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January 27, 2015

To: Members of the Education Committee

From: Julia Tse, Child Welfare Policy Associate

**Re: Support for LB 303 – Authorize schools to adopt a child sexual abuse policy**

Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 303 and its efforts to develop a model child sexual abuse policy in schools across the state. A coordinated response to child maltreatment is essential to keeping children safe; LB 303 represents an important step forward ensuring that all schools cultivate an environment that promotes educational awareness and emotional support when it comes to sexual abuse.

Children who experience sexual abuse suffer from some of the most severe psychological, behavioral, and physical consequences, many of which persist well into adulthood. Child victims of sexual assault and abuse are also more likely to undergo additional adverse childhood experiences (ACE), which research has linked to increased diseases in adulthood and shorter life expectancy.<sup>1</sup>

**Last year, there were 351 substantiated cases of sexual abuse against children in Nebraska—school aged children and teenagers represented nearly 90% of those cases.**<sup>2</sup> Given the data on reported rates is likely an underestimation of the actual prevalence of child sexual abuse, schools are a crucial place to prioritize as this Legislature considers our state’s response to child maltreatment. Children spend a majority of their time in school, and therefore it is important that we involve all teachers, staff, and other children in a coordinated and thoughtful response to child sexual abuse.

LB 303 provides a key opportunity to continue the work that Nebraska has done in recent years to keep all children safe. We thank Senator Bloomfield and this committee for their leadership in developing a more comprehensive approach to child maltreatment in Nebraska. We look forward to continuing the conversation on how we can best support schools as they develop sexual abuse policies and procedures and respectfully request that you advance this legislation.

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<sup>1</sup> Felitti, V.J. et al, “Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adults. The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study,” *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 14(4):1998, 245-258.

<sup>2</sup> *Kids Count in Nebraska 2013 Report.*