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February 13, 2024

Senator Steve Halloran, Chair, and Members of the Agriculture Committee
State Capitol, Lincoln, NE

RE: LB1368 (Ibach) – Adopt the Nitrogen Reduction Incentive Act

SUPPORT – *Please include this written testimony from the League of Women Voters of Nebraska as part of the public hearing record for LB1368.*

Dear Senator Halloran and Members of the Agriculture Committee:

The League of Women Voters of Nebraska supports clean drinking water for all Nebraskans. We believe that measures should be in place to protect water from contamination and pollution, both from direct point-source discharges and from indirect nonpoint sources.

Access to clean drinking water is becoming a huge problem in Nebraska. Too many of our small and rural communities have drinking water contaminated with nitrates. Nebraska has the highest rate of pediatric cancer in the Midwest and ranks 8th in the nation.¹ Why so high? Researchers point to nitrates in drinking water as one of the possible links to cancer.²

Nebraska has the third highest nitrate levels in the United States. Why? Because too much fertilizer is applied and not used by the intended crop or golf green. Any fertilizer not used by the crop remains in the soil as nitrate, and, consequently, is easily leached out into waterways and groundwater.

This is why the League of Women Voters of Nebraska supports LB1368.

As a conservationist for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for 34 years, I worked with farmers to create nutrient management plans that would reduce fertilizer and maintain productivity. Through the Farm Bill reauthorized in 2018 and extended in 2023 through September 2024, NRCS was able to offer incentives for farmers to monitor and ultimately reduce their nitrogen inputs. Although initially apprehensive, farmers saw positive results by the end of the season. In 100% of my conservation contracts, the farmer spent less on nitrogen fertilizer over a five-year period and maintained production levels.

¹ Galvin, G. (2018, June 28). Where childhood cancer hits the hardest. *U.S. News and World Report*. <https://www.usnews.com/news/healthiest-communities/articles/2018-06-28/cdc-childhood-cancer-rates-highest-in-prosperous-counties-big-cities>

² Ouattara, Puvvula, Abadi, Munde, Kolok, Bartelt-Hunt, Bell, Wichman, & Rogan. (2022, February 1). Geospatial distribution of age-adjusted incidence of the three major types of pediatric cancers and waterborne agrichemicals in Nebraska. *Geohealth*. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35372745/>

Reducing nitrogen inputs is a win-win. Farmers win through the reduction in production costs, an increase in overall organic matter, and increases in water retention capability. The other win is for the environment. Less nitrogen is wasted and, therefore, less infiltrates the sources of our communities' drinking water. Less nitrates in drinking water means healthier children and communities.

LB1368 is a fantastic addition to LB243, which created the Soil Health Task Force.

Currently the bill proposes a biennial review of fertilizer rates. We strongly support an annual review of the soil tests and crop rotation and suggest that golf courses should be included in the program to review their fertilizer inputs.

For these reasons, the LWWNE asks you to advance LB1368 to the floor for debate.

Sincerely,

Claudia Stevenson, Director, Natural Resources and Energy, LWWNE
MaryLee Moulton and Janelle Stevenson, Co-Presidents, LWWNE