

## **Summary Report on AAUW-NE 2016 Legislative Priorities**

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AAUW-NE designated a total of 47 bills and 2 resolutions as legislative priorities during the Second Session of the One Hundred Fourth Nebraska Legislature in 2016. Nineteen priorities were carryover bills from the 2015 session. For a complete description of the current status of each priority, please check the “Final Report AAUW-NE 2016 Legislative Priorities” on the state web site, [www.aauw-ne.aauw.net](http://www.aauw-ne.aauw.net). The priorities are listed under four categories: “Good Government (GG)” includes eight bills and two resolutions. “Health Care/Health Insurance (HC/HI)” lists twelve bills. “Public Education (PE)” contains fourteen bills as priorities, and “Social and Economic Justice (SEJ)” includes thirteen bills. The priorities align with those of the 2015-2017 AAUW Public Policy Program.

Periodic “Action Alerts” kept members informed about the progress of selected priorities during critical times in the legislative process and urged members to contact their state senators as necessary. An opportunity for our members to visit with senators directly about selected priorities was provided at our annual AAUW-NE Legislative Day on February 25<sup>th</sup>. The Second Session of the 104<sup>th</sup> Nebraska Legislature adjourned sine die April 20, 2016, the 60<sup>th</sup> day of the scheduled 60-day or what is known as the short session.

As you review the 2016 Final Report, please note significant success with passage of Omaha Senator Tanya Cook’s LB83 (SEJ) that incorporated parts of LB928 (SEJ) to advance the cause of equal pay for equal work for women in Nebraska. The new law allows employees to disclose their wages to co-workers without fear of reprisal from their employers. Numerous contacts made by AAUW-NE members with state senators made a difference in convincing them of the need to pass this necessary bill after a two-year effort.

Other successes include passage of LB746 (SEJ), the Strengthening Families Act, to ensure youth with foster care experience have more normalcy and permanency in their lives. Passage of LB843 (SEJ) provides that a person cannot be charged with an act of prostitution if that person was in fact subjected to a form of human trafficking. The new law is a step in the right direction toward achieving a national policy against human trafficking that promotes peace, justice, human rights, sustainable development and mutual security for all people. We supported LB787 (GG), Senator Adam Morfeld’s bill, to allow a voter to voluntarily photograph his or her marked ballot to show to others as a means of creating enthusiasm for the voting experience, especially among first-time and young voters. This portion of LB787 was amended into LB874 to change provisions of the Election Act that was signed into law by Governor Pete Ricketts.

We dodged a bullet on a pair of anti-union bills whose passage would have negatively affected Nebraska’s public employees. We took a position of opposition on the two bills. Fortunately, both bills introduced by Crete Senator Laura Ebke died in committee. LB1044 (SEJ) proposed to

eliminate the Commission of Industrial Relations (CIR), which has a decades-long record of success in peacefully resolving labor/management disputes. LB288 (SEJ), also introduced by Senator Ebke, would have prohibited the deduction of union dues from an employee's paycheck. Luckily, this bill also died in committee.

On the downside, LB580 (GG), the bill we supported to create an independent redistricting commission passed in the Unicameral, but Governor Ricketts returned it to the legislature without his approval. Hopefully, a bill very similar to it will be introduced in the 2017 session of the Unicameral. About 21 states including Iowa successfully use some form of an independent, nonpartisan commission to draw boundary lines of districts for federal and state offices after each decennial census. Doing so takes the politics out of reconfiguring political maps and underscores the basic democratic principle that all political power flows from the people.

Lincoln Senator Kathy Campbell's LB1036 (SEJ) was an effort to rein in some of the excesses of payday lenders who charge exorbitant interest rates for short-term loans. Single-parent families and low-income earners are targets of such predatory practices. LB1036 had three goals. It would limit the fees and interest a payday lender can charge and allow borrowers to pay affordable amounts over a reasonable period of time. Thirdly, it would strengthen disclosure requirements so borrowers know their rights and are clear about the terms of the loan. Unfortunately, LB1036 was indefinitely postponed at the session's end. Hopefully, a similar bill will be introduced during the 2017 Unicameral session. We urgently need this reform.

A major disappointment this session was the failure to pass a Medicaid expansion bill for the fourth year in a row. Sponsored by Omaha Senator John McCollister, LB1032 (HC/HI) would have covered an estimated 97,000 Nebraskans who do not qualify to purchase health insurance in the Nebraska marketplace under the Affordable Care Act (ACA). The proposed Transitional Health Insurance Program Act (T-HIP) would have operated as a three-year pilot program. During that time, the T-HIP Act would have brought in \$1.8 billion in federal funds to pay for the program. Unfortunately, LB1032 was bracketed or tabled for further discussion for the remainder of the session on a 28-20 vote. Senator McCollister said the issue of Medicaid expansion in Nebraska is not dead. A similar proposal will be introduced in the 2017 Unicameral session, and if necessary, in future years until it passes. (Nebraska Legislature "Medicaid Expansion Defeated a Fourth Time", [Omaha World-Herald](#), March 30, 2016).

This concludes my summary report regarding the status of our legislative priorities at the conclusion of the 2016 Unicameral session. Thank you for all you do to be actively involved in supporting our annual AAUW-NE legislative priorities. I remain convinced that by working together we can and do make a positive difference in the lives of Nebraska's women, girls and families.