



*A decade of sowing
the seeds of justice.*

January 17, 2007

Senator Joel T. Johnson
Chair, Health and Human Services Committee
Room 1402, State Capitol
Lincoln, NE 68509

Senator Johnson and members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

On behalf of the Nebraska Appleseed Center for Law in the Public Interest, we would like to thank Senator Howard for her leadership in ensuring that children and families in the Nebraska Health and Human Services System receive quality assistance. We are here to testify in support of LB 54.

The Nebraska Appleseed Center for Law in the Public Interest is a non-profit, non-partisan law project that works to address systemic issues facing low-income Nebraskans and remove obstacles to self-sufficiency. Nebraska Appleseed focuses on advancing policies and practices that promote self-sufficiency for Nebraska's working poor families, promote the integration and participation of immigrant populations in communities across Nebraska, provide safe and adequate child welfare services to children who need protection, increase low-income people's access to the legal system, and support democracy by removing barriers to low-income people's participation in the electoral and public policy decision-making processes. In 2003, Nebraska Appleseed established its Child Welfare System Accountability Project which seeks to protect the legal rights of children in foster care and to work for lasting and meaningful reform of the system.

Child welfare is a field which requires well-trained individuals who are capable of interacting with a diverse array of children and families, understanding the issues these children and families face, and making decisions in the best interest of the children and families. While we do not believe that persons with social work degrees alone possess these skills, we do agree that, along with experience, an education in a human service field is an important part of this training. Research shows that those with a degree specifically in social work have lower turnover rates in these jobs, as they are often the best prepared to work with children and families. Less hiring and less training of new employees will eventually save taxpayer dollars. The citizens of Nebraska, and certainly the children and families in the child welfare system, would benefit tremendously if all child welfare employees in the Department of Health and Human Services were adequately trained.

To that end, we would like current child protection and safety workers to be required to complete continuing education classes and/or participate in continued training, rather than being exempted completely from the standards this bill would place on new hires.

Nebraska Appleseed's Child Welfare System Accountability Project is committed to

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ensuring adequate child welfare protection services in the State of Nebraska and creating not just a “better” system, but a model system in which children and families are well served by a system with principles. Therefore, we support this effort to ensure that Nebraska’s child protection and safety workers are highly skilled and well-trained individuals who can best serve our most vulnerable population. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Jennifer A. Carter
Staff Attorney
Child Welfare System Accountability Project