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March 2, 2015

To: Members of the Judiciary Committee

From: Juliet Summers, Policy Coordinator for Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice

RE: Support for LB 13, to provide for use of community based aid funds

Nebraska children deserve the most effective services that we can afford with our tax dollars. Data collection, evaluation and analysis of programming options is crucial to ensure that we are getting the results we want with the money we are spending. Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 13, because by creating an independent evaluation center for programs funded by the Community Based Juvenile Services Aid program, it would guarantee accurate evaluation of whether those dollars are actually creating the outcomes we want for our youth. Moreover, by tying funding for this evaluation to a percentage of the annual appropriation, the bill ensures that this monitoring would remain consistent from year to year going forward.

One of the Council of State Government's core principles for reducing recidivism and improving outcomes for youth in the juvenile justice system is to collect data on and evaluate service outcomes at the statewide level.¹ Creating a statewide system for assessment, which can measure outcomes neutrally and consistently across jurisdictions, allows a true picture to emerge of which programs are working and which are not. If outcomes are assessed county by county, or program by program, policymakers run the risk of being unable to attribute results to the specific programs that youth are receiving. Additionally, they may be asked to make future grant determinations based on data that looks like apples and oranges. Housing a statewide center at the University of Nebraska at Omaha makes sense; the Juvenile Justice Institute has a demonstrated capacity to provide neutral, clear, and easily disaggregated data and analysis, and to collaborate with state agencies and other researchers in putting the information together.

Allocating 10% of the total funding does seem like a large bite; if this data center can be funded with less, we would heartily support putting more money toward direct programming for youth. That said, without neutral evaluation, we can't know if we are throwing our money away on ineffective services. Having a statewide evaluation center will also save counties from having to use any of their allocated grant funds to create their own assessment tools and outcome tracking measures.

Finally, establishing an ongoing percentage of the annual appropriation, rather than a one-time assessment, ensures that accurate data will continue to be collected year after year. Policymakers will be able to watch trend lines for program success or failure over the long run. Service providers will be able to analyze and shift their models to improve outcomes for youth.

By deploying funds to ascertain whether our tax dollars are actually going to programs that work, LB 13 is a smart investment on behalf of our youth. We thank Senator Krist for bringing this bill, and would urge the Committee to advance it.

¹ Elizabeth Seigle, Nastassia Walsh, and Josh Weber. *Core Principles for Reducing Recidivism and Improving Other Outcomes for th in the Juvenile Justice System*. Council of State Governments Justice Center: 2014.

