



Ex. 9
LR 390
Letters for the
Record

September 23, 2020

Dear Senator Stinner and members of the Appropriations Committee,

Nebraska most valuable product is not something you can package, export or sell to other states or countries. It is not something that can be outsourced, relocated or downsized. Nebraska's most valuable product is opportunity—to live a productive, fulfilling and prosperous life. It is our ability to create opportunity that will enable us to keep talent and resources rooted in our state and encourage young people to return to their hometowns when it is time to start families of their own.

We have known for years that creating opportunity in Nebraska is inextricably linked to the care and education of young children. The best research shows us that stimulating and supportive early developmental experiences are pivotal in preparing kids to succeed in school and as members of their communities. We also know that quality early care and learning programs create social and economic opportunity by enabling hard-working parents to raise their kids, grow their careers or develop their own businesses in Nebraska.

Time and time again, we have seen how quality early care and learning programs are creating transformative change for children, families and communities. This includes places such as Columbus, Pender and my own hometown of Red Cloud, where the Valley Child Development Center has played a key role in anchoring young families and entrepreneurs in Webster County.

In 2019, I was invited to represent the Nebraska Community Foundation alongside 40 other public- and private-sector leaders of the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission. Our task was to investigate what would be needed to strengthen Nebraska's early childhood infrastructure. We looked at financial obstacles that undermine the operational stability of child care programs, the factors that drive existing or aspiring educators away from early education as a career, as well as the high cost and low availability of quality child care throughout the state.

The findings of that investigation are now in your hands. We now know that about 91 percent of all Nebraska counties lack the child care resources they need to sustain a vibrant and growing population of working parents with young families. We have seen that a year of infant care can cost more than a year of college tuition. We recognize that the earnings of child care professionals falls well below the poverty line in Nebraska.

Our work at the Nebraska Community Foundation is built upon the idea that every hometown can and should benefit from the abundance of ingenuity, resourcefulness and talent our state offers. Expanding high-quality early care and learning throughout Nebraska is fundamental to that idea. Therefore, we support Legislative Resolution 390. I encourage you and your fellow policymakers to play an active role in helping us address these challenges and make our state truly rich in opportunity our current and future citizens.

Sincerely,



Jeff Yost
President and CEO

P.O. Box 83107 • Lincoln, Nebraska 68501-3107 • (402) 323-7330 • Fax (402) 323-7349

www.nebcommfound.org

Students who thrive.



Date: Sept. 22, 2020
To: Brittany Bohlmeyer, Clerk of the Appropriations Committee
From: Dr. Robin Dexter, Associate Superintendent – GIPS
RE: Letter of Support for LR390 – Study Resolution for Early Childhood Workforce, Care, and Education

Appropriations Committee:

I am writing in support of LR390 study resolution to analyze Nebraska's strengths and challenges across all sectors affecting early childhood care and education in Nebraska. As Associate Superintendent for GIPS, I have the opportunity to provide direct support to our early childhood education program serving 380 students identified as at risk due to socio-economic status, teen parent, disability, and/or an English Language Learner. I am a member of the Hall County Community Collaborative (H3C) Birth to 11yrs Committee supporting area early care and education providers in Hall County. I also had the privilege of participating in the first Early Childhood Policy Leadership Academy and I am a member of the Early Childhood Workforce Commission. I share this background as I have a passion for and a deep understanding of the needs in the area of early care and education, specifically in Hall Co.

GIPS serves a third of our 785 prekindergarten students with private preschools and daycare serving another third. A third of our prekindergarten students do not participate in early care or education. Our kindergarten teachers report a noticeable difference in students who have had the opportunity and support via early care and education before entering kindergarten and this gap continues to grow as most providers, including GIPS, have waiting lists.

The H3C provided much needed support to early care and education providers from April to current during the pandemic. Groups and area businesses provided cleaning supplies, food, milk, social emotional learning activities, stress relief activities for staff, and stipends to help providers stay open.

The Grand Island community continues to grow in population and growth in business and industry. Sadly, we continue to lose early care providers due to wages, insurance, and cost of operation. The data collected and summarized in the Workforce Commission Report provides guidance to move Nebraska forward in supporting our working families and the need to support our early care providers with increased wages and professional development.

I strongly urge you to support LR390 study resolution in support of early care and education. Please feel free to contact me if you need more information.



www.gips.org | 123 S. Webb Rd. PO Box 4904, Grand Island, NE 68802-4904 | (308) 385-5900 | @GIPublicSchools

Every Student, Every Day, a Success!

Students who thrive.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robin R. Dexter". The signature is enclosed in a thin black rectangular border.

308-385-5900 ext 1153
rdexter@gips.org



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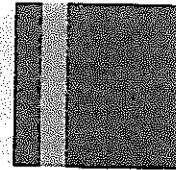
Every Student, Every Day, a Success!

Rachel Sissel

3874 Road 173, Oshkosh, NE 69154

(308) 874 - 6190

rsissel@nebraskachildren.org



September 25, 2020

Senator Stinner

Nebraska Legislature District #48

P.O. Box 94604 / Room # 1004

Lincoln, NE 68509

Dear Senator Stinner,

Thank you so much for introducing legislative resolution #390 and for the Legislature giving attention to early childhood. Thank you also for your commitment and willingness to advocate for early childhood as it is an important issue for Nebraska children, families, providers, and communities. The remarks made by you in the opening portion of the Thriving Children, Families, and Communities conference recently, have been energizing and appreciated.

LR390 is an important proactive step in not only understanding the effects of COVID-19 on the early childhood system to assist in moving forward as this pandemic carries on, but also will highlight the shortfalls that exist, in general, in early childhood.

In my current, we raise public awareness about early childhood working with communities directly, throughout the state, more and more Nebraskans recognize early childhood as not only a vital piece of child development but also related to their community's ability to thrive.

Please feel free to contact me if there is anything further, I can do to support LR390 or assist in continuing to move support, for early childhood in Nebraska, forward.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Rachel Sissel".

Rachel Sissel

Assistant Vice President - Nebraska Children and Families Foundation - Communities for Kids

Panhandle Partnership, Inc. Board of Directors Member

Garden County Communities for Kids Core Team Member

Cering Communities for Kids - Primary for Core Team





Brittany Bohmeyer <bbohimeyer@leg.ne.gov>

LR 390 Public Hearing on September 29, 2020

sahansen@gpcom.net <sahansen@gpcom.net>
 To: bbohimeyer@leg.ne.gov

Sun, Sep 27, 2020 at 4:19 PM

September 27, 2020

Dear Chairperson Stinner and the Appropriations Committee,

I'd like to begin by thanking Senator Stinner for your attention and commitment to the importance of early childhood in good times and now as the world is dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, and for introducing LR390. It's a difficult time for all of us as we adapt to the changes necessary to stay safe.

I reach out to you regarding The Valley Child Development Center in Red Cloud during this unprecedented time. The Board of Directors made the tough decision to continue to safely serve our families of emergency and essential workers who needed our child care and learning services. We also decided to retain all members of our high-quality staff, so they would be with us once our lives return to normalcy and all children could once again attend. Stability of our high-quality staff means consistency for the children which is of upmost importance for a child's sense of security and development of a positive self-esteem, both of which heavily influence their ability to reach their fullest potential.

Our non-profit child development center was created for ALL children, with affordable, reliable, high-quality services. Prior to the pandemic, sustainability was a constant concern and weighed heavily on philanthropy as we experience a "quality gap", the difference between what it costs to provide high-quality services and revenue income. Then for several months the child development center served a significantly reduced number of children, yet we continued to have 100% of our expenses and about 25% of our usual revenue from tuition. And now, as we serve all children once again, we haven't experienced the growth we would have due to some parents deciding not to return as they found cheaper unlicensed care during the initial shut down, lost their jobs, or remain on high alert due to the pandemic. Before the pandemic and in good times, there are many parents who feel they just can't afford our very reasonable rates due to the despicably low child care subsidy threshold for working parents.

Early care and learning services are especially important to Red Cloud and the surrounding communities as we are the only licensed child care center, with the exception of one licensed family child care home who cares for 3 children, within a 20 miles radius. Our services are ESSENTIAL: for the children to develop to their fullest potential, ensuring a more stable, responsible, better educated child; for their families ability to go to work without distractions regarding the safety and success of their children, and with reliable care; for the employers to retain attentive employees and recruit qualified employees; for the entire community to thrive; and thus for the state's economic growth and future responsible citizens.

I urge you as policymakers to make early childhood a priority for the well-being of Nebraska's children and families and our state's economic growth. We need to put funds where they make the biggest impact, and early care and education is that make-or-break issue!

In the midst of all that is going on and once we again safely return to the new normal, we need your help and sincerely appreciate your consideration to sustain our reliable, high-quality, nonprofit child development center for many generations to come.

Please feel free to contact me if I can be of assistance in the future.

Thank-you and be safe,

Sally Hansen

{The Valley Child Development Center}

Board President

Sally's Cell: 402.746.3989



The Center's Address:

P.O. Box 335

Red Cloud, NE 68970

Making Learning Fun. Affordably. Professionally. Happily.

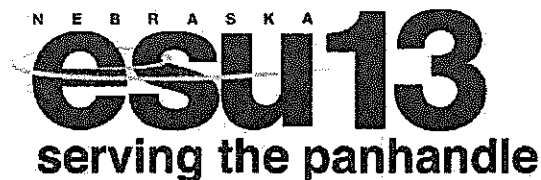
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www.esu13.org



Educational Service Unit 13

Dr. Andrew Dick, Administrator

September 28, 2020

Senator Stinner,

It warms my heart that we have such an amazing champion for Early Childhood in our Scotts Bluff Senator! Your time in office has meant so much to the young children and families of the Panhandle and I cannot thank you enough for your support.

I am writing to let you know how grateful ESU 13 and our Early Childhood programs are for the introduction of LR390. This resolution shows child care providers just how much they are appreciated and needed in our state. I especially appreciate the resolution, because it shows our coaching staff at ESU 13 in the programs of Sixpence Child Care Partnerships, Rooted in Relationships, and Panhandle Early Learning Connections that their work matters as well. As the director of Early Childhood, I spend a lot of my time reminding our staff of the good they are doing in helping to support our youngest citizens and the people who provide care and education to them. Supporting child care gives children the most positive experiences they could have in the first 8 years. We will see the payoffs from those efforts for years to come as they go to school, move on to careers, and become valuable employees hopefully right here in the Panhandle.


Our staff has been working very closely with local child care providers through the impacts of the pandemic. COVID not only caused many programs to close early on, it has made it difficult to keep the doors open due to the following:

- limits of classroom sizes
- providers who aren't able to be at work because they are taking care of their own children's educations while they are at home
- illness and quarantine absences, loved ones in their own homes (Family Home Providers) who are at high risks for the complications of COVID and so are not able to reopen
- loss of income due to parent's losing their jobs
- the high costs of groceries that are impacting all families, but in child care programs make it difficult to provide the same healthy meals at the same reimbursement rates in state food programs.

I close this letter lending my support in any way I can help you and the proposed legislation. Thank you again for all you are doing and I look forward to celebrating the success of LR390.

Nici Johnson
Director of Early Childhood
Educational Service Unit #13
308-254-4677

Achieving educational excellence for all learners through strong partnerships, service and leadership



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Educational Service Unit 13
Dr. Andrew Dick, Administrator

Achieving educational excellence for all learners through strong partnerships, service and leadership

A dark, textured graphic at the bottom of the page, resembling a stylized landscape or a wave. It consists of several overlapping, rounded shapes in shades of gray and black, creating a sense of depth and movement.



Chairman Stinner and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

Thank you for your attention to LR390. Of the many issues you consider each year, and particularly during this pandemic, there may be none as important to Nebraska in both the short- and long-term as early childhood education.

The Nebraska Association of School Boards (NASB) is a private, nonprofit organization that serves the needs of Nebraska's public schools. Our mission to enhance public education for the children of Nebraska is assembled upon the beliefs that:

- Every public school board will govern effectively and with integrity.
- Every public school board member will understand the importance of and emphasize increased student achievement.
- Every public school board will practice good stewardship of resources.

We serve 260 member school districts and educational service units across the state of Nebraska. The NASB has worked to articulate the fact that public and private resources devoted to education are an investment, not an expense. When evaluating the value of an investment you need to look at the rate-of-return. There is much data out there that will show the earlier you invest in people the higher rate-of-return you will get. School Boards in Nebraska understand the value to our education system when we have more high-quality early childhood education available for our children. In fact, our membership has adopted the following resolution:

NASB will support early childhood education programs at the community level, which may include redefining economic development programs to include early childhood infrastructure development for communities and will support early childhood programs as an element in community comprehensive plans.

More and more, school boards are recognizing the very direct impact that the early years have on students' performance in K-12. Ten years ago, our members were focused on student performance from the time students entered kindergarten. Now, school boards have high interest in the kinds of experiences and opportunities children have before they ever show up at school, whether that be in preschool classrooms operated by the school district or even in private childcare settings. No matter where children are, we want them to have good, quality experiences that provide a solid foundation from which to build on when they enter the K-12 system.

Please include this letter as part of public hearing record for LR390 on September 29, 2020.

Thank you for your leadership on this vital issue, and please let me know how NASB can continue to support your efforts on the early childhood front.

Sincerely,

John Spatz, Executive Director

Nebraska Legislature
Appropriations Committee
1445 K Street
Lincoln, NE 68508



September 28, 2020

To Whom It May Concern,

I wish to thank senator Stinner for introducing legislative resolution, LR390, and for the Legislature giving audience to the issues surrounding Nebraska's early care and education.

My community of Grand Island, and the greater area of Hall County, continues to demonstrate a high level of support for early care and education. As part of this support, our leadership team has been able to expand to support an early childhood coordinator. This coordinator will implement additional county-wide support networks for licensed and non-licensed child care providers, educators, and families.

Most recently, this key leadership group has also guided our community through various challenges faced by our child care providers and parents through the dark days of the COVID-19 crisis. As an example, many parents had to leave their infant children home in the care of their eleven and twelve year old siblings in order for the parent to go to work to be able to continue to support the family. We trained 49 students, with a mean age of 12, to become certified babysitters. They reported to be caring for siblings with a mean age of five years old, with most watching multiple siblings at the same time. Much of this need was because child care programs were either closed or needed to drastically reduce their capacity of care to stay within health guidelines. At one point, 15 to 30 percent of our licensed facilities closed, with at least five out of 86 licensed programs closing their doors permanently.

I believe these brief statistics of Hall County alone, demonstrate that early care and education issues are a necessity to be addressed no only at the local level, but at the state level as well. When we have parents who go to work feeling confident that their young child is safe, well cared for, and has nurturing relationships, they will be more productive employees along with businesses seeing a decrease in tardiness and overall absentee rates.

I am willing and available to be a resource for Senator Stinner or any Senator who would like to follow up with me regarding early care and education issues. Thank you kindly for taking the time to review my letter.

Best Regards,

Saffron Buettner
Communities for Kids – Grand Island Coordinator
saffronbuettner@q.com
308.390.8612

Matthew L. Blomstedt, Ph.D., Commissioner

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NEBRASKA

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

September 28, 2020

Chairman Stinner and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

Thank you for your attention to challenges facing early childhood workforce during the pandemic and for the specific efforts of LR390 at this time.

At the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE), we know successful early childhood programs are ones that:

1. Provide the level of quality that meets the needs of all children to be ready for kindergarten and ensure those children gain the skills and knowledge to be successful throughout their elementary and secondary education.
2. Engage parents as a child's first teacher; and
3. Respond to unique, local needs often done when the community comes together, and increasingly, in school-child care partnerships that continue to emerge and show promising results.

Of the 244 school districts in Nebraska, 230 operated an early childhood education program during the 2019/2020 school year. These included full day and part day early childhood classrooms, as well as Sixpence, birth-to-age-three programs.

The purpose of NDE's early childhood efforts are to provide high quality early childhood education experiences that empower children to reach their full potential and increase the likelihood of their later success in school. We are proud of what we are able to do for young children and their families and appreciate your focus on the early childhood workforce in this interim study. Early childhood is a skilled profession, and research shows the early childhood professional is the single most important difference maker when it comes to a quality early childhood experience.

At the Department, we hear frequently that schools want to do more and how more children are arriving at kindergarten ill prepared to learn. School districts know how important the early years are and recognize the school can't do it all to meet the entire need of every child and family. Child care providers play a critical role in helping to meet the needs of families across the state in ways that offer parents a choice that best fits their child and, frankly, their schedule and geographic location. School districts, and the NDE, are well aware of the critical importance of child care in communities for the early education and care of young children. Availability of quality child care allows schools to attract and keep staff and supports the stability of employment in the community.

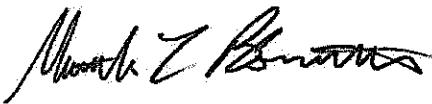
To lead and support the preparation of all Nebraskans for learning, earning, and living.

Prior to COVID-19, the early childhood system was fragile. Those who work within it (including early childhood teachers and para educators in our schools) face significant challenges, all of which are highlighted in the comprehensive report released in January 2020 by the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission.

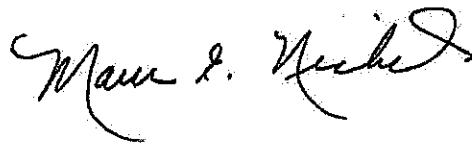
COVID-19 has made a fragile situation worse for the entire early childhood workforce, and perhaps impacted our partners in child care more substantially than it has impacted early childhood teachers in schools. When schools close from having children in the facility, the early childhood programs operating in schools typically do, as well. Early childhood teachers in schools have sick leave, health insurance, and other benefits that child care providers often do not have, so the pandemic and economic uncertainty has potentially had a different and more negative impact on some members of the early childhood workforce than on others.

The Nebraska Department of Education has partnered with our colleagues at DHHS for decades on early childhood efforts to coordinate and administer programs together. The agencies work together to provide professional development and supports for the entire early childhood workforce – be they early childhood teachers in schools or child care providers educating and nurturing children in homes and centers. Additionally, the Head Start State Collaboration Office is part of the NDE, and works to ensure that the interests of children of low income families are foremost in mind in state policy discussions. NDE is committed to continuing our partnership with DHHS to work with your Committee and the entire Legislature on strengthening our early childhood system to meet the needs of children and families in ways that communities and taxpayers can get behind. Please be assured of our long term commitment to working together with you.

Thank you,



Matthew L. Blomstedt
Commissioner of Education



Maureen Nickels
President, State Board of Education

Cc:

Stephanie Beasley, Director
Division of Children and Family Services
Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services

September 24, 2020

Senator John Stinner, Chairperson
Appropriations Committee
Nebraska Legislature
Room 1004
Lincoln, NE 68509

Dear Chairman Stinner:

I write to you in my capacity as the State Director for the Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC), a center of the University of Nebraska, located at UNO, College of Business Administration. NBDC supports the start and growth of business across Nebraska. I have two purposes in reaching out to you today. First, to commend you for taking time to give your focused attention to one of the most urgent issues in our state—specifically, the vitality of childcare programs and professionals as crucial pillars of Nebraska’s economy and that of its communities. Secondly, to encourage you and the member of the Appropriations Committee to take action on the findings of the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission through the responsible and strategic use of our state’s public and private resources.

Nebraska Business Development Center helps Nebraskans cultivate more successful, financially resilient small businesses throughout the state. We do this by offering one-on-one consulting to our clients. Our services are confidential, consultative and at no charge. We help businesses in developing the business acumen to succeed and grow. Our clients represent all areas of industry, which gives us a distinctly well-informed understanding of how the small business ecosystem works in Nebraska.

One of the most significant insights we have gained through this work is that high-quality childcare programs play an integral and unique role in that ecosystem. As small businesses themselves, independently owned and operated childcare programs stimulate economic activity among other small businesses as producers and consumers of locally sourced goods and services. In a larger sense, access to affordable, high-quality childcare programs make it possible for existing business owners and aspiring entrepreneurs to invest their time, skills and resources in achieving their own professional ambitions and providing for their families and employees.

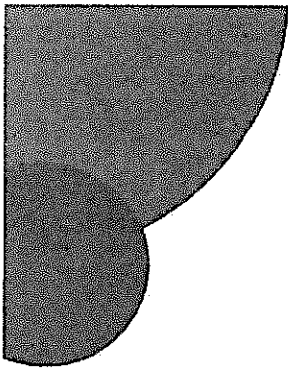
Our ongoing work with childcare owners revealed the severe and complex obstacles these programs face in an increasingly uncertain marketplace. We see how low profit margins, high turnover and inadequate connections to the broader business community undercuts the viability of these programs as small businesses. While the NBDC is fully equipped to assist providers through consultation and advisement, it is also clear that more comprehensive efforts would be required to promote the sustainability of high-quality childcare programs in Nebraska. When I was invited to represent the NBDC in the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission, it was a clear indicator that the time has come for a coordinated, public-private response to this issue.

In January 2019, the findings of the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission study were published, only weeks before the emerging pandemic took hold of our nation, and its economy. The needs and objectives outlined in that study are more urgent than ever. However, the impact of the pandemic also means that we must be even more planful and strategic in how we deploy our resources to address them.

Make no mistake—the survival of small business in Nebraska is fundamentally tied to the survival of independently owned and operated high-quality childcare programs. They are needed not only to spur economic activity and recovery in the short term, but to create a stronger culture of entrepreneurship for our state in the decades ahead. On behalf of the Nebraska Business Development Center, we look forward to working with the Nebraska Legislature on this important issue.

Sincerely

Catherine Lang
State Director



nebraska early childhood
COLLABORATIVE

September 28, 2020

Dear Chairman Stinner and members of the Appropriations Committee,

As a member of the Buffett Early Childhood Institute's Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission, and Chief Operating Officer of the Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative, I write to offer gratitude, support, and the willingness on behalf of our organization to serve as a resource in furtherance of your efforts related to LR 390. We support the Workforce Commission's report as a guiding document in collective endeavors to promote best practices, drive new investments, and leverage our infrastructure to facilitate high-quality service delivery in Nebraska.

The Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative's (NECC) mission is to harness the potential of providers to deliver high-quality early learning opportunities through access to business resources, innovative partnerships, and educational support. In addition to serving as the grantee for two large federal Early Head Start Child Care Partnership grants currently serving 280 infants and toddlers in high-risk zip code areas in Omaha, we are building the first of its kind Family Child Care Network across the state to elevate the business of child care through intensive business trainings, child care licensing toolkits, innovative online platforms and automation software, and other pioneering tools and technology.

While our child care partners provide direct services to families and children, NECC relies on shared services principles to elevate the business of early care and education and to increase access to high-quality options for all Nebraska families. Our work includes, but is not limited to: finance administration, accounting, human resources, professional development, coaching and training, comprehensive family engagement, health services, public benefits enrollment, and emergency economic assistance. We know firsthand the complexities of the financial challenges of early childhood education businesses, the educators they employ, and the families they serve.

With respect to COVID-19, we have observed the financial strain of programs suffering great instability in enrollment, tuition, and attendance, which in turn has a direct impact on their ability or inability to compensate their staff or themselves in the case of family child care providers. Throughout this ongoing pandemic we have also observed a lack of access to necessary cleaning and health supplies and critical mental health services to address the grief among providers faced with difficult decisions about staying in business and who have endured the loss of clients, family, and loved ones to COVID-19. We have responded to address these needs through emergency grant assistance, cleaning and health supply care packages, and grief counseling services in both English and Spanish, but our work continues. We look not only to work collaboratively to build our early childhood infrastructure back better, we aim to transform it based on lessons we continue to learn from providers and one another each and every day.

www.nebraskaeearly.org

3200 N 30th Street
Omaha, NE 68111

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nebraska early childhood
COLLABORATIVE

The future success of the child care industry requires a strong commitment to strategic new investments. To help inform this work, we are currently engaged with national partners at First Children's Finance to conduct a landscape analysis of capital currently available to child care businesses in Nebraska. We look forward to sharing this assessment with you and other stakeholders in 2021.

Thank you for your time and attention to the early childhood care and education system and for your public service to our great state. Please let us know if we can be of any assistance moving forward.

Kind regards,

Sarah Ann Kotchian, J.D.
Chief Operating Officer