



*Telling the whole story.*

7521 Main Street, Suite 103  
Ralston, Nebraska 68127

(402) 597-3100 P  
(402) 597-2705 F

<http://voicesforchildren.com>

BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
Eric Nelson  
*President*

Tim Hron, MA, LIMHP  
*Vice President*

Donna Hammack, MSEd  
*Secretary*

Steve Mitchell  
*Treasurer*

Yolanda Chavez Nuncio, MEd  
Catherine Damico, JD  
Jeremy Fitzpatrick, JD  
Joel Jacobs  
Eric Johnson  
Lloyd Meyer  
Daniel Padilla  
Mike Socha  
Tim Thoreson

Carolyn D. Rooker, MSW  
*Executive Director*

A member of:



Find us on:



February 19, 2015

To: Members of the Health and Human Services Committee

From: Julia Tse, Child Welfare Police Associate

**RE: LB 441 – Change provisions relating to the Bridge to Independence program**

Young adults transitioning from our state child welfare system deserve adequate supports as they navigate their way into adulthood. Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 441, which would allow for better implementation of the Bridge to Independence program.

Permanent family support is an important factor in childhood development, but for the many Nebraska youth who “age out” every year, leaving the foster care system without a forever family often means poorer outcomes in educational attainment, economic well-being, criminal justice involvement, and mental and physical health.<sup>1</sup> **Last year, 260 Nebraska youth aged out of the system which was about 9% of all exits—a rate that has been on the rise since 2008.**<sup>2</sup> The services and supports available to young people through the Bridge to Independence program fulfill a significant need in our efforts towards a complete and child-focused foster care system.

LB 441 would strengthen the Bridge to Independence program by requiring that transitioning youth are adequately informed of their options in an independence hearing, extending program access to tribal youth and those in guardianship relationships, aligning statute with medical care eligibility, better leveraging federal IV-E funds, and shortening the amount of time that youth spend waiting to receive services. **These adjustments will ensure the continued success of the program in assisting vulnerable young adults. Nebraska will reap the benefits in a population that will be healthier, better educated, more employable, and less involved in the justice system.**

We would like to thank Senator Bolz and this committee for their work on this issue and respectfully urge you to advance LB 441.

<sup>1</sup>Courtney, M.E. et al, “Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 26,” Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Kids Count in Nebraska 2014 Report.