



January 29, 2025

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

RE: LB162

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Mitchell Clark, and I am a Policy Advisor for First Five Nebraska, a statewide public policy organization committed to the early care, education and healthy development of Nebraska's youngest children. I am here today to testify in support of LB162 and would like to thank Senator Juarez for her leadership in advocating for the safety and security of children in early childhood programs.

This bill addresses the need for early childhood programs throughout the state to partner with K-12 and other community institutions in opting into emergency preparedness efforts already in place for schools. LB162 mirrors three components from schools: 1) an emergency response notification system, 2) standardized, age-appropriate training on emergency procedures or protocols, and 3) materials for training and signage to be displayed in early childhood programs.

The bill provides the opportunity for communities to operate an emergency response notification system and implement emergency protocols for the safety of young children and reunification with their families. Participation is entirely voluntary for community partners and individual early childhood providers.

Currently, federal and state regulations require a written emergency preparedness and response plan for licensed 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, those plans are siloed, leaving early childhood programs vulnerable during emergencies.

An emergency response notification system is the link between emergency preparedness plans, training of staff, age-appropriate procedures for children and notification from local law enforcement. A key benefit of the emergency response notification system is that it allows for the geolocation of emergency incidents—whether it is a weather event, fires, accidents or violent incidents and intruders—and can notify providers within a specific area.

As you have already heard, Lincoln-area efforts to standardize emergency preparedness for child care providers have proven effective, giving us a model to follow with LB162. This work requires effective coordination among key partners like Lincoln Public Schools and the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department. While LB162 does not require other communities throughout the state to exactly replicate the system being used in Lincoln, it allows them to establish similar partnerships which operate the various components of emergency preparedness efforts.

The safety and security of children under the care of early childhood programs warrant the need for emergency preparedness and response like those that already exist in K-12 schools. LB162 provides the crucial link to that infrastructure by enabling communities to establish the necessary partnerships and coordination of safety and reunification procedures.

Thank you, Chairman Hardin and members of the Committee, for the opportunity to speak with you today. I urge the Committee to advance LB162 to General File.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mitchell Clark".

Mitchell Clark
Policy Advisor
First Five Nebraska