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To the Nebraska Unicameral Natural Resources Committee,

The Midwest Energy Efficiency Alliance (MEEA) appreciates this opportunity to provide comments to the Natural Resources Committee on LB459. MEEA is a nonpartisan nonprofit regional member-based organization that promotes energy efficiency to optimize energy generation, reduce consumption, create jobs and decrease carbon emissions in all Midwest communities.

Energy efficiency is the least cost energy resource, making each kilowatt of energy generated more productive and reducing demand for the state's public power districts. A key aspect of energy efficiency is weatherization, which involves the retrofitting of existing properties to create more efficient building envelopes and heating systems. Weatherization upgrades in older buildings often require "pre-weatherization" measures, home repairs that address health and safety or structural concerns - including asbestos remediation, roof repairs and more. Together, these measures reduce household energy use and bill costs, while enhancing indoor air quality and improving the health of residents.

The U.S. Department of Energy has defined energy burden as the percentage of a household's gross annual income spent on total energy costs. An energy burden of 6% or greater is considered "high." Energy burden can create instability for households, requiring households to forego bill payment and accrue debt, or risk service interruption. Service interruptions can cause households to lose access to work, school, communication resources and medical technologies. Losing heat in the winter, or air conditioning in the summer, can cause an array of health impacts, heightening risks for vulnerable populations, the elderly or children.

According to the Low-Income Energy Affordability Database (LEAD) tool, low-income households (0-80% Area Median Income) in the majority of Nebraska's census tracts experience on average a high energy burden. This amounts to nearly 200,000 energy burdened households, representing over 25% of total Nebraska households. The DOE's Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) and Low-Income Heating and Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) are designed to curb energy burdens, assisting households in paying backlogged energy bills as well as implement weatherization improvements. However, the need for home improvements and federal dollars have long outnumbered the available resources. From 2010 to 2020, LIHEAP served only 19% of eligible households due to funding restrictions, and WAP typically receives less funding than LIHEAP.



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The creation of a Home Weatherization Clearinghouse will allow the Department of Environment and Energy (NDEE) to coordinate weatherization efforts across federal, state, local and nonprofit programs, braiding resources to reach the greatest number of Nebraskans possible. This office would not only help coordinate WAP and LIHEAP efforts across the state but also aid in implementing federal programs set to reach Nebraskans in 2025. Nebraska's Home Energy Rebates program will provide \$91 million in home efficiency and appliances rebates, including federal dollars for building shell improvements. NDEE's ONE RED program will provide \$4.1 million to low-income Nebraskans for pre-weatherization measures. The Home Weatherization Clearinghouse will allow NDEE to use federal dollars more efficiently, braiding resources to maximize impacts and create the greatest return on investment for taxpayers across the state.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment; please contact Clara Stein (cstein@mwalliance.org) with any questions.

Regards,

Paige Knutsen, Executive Director
Midwest Energy Efficiency Alliance