



February 5, 2024

Senator Dave Murman, Chairman  
Members of the Education Committee  
Nebraska Legislature

RE: LB1083

Chairman Murman and Members of the Education Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment for the public record as a proponent of LB1083. My name is Mitchell Clark and I am a policy advisor for First Five Nebraska, a statewide public policy organization invested in the care, education and healthy development of Nebraska's youngest children. We appreciate Senator Conrad's efforts in promoting the professional development of Nebraska's early childhood workforce.

A highly skilled early childhood workforce is essential in helping families cultivate the next generation of healthy, capable Nebraskans. Creating effective education and training pathways for early childhood professionals also produces downstream benefits to the wider workforce and economy. LB1083 aligns with these positive outcomes by including early care and education programs of study at community colleges under the Nebraska Career Scholarship Program.

Pathways toward obtaining a credential or degree is one of two focal elements of the Nebraska Career Scholarship Program; the other is hands-on experience gained through internships, apprenticeships or employment. These two elements are already present in the most widely recognized credential in the early childhood profession and especially within the community college system—the Child Development Associate (CDA) credential.

The CDA typically takes six months to one year to complete. It requires 120 clock hours of formal early childhood education training and 480 hours of working with children within the past three years. These requirements make the CDA the perfect fit for the Nebraska Career Scholarship Program.

In addition to those programs that culminate in the CDA, many now include the CDA as a waypoint in obtaining an associate degree. This leads to higher degree completion and retention in the field. According to a recent survey of credential holders by the Council for Professional Recognition, 78% of CDA holders in Nebraska continued working in the early childhood education field.

Another benefit of the Nebraska Career Scholarship Program is that it enables a full-time transition to a new career with minimized debt. This is especially important for recruiting early childhood professionals, most of whom are likely to earn considerably less than they would in other careers. The most recently available data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics for 2022 shows child care workers earn a median hourly wage of \$13.34 in Nebraska, compared with \$21.20 for all occupations.

LB1083 would be a helpful recruitment and retention tool to support Nebraska's early childhood workforce. Ultimately, development of the early childhood workforce through financial aid under the Nebraska Career Scholarship Program would help give families the high-quality options they need and deserve for the care of their young children. Thank you for the opportunity to provide public comment. I encourage the Committee to advance LB1083 to the floor.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mitchell Clark".

Mitchell Clark  
Policy Advisor  
First Five Nebraska