



January 23, 2018

Senator Mike Groene, Chair  
Members of the Education Committee  
Nebraska Unicameral Legislature

RE: LR270CA

Chairman Groene and Members of the Education Committee,

I represent First Five Nebraska, and our focus is on effective policies that close the achievement gap for young children facing risk factors that threaten their success in school. In Nebraska, there are approximately 60,744 children ages 0-5 that fall into this category. When children at risk enter kindergarten, behind their peers, they often struggle to catch up and research shows they typically fall further and further behind. High-quality experiences and interactions in the first five years of life can close and even eliminate that gap. While we recognize the enormous benefits of high-quality early childhood education, we also understand the current budget climate and the need to be fiscally responsible.

LR270CA would leave it to Nebraska voters to decide if public education should be available for children starting at age 3. Although this resolution is well intended, we see three main challenges: funding, workforce, and physical space. When it comes to funding, First Five Nebraska believes it would be better to target funds aimed at closing the achievement gap for young children who are likely to struggle when they get to kindergarten, rather than funding early childhood services for *all* children.

In addition, public schools have difficulty finding a qualified workforce now to meet current needs, let alone the increased demand this initiative would cause. Finally, most schools simply do not have the physical space to accommodate more children.

We appreciate Senator Kolowski's passion for our youngest learners and thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts. First Five Nebraska looks forward to continuing to work with the Legislature to create policies that are both effective and fiscally responsible for our youngest citizens.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Lopez Everett  
Policy Associate  
First Five Nebraska