



February 6, 2025

To: Chairperson Murman and members of the Education Committee

From: Juliet Summers, Executive Director of Voices for Children in Nebraska

Re: Opposition to LB 552, to prohibit public postsecondary educational institutions from having a diversity, equity, and inclusion office and taking certain actions relating to diversity, equity, and inclusion

Children across Nebraska deserve to feel seen for who they are. It is vital for teachers, counselors, healthcare professionals, and other professionals that interact with children to be trained in valuing their unique, beautiful diversity and promoting equity and inclusion to see them all thrive. Voices for Children in Nebraska opposes LB 552 because it would disallow public higher educational institutions from participating in activities and hiring individuals in roles relating to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Because our higher educational institutions are the training ground for our future teachers, case workers, probation officers, lawyers, and other system professionals, Nebraska children would lose out.

Despite changes to federal funding and practices from a new executive administration, in Nebraska we should strive, as we always have, to ensure our children, youth, and young adults are best set up for success. DEI practices are about creating environments where everyone feels welcome and respected, regardless of background, race, ability, gender, sexual orientations, ethnicity, or religion. These practices not only benefit individuals but also contribute to fostering conversations that enhance mutual understanding among students and adults alike. This allows students, upon graduating and entering their profession, to embrace different perspectives and understanding of diverse needs and inclusive practices.

Eliminating these positive practices opens the door to exclusion, extending far beyond a student's college years. Exposure to meaningful dialogues and spaces of understanding during their college experience equip students with critical thinking skills and a broader perception that in turn, enables them to appreciate and value individuals different from themselves.

One example: a recent report by UNMC, *The Status of the Healthcare Workforce in the State of Nebraska*, highlights a lack of diversity among our healthcare providers, with 87% of physicians being white, 1.6% Black/African American, and 2.6% were Hispanic/Latino.

Consider this data in light of health disparities between white, non-Hispanic children in Nebraska and their peers who are Black and brown. When college students are exposed to DEI programming, they can learn about cultural relevance and background preparing them to better serve the populations they work with, and that goes across all professions. We cannot address disparities in outcomes for kids if our professional workforce is not trained in the need for equity and inclusion among the diverse youth and populations they will serve.

DEI work is not only supportive to individuals but also holds potential for positive transformation across society. We would respectfully urge the Committee not to advance LB 552.