



January 23, 2025

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

RE: LB22

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 of LB22.

First, I want to thank Senator Dungan for his interest in nurse home visiting in the state of Nebraska. Nurse 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, the model for nurse home visiting is called Family Connects and is a support that is offered to mothers at their discharge from the hospital with their new baby. Some of the key areas covered by a registered nurse at the three to four visits include:

- Head-to-toe health assessment for baby
- Postpartum health assessment for mom
- Breastfeeding support
- Education and Guidance about topics relevant to all newborns and maternal needs
- Assistance with connecting to a medical home and/or scheduling routine care visits
- Connections to services and resources around our community as needed

The Family Connects model has been in effect in Lincoln since late 2023 and has already garnered support among families and physicians.

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 past 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.

How LB22 Supports and Expands Evidence-Based Nurse Home Visiting in Nebraska

As written, LB22 would require Nebraska DHHS to submit a state plan amendment to Medicaid to allow providers to bill a targeted case management code for evidence-based nurse home visiting services. Last year, with passage of Senator Dungan's LB857 to create the Prenatal Plus program, Nebraska opened up the use of targeted case management or TCM for pregnant women. This bill would allow postpartum mothers to access targeted case management services for a specific service, namely, evidence-based nurse home visiting. Because this service is for the postpartum population, the federal matching rate from Medicaid would be 90%.

Nebraska has invested in nurse home visiting programs through city, county and state funds, however, the use of these funds has been limited to Lincoln and Omaha. The best, most expeditious and fiscally responsible way to ensure that every baby across the state has access to the opportunity for a nurse to visit them at home would be to allow for the service to be billed to Medicaid.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today and again, I want to thank Senator Dungan for his willingness to support new mothers and babies 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