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February 6, 2024

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

RE: LR278CA (Murman) – Constitutional amendment to change the membership of the State Board of Education

OPPOSE: *Please include this written testimony from the League of Women Voters of Nebraska as part of the public hearing record for LR278CA.*

Dear Senator Murman and the Members of the Education Committee:

Since 1920, the League of Women Voter has been a nonpartisan political grassroots organization which believes that people should play a critical role in democracy. Founded by activists who secured voting rights for women, the League has always worked to promote the values and processes of representative government. The League works to protect and enhance voting rights for all Americans; assure opportunities for citizen participation; and achieve open accountable, representative and responsive government at every level.

LR278CA proposes to reduce the State Board of Education from eight to seven members with three members elected by congressional districts (one from each district), two members elected at large and allowing the governor to appoint two members. By doing so, representative, accountable and responsive government would be diminished.

The current makeup of the board allows members to advocate for the specific needs and concerns of their constituents in a smaller geographic area, thus truly representing the areas of the state from which they are elected. Physical and demographic factors vary greatly across the state and must be represented and understood when considering and implementing policy.

For example, requirements and methods to provide all students with special needs access to care may vary in different parts of the state. In more urban areas, providing resources to a single site where multiple children can be served may be a better and more cost effective way to provide services than in a rural community where those resources are better put toward the cost of transportation for providers to get to multiple locations.

Community and district specific needs like these need representation on the state level. The current makeup of the board strikes a balance between acknowledging differences across the state and recognizing when statewide uniformity will benefit all children.

Electing members at-large and allowing the governor to appoint two members makes the board less representative, less accountable and less responsive to the citizens of the state of Nebraska.

Therefore, the League of Women Voters of Nebraska is strongly opposed to LR278CA and asks that you do not advance this proposed legislation.

Sincerely,

Rachel Gibson, vice president-action, LWWNE

Jean McGuire, Education Policy Action Team, LWWNE

Taylor Sterba, Co-Director of Education Policy, LWWNE