



March 18, 2019

Senator John Stinner, Chair
Appropriations Committee
Nebraska Legislature

RE: Agency 13, Department of Education

Chairman Stinner and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Elizabeth Everett and I am a Policy Associate with First Five Nebraska. Our organization focuses on promoting effective, accountable and fiscally responsible policies that create high-quality early learning opportunities for Nebraska's youngest children. I write this letter today in support of the Department of Education's budget request.

In Nebraska, approximately 60,744 children age 0 to 5 are at risk of arriving at kindergarten unprepared to thrive in the K-12 system and succeed academically. High-quality early experiences can offset hazards known to threaten children's emotional, social and cognitive development during the critical early years of life.

The Nebraska Department of Education is deeply committed to ensuring that parents, child care professionals and pre-k programs have the necessary resources to provide safe, cognitively stimulating and emotionally supportive early learning environments. This includes results-driven efforts like the Sixpence Early Learning Fund, an innovative, public/private collaboration that helps communities develop local early learning solutions for infants and toddlers at risk. Limiting the resources available to the Department of Education for quality early learning has the potential to reduce the impact of programs like Sixpence that play a role in steering many of our youngest children toward lifelong achievement.

Last year, Governor Ricketts proposed across-the-board agency cuts of 2% for FY2018-2019 and 4% for FY2019-2020 to offset the budget deficit. This year, the Governor's budget proposal includes the 4% cut for FY2019-2020 and extends the cut for early childhood in FY2020-2021. Although we understand the need to be mindful of our current budget climate, we also recognize the importance of raising a well-educated, productive citizenry, beginning in children's earliest years. First Five Nebraska fully supports the Department of Education's budget request to have these funds reinstated so we can better advance the important work of raising the next generation of Nebraskans.

Thank you again for the opportunity to express our concerns. First Five Nebraska looks forward to continuing to work with the Legislature on policies that will position our state and its citizens for continued growth and prosperity.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elizabeth Everett". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Elizabeth Everett
Policy Associate
First Five Nebraska