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March 2, 2015

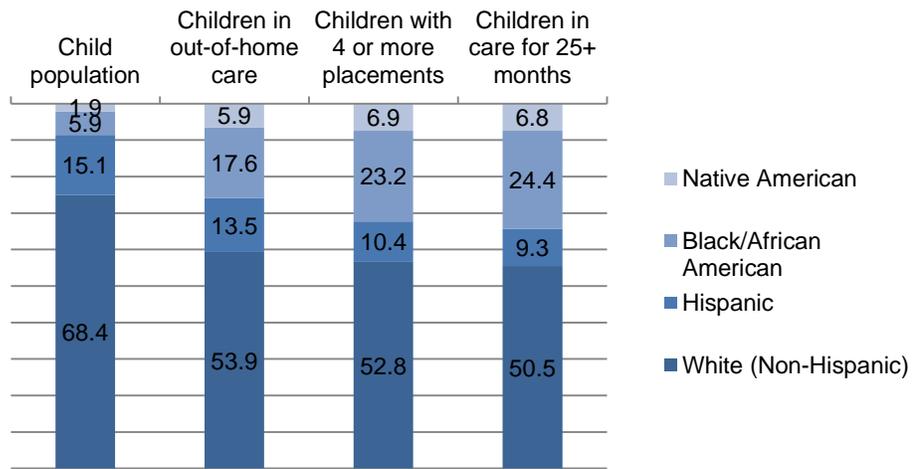
To: Members of the Judiciary Committee

From: Juliet Summers, Policy Coordinator – Child Welfare & Juvenile Justice

RE: Support for LB 566 – Change provisions of the Indian Child Welfare Act

All children in Nebraska deserve to grow up in a safe and loving home. Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 566, which changes provisions of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) to better provide culturally competent care to Indian children and families who come into contact with the child welfare system.

Although significant progress has been made in our state child welfare system in recent years, a particularly troubling issue persists in the data that requires our attention. **In 2013, Native American children, who make up less than 2% of the child population, accounted for nearly 6% of all children in out-of-home care, 7% of those with 4 or more placements, and 7% of those in care for over 2 years.**¹



LB 566 makes important clarifications to the ICWA that will enhance our state response to cases of abuse and neglect for children who are consistently overrepresented in the system. Connection to culture and family is a crucial part of overall well-being for children, and especially for Native American children in the child welfare system.² **When children cannot remain in their own homes with people that they know and trust, it is important to ensure that further trauma is minimized by engaging family and community connections with fidelity.**

The racial disparities present in our child welfare system today are a tragedy and demand special attention as we consider how to improve the safety, permanency, and well-being of all children. We respectfully urge the committee to advance this bill. Thank you.

¹ Kids Count in Nebraska 2014 Report. This data is likely an underrepresentation of the true number of Native children in out-of-home care, because it only captures children in NDHHS custody, excluding children overseen by Tribal Court authority.

² "Serving Native American/Alaska Native Children in Foster Care," CASA for Children, 2009.