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January 26, 2024

To: Chairperson Hansen and Members of the Health and Human Services Committee

From: Anahí Salazar, **Support for LB 856, change eligibility requirements for the federal child care subsidy program.**

Nebraska is full of hard-working caretakers who are determined to better the lives of the children they look after. Yet, caretakers are faced with difficulty when it comes to finding quality and affordable child care. In order to keep and attract families in Nebraska there needs to be affordable and accessible high quality child care for every child. Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 856 because it allows child care workers access to the federal subsidized child care program, helping with their own children's child care costs.

91% of counties in Nebraska do not meet the local child care demands.¹ 11 Nebraska counties are deemed child care deserts with no licensed provider, and 10 counties can accommodate less than 100 children.² A child care desert is an area where there is a lack of licensed child care options. These deserts have a negative impact not only on parents and children but also the economy. Parents have to make difficult decisions to either quit their jobs or reduce their hours, which in turn affect family income and career prospects. Children may miss out on quality early learning opportunities. And lastly employers may face challenges in attracting and retaining workers who need reliable high quality child care.

The federal child care subsidy program would help increase accessibility across the state. Creating sustainable work positions in Nebraska's workforce as well as expanding the child care availability for parents. Research tells us there is a direct link between lower wages and higher turnover.³ LB 856 would help early childhood professionals stretch their household budget further. Recruiting and retaining a qualified child care workforce allows parents in Nebraska to continue working. In 2021, 6% of Nebraska families with children ages birth to five had someone in the family quit, change, or refuse a job because of a childcare issue.⁴

Based on the ACCESSNebraska performance measures, Nebraska is still serving fewer children on the subsidy than we were prior to the pandemic. The

¹ *Kids Count Report 2022. Annie E Casey Foundation, 2023. p. 40.*

² *Kids Count Report 2022. Annie E Casey Foundation, 2023. p. 40.*

³ [Turnover Begets Turnover - Center for the Study of Child Care Employment \(berkeley.edu\)](https://turnoverberkeley.com/), 1 Sept. 2003, cscce.berkeley.edu/publications/report/turnover-begets-turnover-an-examination-of-job-and-occupational-instability-among-child-care-center-staff/. Accessed 1 Aug. 2023.

⁴ *Kids Count Report 2022. Annie E Casey Foundation, 2023. p. 40.*

monthly average for 2019 was 17,437 and in 2023 the monthly average was 13,323. This is even after LB485 expanded eligibility in 2021.⁵

With less turnover, more children and families are able to benefit due to stable classrooms. Other states, such as Kentucky, have noticed that their child care centers are well staffed since the implementation of their subsidy program. This legislation creates an incentive for individuals to work in child care.

LB856 would provide child care professionals with the opportunity to have their children's child care costs covered, in turn creating a classroom where parents, such as myself, can rest assured their little ones are in a safe environment. Thank you to Senator Fredrickson for bringing forward legislation providing a piece of the solution to Nebraska's child care crisis, and the Committee for your time and attention. I would urge your support.

⁵ "Accessnebraska Performance Measures // ." *ACCESSNebraska Performance Measures*, dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/ACCESSNebraska-Performance-Measures.aspx. Accessed Jan. 2024.