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February 1, 2024

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

From: Katie Nungesser, Policy Coordinator for Voices for Children in Nebraska

RE: Support of LB 952, Require Department of Health and Human Services to implement the federal Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer Program

Thank you, Chairperson Hansen and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Katie Nungesser and I am representing Voices for Children in Nebraska in support of LB 952.

Nebraska has an opportunity with Summer EBT to address the nutrition gap that school-aged children face during the extended break from school. While our state currently participates in the USDA Summer Food Service Program, it is imperative to acknowledge the existing challenges that hinder its effectiveness, particularly in reaching the most vulnerable children.

While it is true that the agencies hosting these sites are commendable in their efforts, the data paints a stark reality. According to the 2022 Summer Nutrition Status Report from the Food and Research Action Center (FRAC), Nebraska ranks among the top three states with the lowest success rates in connecting hungry children with meals during the summer. Astonishingly, only nine percent of food insecure children in Nebraska were connected to a summer meal site.¹

The existing summer meals program faces considerable limitations. Strict federal guidelines and logistical challenges make it difficult to operate efficiently, especially in rural and remote areas of Nebraska. Beyond the metro areas, these meal sites are sparse, creating a significant accessibility gap for families. In instances where children are not already enrolled in childcare or camps, connecting with meal sites becomes an uphill battle.

The reality that parents are often at work during the day compounds the issue. Children, left without an adult in the summer months to transport them, struggle to access these essential nutritional resources. For example, families in rural areas may have to travel to another town to connect with a summer meal.

LB 952 provides a tangible solution to bridge this nutrition gap. We can reach children who are currently slipping through the cracks of existing initiatives. This approach empowers families, especially in rural and underserved areas, by providing them with the means to access nutritious meals during the critical summer months.

I urge this committee to consider the food insecurity facing our state's children during the summer break and the potential of LB 952 to make a significant impact. By supporting the Summer EBT program, we can demonstrate our commitment to the well-being of Nebraska's youth and pave the way for a healthier, more nourished future.

Sincerely,

Katie Nungesser

¹ Summer Nutrition Status Report, FRAC, 10 Jan 2023, frac.org/wp-content/uploads/Summer-Report-2022_final.pdf. Page 7.