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Senator Dave Murman, Chair, and Members of the Education Committee
State Capital, Lincoln, NE

RE: LB585 (Hughes) – Change a duty of the state school security director and require behavioral and mental health training for certain school personnel

SUPPORT – *Please include this position statement as part of the public hearing record for LB585.*

Dear Senator Murman and Members of the Education Committee:

The League of Women Voters of Nebraska supports funding a mental and behavioral health care system that provides comprehensive and coordinated services for children and adults with mental and behavioral health disorders. The League also supports 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 specifically support early and appropriate diagnosis and treatment for children and adolescents that is family-focused and community-based. In 2018, according to the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, the suicide rate for children was 7.9 per 100,000. The suicide rate was higher for Native American youth (19.0 per 100,000) and Asian youth (13.1 per 100,000). Nationally, rates of reported suicide ideation and thoughts of self-harm have greatly increased – up 45% in 2021 compared to 2019.

Rates of other mental illnesses have similarly increased in children following the first few years of the COVID-19 pandemic. In Nebraska, Children's Hospital and Medical Center reported month-to-month increases in positive screenings for depression in ranges of 5% to 15%. Boys Town National Research Hospital saw an increase of more than 50% of children reporting anxiety between 2020 and 2022.

It is evident that even before the pandemic, children in Nebraska would benefit from more attention to mental health issues. Following the disruption of the pandemic, children are still struggling to adjust to in-person schooling and are having behavioral problems that may relate to mental health issues.

LB58 would aid children and families in Nebraska that are struggling with mental illness. Training each employee who interacts with students will increase the chance of identifying youth who are struggling and need outside support. Adding a provision for training on trauma-informed care will broaden the understanding of student sources of mental and behavioral problems. Procedures to provide information on services and supports for behavioral and mental health issues to families will make the safety program more effective.

For all these reasons, the League of Women Voters of Nebraska supports LB585 and urges the Education Committee to advance it to the floor for debate. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Angela Gleason, Mental and Behavioral Health Action Team, LWWNE
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MaryLee Moulton, President, LWWNE