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February 25, 2015

To: Members of the Judiciary Committee

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

RE: Support for LB 25, to change court jurisdiction

Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 25, because it will provide a safety net for a small number of youth involved in the juvenile justice system who desire and would benefit from extended court oversight.

As of yesterday, there were 602 total eighteen year olds under the supervision of juvenile probation. In 2014, there were 226 juveniles who were already eighteen at the time they were placed on probation.¹ These numbers can be expected to increase in 2015 as LB 561's provisions roll in, expanding original juvenile court jurisdiction to a greater number of older teens. Under the current law, court jurisdiction, and probation oversight cut off automatically when a youth turns nineteen, regardless of whether or not she has completed the terms of her probation, finished a course of court-ordered treatment, or otherwise successfully rehabilitated herself.

Imagine a seventeen year old charged with marijuana possession. An overloaded juvenile court docket means she isn't formally adjudicated on the charge until she is almost eighteen. The judge orders a chemical dependency evaluation; getting that completed and returning to court takes another few months. The evaluation recommends a course of outpatient treatment. It takes a little while for her probation officer to help her mom find an available provider, work out the payment, set up transportation, and get her started in treatment. **The National Institute of Health's Institute on Drug Abuse reports that most addicted people need at least three months in treatment to really stop or reduce their drug addiction, and longer treatment periods result in better outcomes.** By the time she is starting her treatment, this young woman has barely any time to reap its benefits and turn herself around.

LB 25 would provide a little breathing room for young adults like this one. Because the bill requires that any extensions of jurisdiction be voluntary, incremental, and specific to a course of treatment or service related to an underlying offense committed when the individual was a minor, it is unlikely to affect more than a handful of cases each year. The impact would be limited to those cases where everyone, including the young person, is in agreement with continued probation oversight for a specific treatment or service plan.

Offering the opportunity to fully complete a rehabilitative plan is good policy, both for the child who is asking for help, and for the community that will reap the benefit of a fully rehabilitated young adult. We thank Senator Krist for bringing this bill, and would urge the Committee to advance it.

¹ Data provided by the Office of Juvenile Probation Administration.

