



February 7, 2025

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

RE: LB104

Chairman Hardin 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 LB104.

First, I want to thank Senator Raybould for her interest in, and commitment to, home visiting in the state of Nebraska. 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 utilized nationally, only a handful of which are being implemented in Nebraska. Each model varies in curriculum, visit frequency, focus populations and type of home visitor, among other factors, in an effort to provide families with a level of service that meets their needs.

Statutory History of Home Visiting in Nebraska

The Legislature has done important work on home visiting, but that work has occurred through the budget only. 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 benefited 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 over to the Division of Public Health and modified the language in the budget from "nurse home visiting" to "evidence-based home visiting."

During the last legislative session, two home visiting bills were introduced to support and expand access to home visiting services in Nebraska. LB1124 (Vargas) increased the annual appropriation in the budget for evidence-based home visiting from \$1.1 million to \$2 million to ensure that Nebraska was able to fully maximize a new federal matching opportunity for home visiting. The second bill, LB1125, (Wishart) created a new line item in the budget specifically for evidence-based nurse home visiting for new mothers at \$500,000 annually. Both bills were included in the budget bill (LB1412) with the unanimous support of the Appropriations Committee.

Federal Supports for Home Visiting in Nebraska

In addition to state resources, 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 created in 2010 and 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 reauthorization bill, Nebraska's base allocation increased to \$1.7 million with the opportunity for additional funding at a 25/75 match from the federal government. Nebraska will be able to fully realize the entirety of the available federal matching opportunity with the passage of last year's LB1124, as discussed above.

The State of Nebraska also utilizes funding from the TANF Rainy Day fund for home visiting and allows 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 LB104 Advance Home Visiting in Nebraska?

LB104 creates a statutory structure and definition for evidence-based home visiting in 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.

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. There is a sunset proposed on the report of three years to align with the federal MIECHV program authorization timeline. 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
Policy Advisor
First Five Nebraska