



29 January 2019

Senator Justin Wayne, Chair  
Members of the Urban Affairs Committee  
Nebraska Legislature

RE: LB160

Chairman Wayne and Members of the Urban Affairs Committee,

Chairman Wayne, members of the Urban Affairs Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Elizabeth Everett, and I am a Policy Associate with First Five Nebraska, a statewide early childhood policy organization. I am here today to testify in support of LB160.

As you know, all communities require a strong and diverse infrastructure to thrive economically. This includes elements such as housing, roads, telecommunications, and job training. It also includes community assets that attract people and promote economic productivity. High-quality early learning and child care programs are among the most important of these economic assets. Therefore, it makes perfect sense to allow communities to utilize local economic development dollars to develop this sector of their local infrastructure.

Right now, Nebraska is ranked 1<sup>st</sup> in the U.S. for percentage of single mothers with children under the age of 6 working outside the home and ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> in the U.S. for percentage of married couple families with both spouses working outside the home. Due to demand, several communities in Nebraska have started to incorporate early childhood into their own strategies for economic growth. Gothenburg, Columbus, Wood River, Albion, and Pender have all developed public/private partnerships to build or enhance already existing early childhood infrastructure. These and other communities are finding innovative ways to address the needs of working parents and employers.

These communities have seen the benefits of investing in quality early care and learning programs. According to Melissa Kelly, Pender Community Hospital CEO, “the addition of Little Sprouts Child Development Center in Pender filled a fundamental void for an essential building block necessary for economic development in our community. For Pender Community Hospital, it is a recruiting tool as we work to engage top-end candidates for open positions. Prior to the opening of the new child development center, Pender existed in a child care desert, where families were struggling to find reliable, quality childcare on a regular basis including my own.”

LB160 provides an additional funding pathway for communities. It would allow them to use existing economic development funds to invest in quality early learning and child care programs if they believe it’s necessary to their community’s long-term prosperity. As our state continues to

grow, it will be imperative that communities have this sort of flexibility and opportunity to invest in these quality early learning programs.

Again, thank you for allowing me to testify today. I will answer any questions now.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Lopez Everett  
Policy Associate  
First Five Nebraska