health insurance. National estimates find that around half of early childhood professionals have earnings low enough to qualify for public assistance despite full-time work.

During roundtables held by the Nonprofit Association of the Midlands in 2021, workforce issues in early childhood were raised as the most significant concern by Nebraskans across the state. Workforce challenges are even more acute for early childhood professionals who are required to maintain student to staff ratios to ensure safety. Furthermore, a lack of child care is a barrier for parents who want to enter or re-enter the workforce.

LB 838 is a smart investment in the early childhood workforce, and we urge the committee to advance the bill.