



February 7, 2024

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

RE: LB1178

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

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Sara Howard, spelled S-A-R-A H-O-W-A-R-D, 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 of LB1178.

First, I want to thank Senator Wishart for her support of innovative solutions to child care challenges in Nebraska. Research shows that intergenerational care facilities can provide quality services in a cost-effective manner. Also, these programs can produce developmental and quality of life benefits for children and older adults. Children who interact regularly with adults show fewer behavioral challenges and stronger social development, while older adults experience improved physical and mental health, a higher sense of self-worth and attitude, and enhanced socialization.

Combining these programs into a single facility can also decrease total operational costs for both and create savings in other expenses such as administration and utilities. Nebraska families depend on accessible, affordable, high-quality child care that provides consistent, caring, stimulating and safe environments for their children. Nebraska has lost 12% of licensed child care programs since 2019, even as our need for these services increases. About 3 out of 4 Nebraska children under 6 have both parents in the workforce. Often parents are forced to leave a job or not accept a job because they don't have access to reliable child care.

It should be noted that Senator Wishart initially introduced this bill in 2020 as LB1051 and presented it to the Health and Human Services Committee in February of that year. The bill now before you is a new and improved version of LB1051, including some changes in the amount of the grants and clarifying the language that addresses citations for facilities. However, LB1178 retains those elements of the original bill that prioritize programs in rural areas and require a plan for participating in Step Up to Quality.

As communities grow, it is important to recognize child care as a critical piece of infrastructure that helps support Nebraska families and working parents. First Five Nebraska is grateful to Senator Wishart for her leadership and dedication to ensuring that Nebraska's youngest children have access to quality early childhood programs. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, I am happy to try to answer any questions you might have.

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