



February 19, 2021

Senator Anna Wishart, Vice Chair
Members of the Appropriations Committee
Nebraska Legislature

RE: LB342

Vice Chairwoman Wishart and Members of the Appropriations Committee, good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Elizabeth Everett, spelled E-L-I-Z-A-B-E-T-H E-V-E-R-E-T-T and I am the Deputy Director of First Five Nebraska, a public policy organization that promotes quality early learning experiences for Nebraska's youngest children. I am here today to testify in support of LB342.

Quality early care and learning opportunities are an important part of our state's infrastructure. We know that supportive, stimulating experiences at home or in child care settings lay the groundwork for the fundamental skills and qualities we need children to carry with them into their schools, communities and our future talent pool. We also know that early learning programs—particularly quality child care—make it possible for more Nebraska parents to participate fully in the workforce, strengthen their household incomes and better prepare their children for the challenges and opportunities ahead of them.

For more than a decade the Nebraska Early Childhood Education Endowment Fund, also known as Sixpence, has helped to sustain community partnerships that deliver high-quality early care and learning opportunities for our most vulnerable infants and toddlers. Sixpence provides funding and technical assistance through a competitive grant process, enabling locally controlled partnerships to offer parent coaching and child care services to families most in need. Sixpence provides these supports under the guidance of a governor-appointed Board of Trustees, as well as a team of experts in early education, program administration and grant management.

Sixpence is successful because it effectively unites public and private sector resources at the state and local level, and ensures quality and accountability for the dollars we invest to help communities address their specific early childhood needs. Every year, the Munroe-Meyer Institute at the University of Nebraska Medical Center evaluates the progress of children served by Sixpence-funded programs against recognized developmental expectations for the first three years. In the 2018-2019 evaluation year, nearly all children served by Sixpence programs met or exceeded cognitive, social-emotional and behavioral metrics.

Despite the ongoing success of Sixpence, the effects of COVID-19 have proven to be exceptionally damaging to Nebraska's families and early childhood professionals. Demand for Sixpence-funded services has grown far beyond the capacity of existing programs in communities throughout the state. LB342 would help us meet this challenge by appropriating an additional \$5 million over the next two fiscal years to the Department of Education, allowing

existing and possibly new Sixpence programs to deliver the services our families and communities will need to build back from the pandemic.

Nebraska is at a critical juncture. Now more than ever we need to find innovative solutions to address the most urgent challenges facing our youngest children, their families, child care providers and other members of the early childhood workforce. Since 2006, Nebraska's lawmakers have twice approved legislation that enabled Sixpence enhance its services throughout the state. LB342 is another opportunity for the Legislature to support a proven effort that has made Nebraska a national model for the effective use of public and private-private resources as a solid investment in the future of our children, families and state.

Again, I appreciate your time and attention today. I would also like to thank Chairman Stinner for his leadership on this important issue. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Everett
Deputy Director
First Five Nebraska