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January 25, 2022

RE: LB814 – Require the Office of Legislative Research to Prepare Racial Impact Statements for
Legislative Bills

SUPPORT

Dear Senator Hughes and Members of the Executive Board:

For the record, the League of Women Voters of Nebraska stands in support of LB814, which would require racial impact statements for legislative bills. It is undeniable that at every stage of the process – from introduction, to hearing, to passage and implementation – that these legislative bills impact racial demographics all across Nebraska. Even more than that, restrictions to participation in the civic process in the form of voter restrictions, ever-changing rules regarding public comment, and other legislative barriers make the voices of these communities heard even less so.

Government and policy should be responsive and representative of its diverse communities and their unique interactions with public policy. Moreover, the public officials in our Unicameral have a duty to include comprehensive information on how the bills they introduce impact their constituents.

- According to the most recent Census Bureau data, Nebraska is made up of the following diverse demographics: Hispanic 11.4 %, African American 5.2% , Asian 2.7% and Native American/Indigenous 1.5%, respectively. However, the proportion of these demographics that are adversely affected by legislation in the realm of criminal justice is staggering.
- Nebraska's Black incarceration rate is the 10th-highest in the country, outpacing the national average.
- One of every 81 Black residents nationwide is in prison, according to the Sentencing Project's 2021 report.
- According to a report by the Criminal Justice Institute released in 2021, of the 5,322 inmates in Nebraska, 57% are White, 22% are Black, 13% are Hispanic, 6% are Native American and 1% are Asian. When we compare this information to overall population numbers, it is clear that there is room for more robust explanations of legislation introduced in this Unicameral.

Providing racial impact statements on legislative bills allows us to address the root causes of criminal justice and other related topics. Research from the American Psychological Association indicates community level risk factors for violence include increased levels of unemployment, poverty and transiency; decreased levels of economic opportunity and community participation; poor housing conditions; gang activity, emotional distress and a lack of access to services (Chen, Voisin, & Jacobson, 2016; McMahon et al., 2013; Voisin & Neilands, 2010).

Legislation should not occur in a silo, but rather should address the intersectionality of its impact. It is time to simply address the symptoms of our communities ills through poorly researched legislation that is void of the impact on ALL Nebraskans. The LWVNE urges you to support LB814 to ensure the essence of public service is not compromised and that we are truly working for the people of Nebraska.

Sincerely,

Toni R. Monette, Co-President
League of Women Voters of Nebraska