



February 27, 2025

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

From: Katie Nungesser, policy coordinator for Voices for Children in Nebraska

Re: LB 379, Change the maximum time limit for receipt of cash assistance under the Welfare Reform Act

Our economic policies should ensure that families can make ends meet as they work toward a better future for their children. When we invest in public programs, we should ensure that they actually address root causes of poverty and allow families the ability to take steps into opportunity – without creating fiscal cliffs. Voices for Children is in strong opposition to LB 379, which would reduce the number of months parents in extreme poverty can participate in the Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) program, thus creating unnecessary hardship for families already struggling to make ends meet and ultimately harming Nebraska’s children.

At Voices, we connect with families who rely on ADC to survive. Nebraska’s income eligibility limits are already so low that only a fraction of children living in extreme poverty receive the support. In part because our income eligibility is so low, cutting the time that families can access ADC will not create self-sufficiency—it will push more families deeper into crisis. Parents living in extreme poverty cannot dig out in a handful of days, but need time to build the skills, education, and stability necessary to move off of assistance successfully. Reducing that timeline only increases the risk of failure, homelessness, and continued poverty for Nebraska’s children.

I know this firsthand because I was an ADC participant. I was fortunate to have additional support systems—extra “pegs in the wall” that helped me climb out of poverty. I was gifted an old car, offered free housing for myself and my infant so I could move closer to my college, and other factors that opened doors for me that other participants may not have the privilege of. **Even with these advantages, 24 months would not have been enough for me to transition successfully off ADC. Losing access to the program before I was ready would have derailed my progress entirely.**

Many people underestimate how much time is spent simply preparing for the first step in the program. The initial weeks on ADC were spent learning the complex program rules, securing additional benefits like SNAP, Medicaid, and housing to stabilize my family, and undergoing assessments to determine my strengths and goals. I chose to pursue college as my path to self-sufficiency, but that took time—I had to complete FAFSA, register for classes, and get settled

into a rigorous academic routine while raising an infant alone. The idea that parents on ADC can immediately “start running” on day one is unrealistic. A 24-month limit would not have even allowed me to complete a two-year degree, let alone transition into stable employment. This change would pull the rug out from people like me right before most could complete their training or degree.

The first conversation my caseworker had with me when I was approved for the program was that 60 months is a lifetime limit, and it goes fast. There were no re-dos and no exceptions, she said. I had to land on my feet for my child and a lot was on the line. I think it’s important to highlight that for myself and many others turning to this program, some as a last resort, may be in dire situations such as leaving violent partners, experiencing unplanned pregnancies, losing jobs or housing due to events that may have been out of their control, and a host of other traumas and obstacles that can leave a person exhausted, overwhelmed, and often feeling unsafe. Imagine trying to “hit the ground running” while reeling from some of this.

Sixty months feels a lot shorter when you are trying to heal, break generational cycles of poverty, and often carry the weight of the world while trying to build a bright future for your child. In this sense, twenty-four months to go from crisis to financial security feels impossible. In the life of the child, all parents know, that time goes in a blink; from being a tiny newborn curled in your arms, to being a bright and inquisitive five-year-old with a million questions and a Bluey backpack, marching off to kindergarten.

What’s more, the ADC program is incredibly stringent and guards strongly against anyone who might take advantage of it. A common misconception about ADC—and welfare in general—is that participants simply sit at home and collect a check. I am here to tell you that is absolutely false. Every aspect of my progress while on ADC was monitored. In college, I had to physically walk a piece of paper to my professors after every class to have them sign off on my attendance. There was no sitting at home doing nothing—every hour of work or school was accounted for, and being even one hour short could lead to consequences. Participants are working hard, every day, to build a better life for themselves and their children, and the program is closely monitoring those efforts.

Instead of reducing the time families can access ADC, Nebraska should be looking at ways to make the program more effective at actually lifting families out of poverty. The investment of our public dollars should be leveraged most effectively to build intergenerational cycles of resilience, and unfortunately, LB 379 would do the opposite—it would set parents and children up for failure. I would like to thank the Committee for your time and would respectfully urge you to reject this bill and instead focus on policies that provide real pathways to self-sufficiency.