



LB1054: Emergency notification systems for child care programs

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Working parents trust child care providers to keep their children safe. Yet, providers often do not have access to real-time, life-saving emergency notifications and standardized procedures to follow.

LB1054 creates the Child Care Safety and Security Fund to facilitate community-based partnerships with local school districts and law enforcement to keep Nebraska children safe and prepared for emergencies.

□ Key Points

- ▶ Child care programs often do not have the infrastructure in place to receive immediate emergency notifications or response guidance.
- ▶ LB1054 enables child care providers and community partners to establish emergency response systems and preparation protocols.
- ▶ LB1054 helps keep children safe and secure in the event of emergencies such as severe weather, fire or other threats.

■ Background

Early childhood care and education providers are entrusted with keeping Nebraska's youngest children safe and secure so parents can stay engaged and productive in the workforce. Serious emergency events highlight the need for immediate notification to child care facilities, especially when young children may be in proximity to danger.

After several emergency incidents in Lincoln in which child care providers did not receive notifications, Lincoln Littles, an early childhood nonprofit, began efforts to build a system of emergency notifications and preparedness. Lincoln Littles partnered with Lincoln Public Schools (LPS) and the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department (LLCHD) to develop a first-of-its-kind model to provide emergency notification and standardized response training for child care programs.

Lincoln Littles operates the emergency notification system to notify providers of emergency events and the appropriate procedures to follow. LPS shares local law enforcement notifications (the Lincoln Police Department notifies Lincoln Littles or providers directly) with Lincoln Littles. The groups also coordinate age-appropriate training for providers, parents and children to prepare for and respond to emergency events.

Investment is needed to ensure that child care programs have access to immediate notification and standardized response procedures in the event of local emergencies, including severe weather, fire, accidents, intruders and other threats to children's safety.

LB1054: Emergency notification systems for child care programs

■ Key components of LB1054

Introduced by State Senator Lynne Walz (District 15), LB1054 facilitates establishment of community-based partnerships to coordinate age-appropriate safety and reunification training, distribution of materials related to training and facility signage and operation of an electronic emergency response notification system. This is intended to mirror the emergency response notifications that school systems often receive from law enforcement. The program would be entirely voluntary and at no cost to participating child care programs.

To ensure these partnerships coordinate their efforts effectively, three designations would be required through a memorandum of understanding:

1. A designee to operate an emergency response notification system to notify providers of local area emergencies,
2. A designee to coordinate age-appropriate safety and reunification training, and
3. A designee to provide safety and reunification materials.

■ The Child Care Safety and Security Fund

LB1054 would appropriate \$300,000 from the Cash Reserve Fund in FY2024-25 to create the Child Care Safety and Security Fund.

The Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) would administer the fund by awarding grants to educational service units on a competitive basis on behalf of designees for emergency response notification systems, training and materials related to safety and reunification procedures.

At the end of each year, NDE would provide a report to the Nebraska Legislature on how the fund was used and number of children served.

This bill is different from current state and federal regulations in that it provides the crucial missing link in emergency preparedness for early care and education settings—an emergency response notification system. This would align child care programs with systems already in place for elementary, secondary and school-based early care and education programs.

Currently, schools are notified by law enforcement when safety incidents occur in their area. LB1054 would allow for partnerships to work together when a local area incident occurs, so that the administrator of the emergency response notification system designee may notify participating programs.

■ Conclusion

LB1054 is a first-of-its-kind solution to address the need for a standardized approach to emergency preparedness and response for early care and education providers. While participation is voluntary, it provides communities the opportunity to establish their own procedures. The Lincoln Littles initiative offers an example that can be replicated.

Federal and state regulations already require written emergency preparedness and response plans for licensed programs and license-exempt programs accepting child care subsidy. Other federal programs such as Head Start and Early Head Start also require emergency preparedness plans. However, the key components missing from those plans are the emergency response notification system and coordination with local law enforcement. By aligning child care programs with emergency notification systems, LB1054 takes another step toward ensuring the safety and security of Nebraska's youngest children.

