



January 23, 2025

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

RE: LB41

Chairman Hardin 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 LB41.

First, I want to thank Senator Riepe for his interest in ensuring that every mother and baby in the State of Nebraska receives the screenings they need to prevent adverse outcomes. Nebraska, like most states, is seeing a rise in the rates of congenital syphilis, or babies being born already infected with syphilis. According to a 2023 health alert from the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, between 2017 and 2023, Nebraska had a 373% overall increase in syphilis infections and an 1,100% increase in congenital syphilis.

Congenital syphilis can cause stillbirth, miscarriage, prematurity, low birth weight or death of the baby shortly after birth. Babies who survive may have developmental delays, brain and nerve problems, deformed bones and other issues that can become costly for the family and the Nebraska health care system overall.

Treatment for congenital syphilis is penicillin, which can be administered as a shot or through an intravenous (IV) line. Expedient treatment of syphilis for pregnant women can mitigate the negative impacts of the disease for baby.

Current statute, (Neb. Rev. St. 71-502) calls for a syphilis screening at the first prenatal visit, but the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) released a best practice advisory in April 2024 that recommends two additional screenings, one in the third trimester and one at delivery. LB41 updates Nebraska's existing statute to reflect this best practice and First Five Nebraska wholeheartedly supports this change.

Several states have implemented this change to require three screenings, including Alabama, Arizona, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina and Texas.

Prenatal screenings offered to mothers at the right stage of their pregnancy can impact future outcomes for their babies, and LB41 is a necessary change to Nebraska law to bring the state into alignment with best

practices. Thank you for allowing me to testify today and again, I want to thank Senator Riepe for his strong support of 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