

March 29, 2007

Senator Ron Raikes
PO Box 94604
Lincoln, NE 68509

Re: Support for LB 520

Dear Senator Raikes:

Nebraska Advocacy Services, Inc. is the designated Protection and Advocacy organization for people with disabilities in Nebraska. We are writing in support of LB 520 as currently written.

Examining how best Nebraska can develop systems to sustainably meet the educational needs of its youngest citizens is critical to establishing an educated society. As the 2005 Nebraska Early Childhood Policy Study Summary states: "Early childhood programs have consistently shown academic and social benefits for children. Programs are especially beneficial for children who are 'at risk' for school failure." (p. 1)

However, we would recommend that LB 520 be amended to state that the Early Childhood Education Legislative Study Group shall include special education as a component of the issues to be reviewed and examined in LB 520. Additionally, we recommend that the list of required study group members be revised to state that the study group include at least 1 member from a disability advocacy organization, at least 1 parent or family member of a current or former recipient of early childhood special education, and at least 1 former recipient of special education services. We believe these revisions would benefit the outcome of the Early Childhood Education Legislative Study Group and Nebraska, for as the 2005 Early Childhood Education Legislative Study Group report points out: "[Focus group and discussion forum] participants were concerned that there are few adequate services for children with special needs." (p. 8)

If you have any further questions, please contact Brad Meurrens, Public Policy Specialist, at 474-3183 or brad@nas-pa.org.

Sincerely,

Eric A. Evans
Deputy Executive Director
Nebraska Advocacy Services, Inc.

EAE/BAM/jrm

Cc: Sen. Kopplin; Sen. Adams; Sen. Ashford; Sen. Avery; Sen. Burling; Sen. Howard; Sen. Johnson