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January 18, 2022

Senator John Arch, Chairperson,
and Members of the Health and Human Services Committee
State Capitol, Lincoln NE

RE: LB905 (Walz) Provide for perinatal mental health screenings

Support

Dear Senator Arch and Members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

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.

The perinatal mental health of a pregnant woman and a new mother is important to the health of the infant. A parent's mental disorder is one of the adverse childhood experiences that influences the long-term health of a child. Appropriate diagnosis and care for that mother can provide the positive childhood experiences that have been demonstrated to provide protective buffers against the effects of a multitude of negative experiences and stress. If our governing body intends to create a state that allows children to thrive, then it has no choice but to value the mental health of all mothers.

According to a 2014 study: "There is now strong evidence that major depressive disorder may occur not only after birth but even during the prepartum. Most often, mental illness during this period is underestimated, not assessed, therefore not diagnosed, and consequently goes untreated. Reviewing the literature on the negative impact of both maternal and infant health in case of perinatal depression, we underline that recognizing and treating prenatal depression will lead to preventive and curative treatments for mothers, enhance infant health, and therefore positively influence mother-infant relationships" (Howard, L. M, Piot, P., & Stein, A. 2014. No health without perinatal mental health. *The Lancet*, 384, 1723–1724.)

Also, recent emerging evidence notes that depression in fathers is more common than previously thought and is also associated with negative effects on children.

For these reasons, the League of Women Voters of Nebraska supports LB 905 and urges you to advance to General File. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Aimée Folker & Palistene Gray-Moore
Co-Directors of Mental and Behavioral Health, LWNVE