

26 February 2015

Senator Kathy Campbell, Chair
Members of the Health and Human Services Committee
Nebraska Unicameral Legislature

RE: LB81

Good afternoon, Madame Chair and Members of the Health and Human Services Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to express our support for LB81 this afternoon.

First Five Nebraska's work is driven by neuroscience and data. We focus exclusively on policies impacting children from 0 through age 8 who are at risk of failing in school, and the high-quality early childhood experiences that close the achievement gap for those children.

We support LB81 because the leading factor that places a child at risk of failing in school is living at or below 185% of the federal poverty level. In Nebraska, the number of children at-risk from birth through age 5 is just over 64,000. That is 42% of the state's population in that age range.

The eligibility limit for the child care subsidy is not high enough to cover all of these children at-risk, but just as troubling is the fact that families who do receive assistance find it difficult to move up in the workplace (i.e., receive pay increases and promotions) because they may lose their ability to afford quality child care (or any child care, for that matter). LB81 provides a smart solution.

During your deliberation of this bill, we also ask the Committee to consider expanding access to publically funded child care that is of the level of quality that closes the achievement gap. Not doing so is extremely expensive. We end up paying twice: the first time for a child care subsidy, and the second time in K-12 when these same children need increased resources because they are 1-2 years developmentally behind and struggling to keep up in school.

Purchasing quality early childhood opportunities with the child care subsidy will help these young Nebraskans start kindergarten on par with their more advantaged peers. In the long term, preparing them to be successful in school will do even greater good than simply offering a work support for their parents.

With this in mind, I urge you to support and advance LB81.



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