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February 10, 2021

Senator Steve Lathrop,
Chair and Members of the Judiciary Committee
State Capitol,
Lincoln NE

LB 335 (Flood) Require announcement of the average cost of incarceration at sentencing for sentences served at the Department of Correctional Services

Support

Dear Senator Lathrop and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

Since 1920, the League of Women Voters has been an activist, grassroots organization that believes that people should play a critical role in democracy. We support Senator Flood's LB 335.

LB335 encourages broader transparency of the economic consequences of sentencing practices and incarceration in Nebraska. The bill provides that when sentencing defendants, the court will announce in open court and the court shall place on the record the total estimated cost for the term of imprisonment. In addition, the act provides for the production and distribution of an annual report of estimated costs to be provided to all county and district courts enabling the courts and communities to see the economic consequences of sentencing practices.

This transparency is especially important because minor offenses result in major consequences for the offender and the community. According to the Prison Policy Initiative, most of the highest costs are incurred by low-level offenders. This "massive misdemeanor system" in the U.S is an important overlooked contributor to overcriminalization and mass incarceration. Tracking these costs is a step in identifying the consequences of our sentencing practices.

The League of Women Voters of Nebraska supports transparency in our correctional system and realistic and humane treatment of the accused and sentenced offender as well as the protection of the community. LB335, takes a step towards identifying the consequences of our sentencing practices and will help shine a light on the real costs of those practices.

We urge the Legislature to support LB 335 and advance the bill to the floor for full debate.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Gonzales
Social Policy Committee, LWVNE

Carol Dennison, Director Social Policy, LWVNE

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dianne Bystrom".

Dianne Bystrom
Co-President

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Linda Duckworth".

Linda Duckworth
Co-President