

## **Public Policy Platform**

This platform serves to internally guide and externally inform on public policy stances for which we dedicate Holland Children's Movement time and energy to both pass and protect.

The Movement believes that Nebraskans are at our best when we center children and families at the intersection of opportunity and equity. Because of our unique partnerships with Holland Children's Institute and Family PAC we strategically position ourselves to educate, advocate, and achieve public policy results that work for children and families, in partnership with policymakers and other organizational community partners.

In pursuit of public policy that creates a more equitable environment for children and families to thrive, this public policy agenda is constructed on a set of values derived from our mission statement.

## **Our Work**

### **Strategic Advocacy**

- Identify public policy gaps in access, opportunity for children and working families.
- Seek to pass public policies which ensure equitable access to opportunity.

### **Public Engagement**

- Amplify the volume of existing public opinion research and data.
- Build public support, civic engagement to engage with public policy.

### **Effective Collaboration**

- Build allyship with policymakers who believe in a sustainable workforce; income equity; family economic mobility; common sense tax policy; affordable, quality child care; and comprehensive healthcare for all.
- Seek partnerships with organizations with commitment to ending poverty, hunger, homelessness, and economic uncertainty.

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## Early Childhood Care and Education

"In Nebraska, 71% of all children under the age of six have all available parents in the workforce." (U.S. Census Bureau 2008-2015 American Community Survey).

All Nebraska children should have access to high quality early care and education. Closing the opportunity gap and impacting intergenerational poverty starts with a child's earliest experiences. Nebraska is the least affordable state for families with an infant or toddler in family child care.<sup>1</sup>

According to a public opinion survey by Holland Children's Institute, nearly six-in-ten voters (58 percent) support increasing state investment in early childhood development. Yet, 50 percent of Nebraskans disagree that state government is making adequate investments in early childhood care and education.<sup>2</sup>

- **Step Up to Quality**

[Step Up to Quality](#) is the first public quality rating and improvement system of child care providers in Nebraska. Programs serving the highest populations of children through the child care subsidy program participate in Step Up to Quality. These new quality ratings go beyond licensing and strive for better, for all of Nebraska's children.

- **Child Care Subsidy**

Crucial groundwork is laid for the workforce of today and tomorrow through the child care subsidy program. This program provides child care assistance so families can attend work or school. We have worked consistently to support policy improvements to program eligibility and to tie public investment to quality efforts

Quality child care is essential to the safety and healthy development of children, particularly in the school readiness of children of low income families. A significant new public investment in early childhood care and education is needed if we are to make good on the promise of quality child care in Nebraska. This investment must go far beyond the current investment in child care subsidy and increased investments directly to the child care subsidy and quality initiatives.

- **School Readiness Tax Credits**

Early childhood programs that care for and educate children in Nebraska's lowest income families should be committed to high quality care. The greatest barriers to building quality early childhood education start with affordable access and teacher qualifications.

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<sup>1</sup> Child Care Aware, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Holland Children's Institute. *Nebraska Voters' Outlook*. 2019. Retrieved: <https://hollandinstitute.org/fact-tank>.

New tax credits and incentives must be directly linked to Step Up to Quality in order to support investment and access to quality early child care and education. Programs and members of the early childhood workforce can be eligible to receive each credit based on various factors related to program quality and professional attainment. These credits are intended to serve as an incentive for building quality.

## **Education**

Ensuring all families have access to quality public education for their children is a part of the 'social contract' that exists between its people and the state. Every child attending public school should receive an education that will prepare them for opportunity and success in the future.

- **K-12 Public Education**

The offering of quality and accessible public education is the best, and most important, way to invest in building an effective and educated future workforce, preparing youth for success.

- **Higher Education**

All Nebraskans should have the ability to attend a public institution of higher learning which provides both quality, and accessible education. Higher education at all levels provides an educated and skilled workforce. Our university and state and community colleges provide valuable economic return to the state, with each dollar invested returning seven in value.

According to a public opinion survey by Holland Children's Institute, voters continue to be disappointed with state performance on the affordability of higher education, with a vast majority (86 percent) believing the state should do more to increase college affordability to the middle class, and 70 percent describe the state's performance in this area as "fair" or "poor."<sup>3</sup>

- **Career and Technical Job Training**

Nebraska communities need skilled crafts and tradespersons. To varying degrees, these skills-building and educational training programs can be found as early as middle school, and may include a number of career pathways, including apprenticeships. These skilled training and technical certifications offer an alternative form of higher education, valuable to a diversified healthy economy.

According to a public opinion survey by Holland Children's Institute, 59 percent of Nebraska voters believe providing pathways to job training and career, technical, and vocational education is necessary to support and develop the workforce.

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<sup>3</sup> Holland Children's Institute. *Nebraska Voters' Outlook*. 2019. Retrieved: <https://hollandinstitute.org/fact-tank>.

## **Economic Security**

Any public policy or initiative that works to bring economic security and mobility to Nebraska's children and families is a priority. Nebraska's working families must have the ability and opportunity to live the 'Good Life' here in Nebraska. Families should have the tools they need be able to afford and sustain a middle class lifestyle and improve their future economically.

- **Economic Development**

Economic development is an important tool to ensure continued growth and retention of a qualified labor force; thriving businesses; and safe, healthy, and happy communities. This can and does often include tax incentives, deductions, increases, and revenue expansion.

Tax benefits should never come at the cost of Nebraska's working families. Taxes should never be applied to items needed to survive and to thrive, such as food, water, medication, essential services such as medical care, car repair, and more. Those who can most afford it should always pay their fair share when it comes to strengthening Nebraska's financial security.

- **Minimum Wage**

The right to earn a living wage is undeniable. It's good for the economy and for the standard of living for all Nebraskans. This includes "tipped" minimum wage.

As it stands, "tipped" minimum wage severely disadvantages workers. While businesses are legally required to ensure tipped staff earn at least the standard minimum wage from tips and hourly wages combined, restaurant and other tipped-wage industries have the highest rates of wage theft, whether accidental and purposeful. The system of job coding, tip calculation, etc. is complicated and favors business profits over worker wage fairness.

An effective Tipped Minimum Wage must be indexed in accordance with both standard Minimum Wage practices and cost of living adjustments. Expanding standard Minimum Wage to eliminate Tipped Minimum Wage is also appropriate to ensure fair wage practices.

- **Equal Pay for Equal Work**

The right to equal pay for equal work is common sense, but not always common practice. All Nebraskans deserve to be paid commensurate with experience/education, and in accordance with fair labor best practices for the industry.

No employee should ever be paid less or risk employment due to race, religion, creed, color, gender, gender identity/expression, sexual orientation, disability/ability, political affiliation, economic status, and/or any other distinguishing characteristic.

Women make cents on the dollar compared to men. "Women make just 78 cents for every dollar earned by men. Black women earn only 64 cents and Latinas only 54 cents for each dollar earned by white men."<sup>4</sup> Practices such as sharing salary information to increase transparency should not preclude women from employment, nor promotion. Retaliation must be prohibited and adjudicated.

- **The Cliff Effect**

The Cliff Effect serves as one of the single largest barriers to economic opportunity. The Cliff effect occurs when the public benefits one earns encourages a cycle of poverty and/or economic insecurity. This occurs from reductions in food, housing, child care and other assistance that outpaces or ends when a recipient attains an increase in pay, hours, etc. jeopardizing the ability of working families to climb the economic ladder.

To end the Cliff Effect, we must ensure that recipients are provided with sliding scales, transition periods to stabilize income, hours, and economic obligations. Additionally, support systems that allow for cost-benefit analysis and economic planning are critical.

To combat the Cliff Effect, we must continually reevaluate the systems and operations which affect recipients of public assistance, and not impose punitive pre-requisites, nor arbitrary benchmarks. Creating a smooth transition to economic stability – instead of a cliff – is a smart policy that supports work as a way out of poverty.

- **Paid Family/Medical Leave**

According to Holland Children's Institute public opinion research, 58 percent of people surveyed believe paid family and medical leave employee benefits would be 'extremely helpful to [them] and [their] family.'<sup>5</sup>

Whether it's a new parent who struggles to pay the bills during the first months with a newborn, new adoptee or an individual undergoing cancer treatment, or a child who needs to support a parent's end of life - Nebraskans deserve to have access to paid family/medical leave.

Policies which support Nebraskans' ability to utilize paid time off for themselves or an immediate family member are critical to maintaining family units; health and happiness; and economic security, for EVERYONE!

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.aclu.org/issues/womens-rights#current>

<sup>5</sup> Holland Children's Institute. *Nebraska Voters' Outlook*. 2019. Retrieved: <https://hollandinstitute.org/fact-tank>.

## **Healthcare**

- **Medicaid Expansion**

By vote, by intent, and in keeping with the idea that children and families are the cornerstone of Nebraska's 'Good Life,' Nebraska and its Department of Health and Human Services must ensure the timely expansion of Medicaid, without further delay nor additional barriers to eligibility. Nebraskans, in voting approval of ballot measure 427, did not intend nor provide authorization for cuts to new and existing benefits, nor barriers to coverage.

In a public opinion survey of Nebraskans (July 2019) by Holland Children's Institute, an overwhelming majority of participants (70 percent) reported that affordable healthcare was most important to "[them] and [their] family." Understandably, a large majority (56 percent) of Nebraskans are also "concerned" or "very concerned" with the additional restrictions and delay on the implementation of Medicaid expansion, with only 28 percent say they are "not at all" concerned.<sup>6</sup>

- **Prenatal Care**

Success for children starts with access to prenatal care. All forms of prenatal care, including pregnancy counseling, health appointments, lab tests, and preparation for delivery can significantly impact health and wellness of parents and children. Newborns are 40 percent more likely to die within 28 days of delivery if their birth parent has not received prenatal care.<sup>7</sup>

In accordance with these realities, all expecting parents must receive prenatal care in accordance with public health best practices and licensed medical practitioners.

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<sup>6</sup> Holland Children's Institute. *Nebraska Voters' Outlook*. 2019. Retrieved: <https://hollandinstitute.org/fact-tank>.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.guttmacher.org/journals/psrh/2002/09/neonatal-death-risk-effect-prenatal-care-most-evident-after-term-birth>