



February 22, 2022

Senator Lynne Walz, Chair
Members of the Education Committee
Nebraska Legislature

RE: LB838 as amended by AM1889

Chairwoman Walz and Members of the Education Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Adam Feser and I am a policy advisor at First Five Nebraska. First Five Nebraska is an early childhood policy organization dedicated to promoting quality care and learning experiences for Nebraska's youngest children. I want to thank Senator Kolterman for introducing LB838 and AM1889 and thank the Education Committee for their time and attention for this second hearing on the bill.

Before I speak to AM1889, I want to re-iterate the challenge of health insurance coverage for early childhood providers, and how much of a game-changer LB838 could be for workforce retention in this field.

- Nebraska's economic leaders know that early childhood programs are a key enabler of workforce participation and employer productivity in all areas of business and industry in Nebraska;
- High turnover in the early childhood professional workforce makes it harder for programs to stay open to support state and local economies;
- Turnover in the early childhood workforce is driven by factors such as low wages, demanding work environments and **a lack of health care benefits**;
- Only 39% of Nebraska's center-based early childhood teachers have health insurance;
- The median wage for early childhood professionals is \$25,030, which is too little for most early childhood workers to be able to afford to purchase private health insurance.

AM1889 outlines a program created within the Nebraska Department of Education to provide assistance for health insurance costs to the early childhood workforce. Workers must be full time and employed at an organization that provides quality early child care, which includes licensed child cares in Step up to Quality, pre-kindergartens, Head Start and Early Head Start. These funds would also be available to self-employed individuals who meet the quality requirements outlined above. As outlined in AM1889 the funds may only be used to support premiums, deductibles or other health insurance expenses.

AM1889 clarifies the intent of LB838 and outlines a program that could make Nebraska remarkably competitive in the early childhood space. I can only imagine the dinner table

conversations for early childhood workers after this program is implemented when they are deciding whether to work in Nebraska where they receive health insurance benefits, or Iowa, South Dakota, Kansas, Missouri or any of our neighboring states where they do not. LB838 could ensure Nebraska attracts and retains quality early childhood workers in an innovative way. I appreciate the committee's time and attention to this issue, both today and in January, and I'm happy to try to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'AF', is positioned below the closing 'Sincerely,'.

Adam Feser
Policy Associate
First Five Nebraska