



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Appropriations Committee’s Budget Proposal Includes Strategic Investments in Infants and Toddlers**

LINCOLN, NE—Enhanced investments in Nebraska’s infants and toddlers are included in the state budget bill for FY2021/22–FY2022/23, which was presented today to the Nebraska Legislature. The bill proposes an increase of \$2.5 million per year to the Nebraska Early Childhood Education Endowment Fund—more commonly known as the Sixpence Early Learning Fund—over the coming budgetary biennium. This would build upon \$5 million in existing annual appropriations to Sixpence from the state General Fund.

The Sixpence Early Learning Fund is Nebraska’s signature initiative supporting the healthy cognitive, social-emotional and physical development of children from the prenatal period through age 3, especially those most likely to encounter developmental obstacles early in life. Sixpence combines the investment earnings of its landmark public-private endowment with additional public funding to support locally designed collaborations that deliver high-quality early childhood services.

Currently, Sixpence funds 40 grantees throughout the state, serving approximately 1,800 children through parent coaching, center-based child care programs and school/community child care partnerships. Grants are awarded to local partnerships through a competitive application process, overseen by a governor-appointed board of trustees and supported by Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, which acts as the private endowment provider. Despite the growth of Sixpence since its inception in 2006, demand for prenatal-to-age-3 programs has increased in the wake of COVID-19.

“The pandemic has put enormous pressure on our state’s early childhood system,” said Senator John Stinner (District 48) of Gering. “In turn, that puts enormous pressure on the families who are responsible for raising the next generation of Nebraskans. Sixpence offsets some of those pressures by making quality child care and family engagement services more available to help parents guide the early development of their youngest kids.”

Stinner, who is chair of the Legislature’s Appropriations Committee, proposed the funding increase for Sixpence in LB342 earlier this session. He says Sixpence has been an asset to Scotts Bluff County and is hopeful that other parts of the state will be able to benefit from the prenatal-to-age-3 grants. “I’m

optimistic that my colleagues in the Legislature will see this as a common-sense investment in our communities and state,” he said.

Proponents of the proposal say it would increase the reach and capacity of Sixpence-funded programs and reinforce a funding structure that has earned Nebraska national attention as a model for quality and fiscal accountability in early childhood investments.

“Policymakers around the country are interested in Sixpence because it’s an example of how state agencies, nonprofits, service providers and the private sector can work together more effectively and efficiently,” said First Five Nebraska Deputy Director Elizabeth Everett. “Every year, we’re faced with the challenge of doing more with a finite pool of resources available to us. Sixpence offers a framework for delivering quality and accountability for the dollars we invest in early childhood.”

The budget bill will next be subject to debate by senators before it is submitted to Governor Pete Ricketts later this session.

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### **About First Five Nebraska**

First Five Nebraska believes high-quality early care and education is fundamental to generating educational, social and economic opportunity for all Nebraskans. We provide policy advisement, research, data analysis and strategic engagement to help public and private sector leaders to make informed decisions and coordinate resources to increase the reach of high-quality child care and early learning opportunities throughout the state. Learn more at [FirstFiveNebraska.org](https://www.FirstFiveNebraska.org)

### **About the Sixpence Early Learning Fund**

Sixpence is the public name of the Nebraska Early Childhood Education Endowment Fund. It provides grants and technical assistance to community partnerships to deliver high-quality early childhood programs for infants and toddlers at risk throughout Nebraska. Sixpence is administered by Nebraska Children and Families Foundation. Learn more [at SingaSongofSixpence.org](https://www.SingaSongofSixpence.org)

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