



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: Oppose LB 656, Change work requirements under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

Our state economic policies should support families in trying to build a better future and ensuring children's basic needs are met. Voices for Children opposes LB 656 as a costly, ineffective, and harmful approach to addressing SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) benefits and work requirements. Our concern is amplified by the fact that over **68% of households receiving SNAP in Nebraska include children**.¹ The proposed legislation does not address the root causes of unemployment but does create unnecessary barriers to food access for children.

Mandated Employment and Training Programs: Costly and Proven Ineffective

LB 656 would require mandatory participation in E&T programs, despite clear evidence that such programs are ineffective and burdensome. Nebraska is not equipped to implement such a mandate successfully. The cost of administering and enforcing this requirement would be substantial, diverting resources away from direct support for families who need it most.

Two-thirds of states that attempted similar mandates have since reversed course due to their inefficacy and cost. Of the nine states that do have higher work requirements for SNAP participants, none mandate participation for parents with children still at home.² LB 656, however, would require parents with children as young as six years old to participate. This provision places an undue burden on parents who are already managing the responsibilities of caregiving while struggling to make ends meet.

Elimination of Discretionary Waivers: Threatening Food Security

The second and more troubling aspect of LB 656 is its removal of discretionary waivers for work requirements. These waivers are rarely used by DHHS—only a few hundred per year in Nebraska—but for the households that receive them, they are a lifeline. The elimination of these waivers would mean that families facing dire circumstances, including those experiencing

¹ CBPP.(2022). *Most SNAP participants in Nebraska have incomes below the poverty line*.
https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/snap_factsheet_nebraska.pdf

² Cahill, R. (2025, February). ABAWD waivers and exemption bans. SNAP Policy.

extreme hardship or living in regions with significant employment barriers, would no longer have access to necessary exemptions.

Overall, the top twenty-one food insecure counties in Nebraska are rural. Thurston County is the highest with 18.8% of the population being food insecure, which is 72.5% higher than the national average.³ This provision is particularly concerning for children and youth living in Thurston County, home to the Winnebago and Omaha Reservations. Current law allows DHHS to use discretionary exemptions for residents in areas like these where a lack of sufficient jobs makes meeting work requirements impractical. Those that would be impacted by the loss of these exemptions and **loss of access to SNAP would primarily impact Native Americans living in rural areas and on the reservations.**

If LB 656 were to pass, DHHS would lose its ability to provide these critical waivers, leaving vulnerable populations—particularly Native youth and families—at an even greater risk of food insecurity. For these families, access to SNAP is not a convenience; it is a necessity for survival.

Conclusion

LB 656 is an unnecessary and harmful bill that disregards the realities faced by struggling Nebraskans. Mandating an ineffective and costly E&T program while stripping DHHS of its ability to grant waivers would do nothing to improve employment outcomes but would instead exacerbate food insecurity for children, families, and marginalized communities.

I urge the committee to reject LB 656 and instead focus on policies that genuinely support economic stability and food security for all Nebraskans. Thank you for your time and consideration.

³ “Key Statistics & Graphics, Food Security Status of U.S. Households in 2021.” U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, 2021, ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/key-statistics-graphics. Accessed February 2025.