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

From: Anahí Salazar, Policy Coordinator for Voices for Children in Nebraska

RE: Support for LB 304- Eliminate a sunset date 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. One of the obstacles that stands in the way of accepting and keeping employment is finding quality and affordable child care. Quality early childhood programs give children the best chance for success later in life. Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 304 which eliminates the sunset date and keeps the current eligibility level of child care subsidies at 185% of the federal poverty level, this will allow hardworking families to continue to keep their children safely in care.

The chaotic reality of the pandemic brought many issues regarding child care to the forefront. Child care keeps children safe while parents are working or going to school, but it is now one of the biggest expenses for any household. The cost of child care can sometimes surpass the cost of a college education. In Nebraska, infant care for one child takes up over 19% of a median families income at an average of \$11,420 and is more expensive than in-state college tuition by over \$3,200¹. In fact, Nebraska ranks 19th out of the 50 states for most expensive infant care.² For families with two children, 60.4% more than the average rent in Nebraska.³ We know how vital high-quality child care is for families and Nebraska has the opportunity to continue access for low-income families to work their way towards economic stability.

Child care is a costly investment Nebraska families need to make in order to provide for other essential expenses and build their way into security. The child care subsidy, as it currently stands with eligibility for families at 185% of the federal poverty level, has been helping families across the state be able to afford care they might not otherwise be able to. The loss of eligibility would be devastating to these families, who have come to rely on that access to child care. If this eligibility is allowed to sunset, families would find themselves having to make very difficult decisions: do they continue working or going to school? If so, what happens to their child? LB 304 would ensure that parents and caregivers would not be faced with these decisions, but could instead make choices based on what makes the most sense for their family's economic security, health and wellbeing.

I would like to thank Senator DeBoer for bringing this important issue forward, and I would like to thank the members of the Committee for your time, attention, and commitment to every child in Nebraska.

¹ Economic Policy Institute, *Child Care Costs in the United States*, 2023, available at <https://www.epi.org/child-care-costs-in-the-united-states/-/NE>

² Id.

³ Id.