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February 21, 2022

Senator John P. Stinner, Chair
and Members of the Appropriations Committee
State Capitol, Lincoln NE

RE: LB1066 (Stinner) Appropriate federal funds to the Department of Health and Human Services and the University of Nebraska for behavioral health care services.

SUPPORT

Dear Senator Stinner and Committee Members:

The League of Women Voters of Nebraska supports an adequately funded mental and behavioral health care system that provides comprehensive and coordinated services for children and adults with mental and behavioral health disorders. We support state and local policies and programs that provide the opportunity for persons with mental and behavioral health disorders to achieve optimal management of their illness. We enthusiastically support LB1066.

Access to mental health services, especially in rural areas, is a chronic problem and LB1066 would increase the number of providers in rural areas. Additionally, putting mental health services within primary care is advocated by the National Alliance on Mental Illness as a method to increase access to care and diminish the effect stigma has on persons seeking help (see link below). Social stigma still has a significant negative impact on those seeking services, especially in rural areas, and people will feel more comfortable receiving treatment under the auspices of primary care.

LWVNE member and cosigner of this letter, Patsy Burnett, comments on her personal experiences: "I have been without adequate care since September because the therapist I was seeing lost her position. I, as a retired psychiatric/mental health nurse practitioner and mental health advocate, do not have the ability to pursue assistance for my mental health needs due to the simple scarcity of such services. Many of us are feeling desperate. A young person completed suicide here just two months ago and it devastated our small community."

If one does find services, there is often a long wait and little follow up. LB1066 would address and fund a great many of the issues that create barriers, including the timely access for effective treatment.

According to many major assessments, the mental health of Nebraskans is worsening due to the stress of COVID-19. However, we are hopeful that the growing awareness of the mental health epidemic can effect a substantial change so those with mental health challenges can receive the support they need before costly hospitalization is required. Passage of LB1066 is an important step in this process and the League of Women Voters of Nebraska urges you to advance this bill.

Respectfully,

Patsy Burnett, Mental and Behavioral Health Action Team, LWVNE
Aimée Folker and Palistene Gray-Moore, Co-Directors for Mental and Behavioral Health, LWVNE

<https://www.nami.org/Blogs/NAMI-Blog/March-2015/The-Benefits-of-Integrating-Behavioral-Health-into>