



February 2, 2023

Senator Ben Hansen, Chair
Members of the Health and Human Services Committee
Nebraska Legislature

RE: LB115

Chairman Hansen and Members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Sara Howard and I am a policy advisor at First Five Nebraska. First Five Nebraska is a statewide public policy organization focused on promoting quality early care and learning opportunities for Nebraska's youngest children. My position at First Five Nebraska is focused on the area of maternal and infant health policy, because we know that healthy moms and babies are critical to ensuring the long-term success of children in our state. I am here to testify in support for LB115.

First, I want to thank Senator Raybould for her interest in home visiting in Nebraska, as well as Senator DeBoer who sponsored LR367 on this subject during the 2022 interim. Home visiting is a voluntary service that provides supports and interventions to families through visits in the home (or at any comfortable location for the families). In Nebraska, home visiting is a support that is offered to families at risk across the state, typically during pregnancy or within the first three years after birth of a child, who may be referred from physicians, social workers other partner agencies or through self-referral. There is no "one size fits all" model for home visiting, rather the challenge is about matching a family with the correct model of home visiting that provides them with the support they need, when they need it. There are 26 different evidence-based models of home visiting with variations in frequency of visit, curriculum, focus populations and type of home visitor, among other things, only a handful of which are being implemented in Nebraska.

Statutory History of Home Visiting in Nebraska

The first bill related to home visiting in Nebraska was LB55, introduced in 2007 by then Senator Gwen Howard, and was ultimately included in the appropriations package that year. The funding allocated \$600,000 for nurse home visiting services managed by the Division of Children and Family Services at Nebraska DHHS and benefitted three independent programs. The next home visiting legislation was LB234 in 2013, which also was an appropriations bill that increased the line item in the budget to \$1.1 million, moved the funding over to the Division of Public Health and modified the language in the budget from "nurse home visiting" to "evidence-based home visiting." The line item in the budget has subsequently remained in place since that time.

Federal Supports for Home Visiting in Nebraska

The main funding source for home visiting in Nebraska is the federal Maternal and Infant Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) grant. MIECHV is a program that was initially created in 2010, and was reauthorized in 2013, 2018 and most recently in December 2022. The MIECHV program is structured

slightly differently than other federal programs in that states receive a base funding amount. For the past several years Nebraska's base funding amount has been \$1.2 million. In the pending reauthorization bill, Nebraska's base allocation will increase to \$1.7 million with the opportunity for additional funding at a 25/75 match from the federal government. Senator Vargas currently has a funding bill pending in the Appropriations Committee, to increase the existing line item in the budget for home visiting to maximize this federal matching opportunity.

The state of Nebraska also utilizes funding from the TANF Rainy Day fund for home visiting and has finished a pilot program to allow program partners to receive funding from the Families First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA). Home visiting programs also receive funding from federal Head Start, local city and county funds and private donors.

How Does LB115 Advance Home Visiting in Nebraska?

LB115 creates a statutory structure and definition for evidence-based home visiting in the state of Nebraska. The bill clarifies that state funding shall only be utilized for evidence-based home visiting programs that achieve specific outcomes, including building healthy parent and child relationships, supporting cognitive development and reducing child maltreatment and injury. Further, programs will only be eligible for funding if they have a clear program model, program standards and are nationally certified.

Additionally, LB115 asks NDHHS to create a website for home visiting programs that meet these standards, which should help families and referring entities find programs available in their area. Finally, the bill calls for an annual report to the Legislature on the status of home visiting in Nebraska, which should help policymakers and the general public see the outcomes of their investment in these important programs.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today and again, I want to thank Senator Raybould for her willingness to support home visiting programs in Nebraska.

Sincerely,



Sara Howard
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First Five Nebraska