



February 26, 2026

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

From: Katie Nungesser, Voices for Children in Nebraska

**Re: Support for LB 734, Change waiver of work requirements under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program**

True opportunity starts with stability. Former foster youth, veterans, and people experiencing homelessness have already faced systemic issues and trauma that create barriers to stable employment, housing, and health care. The changes HR1 made this summer to the Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWD) exemptions for these groups do not create opportunity, they deepen instability. Voices for Children is in support of LB 734 as we believe exempting these groups from harmful requirements affirms our commitment to meeting basic needs first, removing structural barriers, and ensuring that support systems promote stability, healing, and long-term self-sufficiency rather than punishment.

For former foster youth under age 24, these policies are especially harmful. Young people who age out of foster care face some of the highest barriers to stability of any population in our state. They often lack permanent family connections, financial foundations, and supportive adults who can help them navigate adulthood. Many struggle to access education, secure vital documents, obtain stable housing, and maintain reliable transportation. These barriers make finding and keeping employment far more difficult.

Unfortunately, young people age out of the foster care system in Nebraska each year, when they turn 19 years of age, without having achieved permanency through family reunification, guardianship, or adoption. In fiscal year 2025, 179 young people aged out of care in Nebraska. This rate of those aging out has nearly doubled in the last decade, rising from 5 percent in 2015 to 9.3 percent in 2025<sup>1</sup>.

Youth who age out face significantly higher instability than their peers. In fiscal year 2025, youth who aged out had four times as many placements as children who were reunified with their families. They were more likely to have a diagnosed mental health condition and less likely to be connected to family or kin supports. These are not conditions that make these extra requirements realistic or humane.

If SNAP is made unavailable to certain young people through these new requirements and intensive reporting systems, the result will not be employment. The result will be hunger, desperation, and deeper instability. Food insecurity undermines mental health, housing stability, workforce participation, and long-term outcomes. Taking away access to food is not a pathway to independence.

---

<sup>1</sup> Nebraska Foster Care Review Office. (2025, December). *December 2025 quarterly report* [PDF]. Nebraska Foster Care Review Office. <https://fcro.nebraska.gov/pdf/FCRO-Reports/FCRO%20December%202025%20Quarterly%20Report%20-%20Final.pdf>

This impact will be even more severe in rural Nebraska. The top ten counties with the highest rates of children who are wards of the state per 1,000 children are all rural counties. In these communities, food pantries are limited, public transportation is often unavailable, and services are spread across large geographic distances. Some of these areas are most likely food deserts. Losing SNAP benefits in these areas does not create opportunity; it deepens isolation.

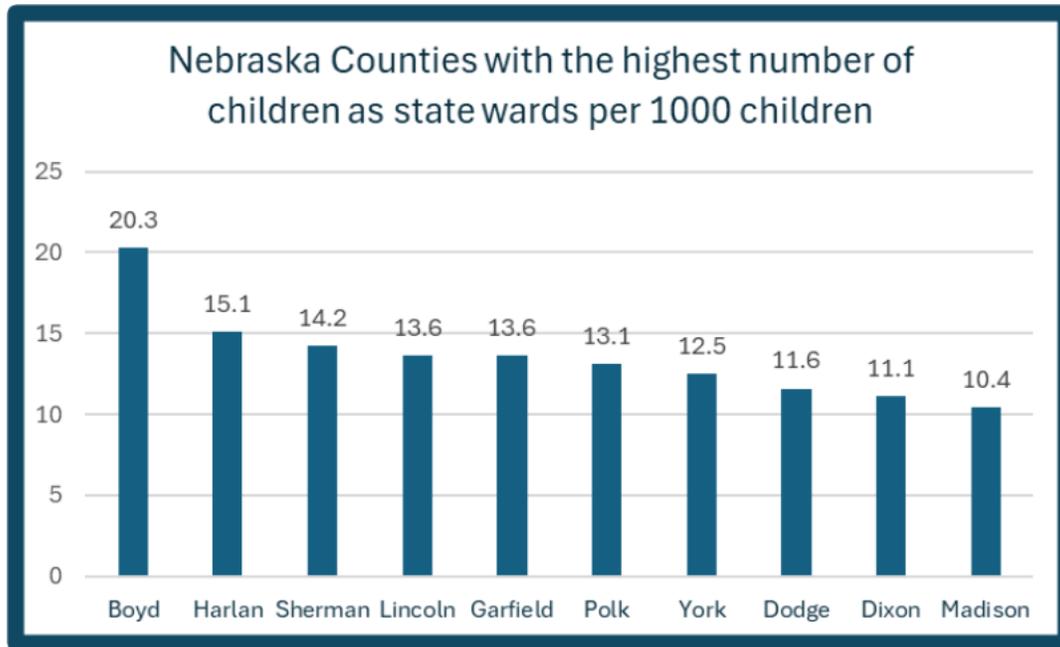


Figure 1 Source Nebraska Foster Care Review Office

Former foster youth are not asking for special treatment. They are asking for the basic stability needed to survive and build a future. Food is foundational to housing stability, education, employment, and health. When we remove access to food, we undermine every other support system we claim to value.

This bill gives Nebraska the ability to protect its most vulnerable young people, improve program efficiency, reduce administrative burden, and prevent unnecessary harm. It restores common sense and compassion to public policy.

Federal law already provides a clear mechanism to prevent this harm. Section 17(b) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 allows the USDA to waive statutory requirements to conduct pilot projects designed to increase the efficiency of SNAP and improve the delivery of benefits to eligible households. Reverting to the pre-H.R.1 work requirement exemptions will do exactly that. It will increase efficiency in Nebraska's SNAP program and improve benefit delivery by removing unnecessary administrative barriers that do not produce better outcomes.

Importantly, the USDA has broadly interpreted its SNAP waiver authority. States, including Nebraska, have been allowed flexibility to adapt federal statutory language to meet state needs, including waivers that go beyond narrow interpretations of congressional definitions. This bill simply seeks to use that existing flexibility to improve the effectiveness and fairness of Nebraska's SNAP system.

We urge you to support LB 734 and allow Nebraska to pursue this waiver so that foster youth are not pushed deeper into hardship by policies that do not reflect their realities.

Thank you Senator Hunt for your continued work to make SNAP accessible to vulnerable Nebraskans, and to this committee for your time and your commitment to Nebraska's children and families.