



February 2, 2007

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

RE: Testimony in Support of LB 410

Chairman Johnson and Members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

My name is Jennifer Carter and I am a staff attorney at the Nebraska Appleseed Center for Law in the Public Interest. On behalf of Nebraska Appleseed, I would like to thank Senator Howard for her leadership on child welfare issues. I'm here to testify in support of LB 410.

Nebraska Appleseed is a non-profit, non-partisan law project that works to address systemic issues facing low-income Nebraskans and remove obstacles to self-sufficiency. 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.

Nebraska's children have a constitutional right to be free from unreasonable risk of harm and a right to reasonable safety. Ensuring that case managers have workable caseloads is essential to protecting the health and well-being of children. Unmanageable caseloads make it difficult if not impossible for case managers to do all that is required to insure the safety and well-being of the children in their care. Additionally, unmanageable workloads lead to high caseworker turnover and subsequent inconsistency and lack of experience. An effectively limited caseload for workers will lead to more efficient use of resources which ultimately saves the state money and will more effectively protect the rights of these vulnerable children.

LB 410 is important because it would mandate that caseloads in Nebraska could not exceed the standards recognized by child welfare experts, rather than merely requesting that the Director of Health and Human Services only consider those nationally recognized standards. There has been a discussion of the importance of manageable caseloads in this state for years, yet caseloads remain too high. Consequently, the state is not meeting its legal and moral obligations to these children who rely on the state for their well-being and their most basic needs. We can and must do better.

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LB 410 is a step in the right direction and, therefore, we respectfully request that this Committee advance the bill.

Sincerely,

Jennifer A. Carter
Project Director
Child Welfare System Accountability Project