



March 24, 2023

Senator Robert Clements, Chair
Members of the Appropriations Committee
Nebraska Legislature

RE: LB114

Chairman Clements and Members of the Appropriations 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 LB114.

First, I want to thank Senator Vargas for his interest in home visiting in the state of 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 offered to families at risk across the state, typically during pregnancy or within the first three years after the 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. Home visiting has remarkable outcomes including improved cognitive and behavioral outcomes for children, parent participants are more likely to be employed or in school and families involved in home visiting programs see significantly fewer calls to the child abuse hotline.

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 the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services and benefitted three independent programs. The next home visiting legislation was LB234 in 2013, which was also an appropriations bill that increased the line item in the budget to \$1.1 million, moved the funding 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 remained in place since then, at that same amount.

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. The MIECHV program was created in 2010, and was reauthorized in

2013, 2018 and, most recently, in December 2022 with support from every member of the Nebraska delegation in the House of Representatives. Every state in the country accepts MIECHV funding and has home visiting programs. 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. The current amount of allocation for this program is \$1.1 million (see LB814, page 51, lines 25-29), and needs to remain in place as it becomes maintenance of effort under the recent MIECHV reauthorization. By increasing the appropriation by \$900,000 as proposed in LB-114, Nebraska will be able to maximize the new federal match option.

Home visiting programs are in demand in Nebraska, and have such strong outcomes that 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 bill for home visiting services under 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.

Conclusion

As you take on the difficult task of which programs to invest in for our state, I hope you'll consider these funds for home visiting as ones that have proven outcomes for families, that save the state money in our child welfare system and can bring more federal funding into our state for these important programs. Thank you for allowing me to testify today and again, I want to thank Senator Vargas for his willingness to support home visiting programs in Nebraska.

Sincerely,

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

Sara Howard
Policy Advisor
First Five Nebraska