

Dear Chairperson Hardin and Members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

As a member of the Nebraska Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers and an Assistant Professor at UNO's Grace Abbott School of Social Work, I am writing to express my strong support for LB71. While I am writing as a member of the Nebraska Chapter of NASW and do not speak for the university, I do so with deep passion and as a dedicated advocate for Nebraska's families and children.

LB71 represents a vital step forward in addressing the challenges facing our childcare system. By lowering the tiered reimbursement threshold for childcare subsidy participation, this bill will expand opportunities for low-income families and address the critical shortage of childcare providers willing to accept subsidy payments. Many providers are unable or unwilling to participate due to the current inadequate reimbursement rates. By lowering the threshold to Step 2, LB71 offers higher reimbursement rates earlier in the process, encouraging more providers to join the program. This means more high-quality childcare options for parents who have been forced to make difficult decisions about affordability, accessibility, and quality.

Beyond expanding options for families, LB71 also invests in raising the standard of care across Nebraska. Providers who achieve Step 2 in the Step Up to Quality program demonstrate their commitment to meeting rigorous quality benchmarks, such as professional development for staff and implementing evidence-based programming. By incentivizing providers at this earlier stage, LB71 rewards their dedication and motivates others to enhance their services. In doing so, this legislation builds a stronger, more equitable network of childcare providers committed to supporting Nebraska's youngest residents.

The positive impact of LB71 extends far beyond the childcare sector. By ensuring that parents can access affordable, quality care, this bill supports Nebraska's broader goals for economic stability and growth. Quality childcare empowers parents to participate fully in the workforce, providing businesses with a reliable labor force and strengthening the state's economy. Furthermore, investing in high-quality early care and education lays the foundation for future generations, equipping our children with the tools they need to contribute to Nebraska's prosperity and competitiveness.

As a social worker, educator, and mother of a one-year-old, I have witnessed firsthand the transformative power of high-quality childcare for families, communities, and the workforce. LB71 is not just a policy adjustment—it is a critical investment in the well-being of our state. It strengthens families, supports providers, and builds a brighter future for Nebraska.

I urge you to support LB71 and help ensure that Nebraska families, childcare providers, and businesses all benefit from this essential legislation. Thank you for your time, consideration, and commitment to the health and prosperity of our communities.

Sincerely,
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