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February 18, 2021

Senator John Stinner, Chair  
and Members of the Name Committee  
State Capitol, Lincoln NE

RE: LB 383 (Hilgers)-Appropriation of Funds for Capital Construction, Agency 46

### **Oppose**

*Please include this position statement from the League of Women Voters of Nebraska as part of the public hearing record for LB 383, Agency 46*

Dear Senator Stinner and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

The League of Women Voters **strongly opposes** LB 383 which would fund the construction of a 1,512-bed facility costing \$230 million to build and \$34 million annually to operate. In addition, there are plans that the facility would expand to over 3,000 prisoners in the future. In 1980, the prison population in Nebraska was 1,402 individuals. Now, despite falling crime rates, our prison population exceeds 5500.

Nebraska needs to stop prison building and focus on decreasing prison population. The League of Women Voters of Nebraska supports a correctional system which provides for realistic and humane treatment of the sentenced offender as well as for the protection of the community. To achieve such a system, the League advocates community-based alternatives to incarceration and the protection of the basic human rights of sentenced offenders.

We encourage the Legislature's leadership in providing solutions that decrease the number of incarcerated individuals. In this session, a range of bills address ways to accomplish this:

- Release and transition with support for the nearly 1000 prisoners held who are now eligible for parole.
- Enact bills from this legislative session that would reduce prison population:
  - LB 624-Earned time incentives
  - LB 130-Include a mental health professional on parole board
  - LB 269-Provide a list of prisoners ages 60 and over
  - LB 56-Identify a prisoner as eligible for parole when the offender has served the total of one-half the minimum term or two years prior to the offender's mandatory discharge date (whichever is earlier).
- Provide more transparency to the Legislature through annual reports:
  - LB499 for Probation and Parole, and LB 151 for County Prosecutors.

In addition, there are effective best practices to reduce the overcrowding problem in the Nebraska correctional system through **Smart Justice Programs** like Diversion, Mental Health & Drug courts. Thirty-five states have implemented sentencing and corrections policies through the Justice Reinvestment Initiative.

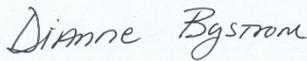
With property and income tax reforms in effect and more proposed, where will the new funding come from? Will we saddle future generations with a debt Nebraska cannot afford? What justifies the case to build more prisons over funding education, workforce development, as well as mental health and drug rehabilitation programs? With the staffing shortages and reported staff injuries that our department of corrections is already experiencing, it is impractical to think that the state can find sufficient and well-trained employees to staff a new prison facility.

We thank Mr. Frakes, Director of the Department of Correctional Services, for his efforts to improve the Nebraska correctional system. We acknowledge the difficult job he and his staff face, but it is crucial to think outside of the box. Prison construction is not the answer.

Please do not advance LB 383 to the floor.

Sincerely,

Joanna Lindberg, Social Policy Committee  
Carol Dennison, Social Policy Director  
League of Women Voters of Nebraska



Dianne Bystrom  
Co-President



Linda Duckworth  
Co-President