



February 3, 2015

To: Members of the Judiciary Committee

From: Julia Tse, Child Welfare Policy Associate

Re: Support for LB 647 – Prohibit discrimination relating to child placement

Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 647 because it would ensure that all families willing to provide a loving and nurturing home for abused or neglected children in Nebraska are given fair consideration to serve as licensed foster care and adoptive placements.

When children must be removed from their homes, it is crucial to consider where they will live during a time of crisis and instability. About 43% of out-of-home placements are in foster and adoptive homes, and over 20% are in congregate care settings, ranging from emergency shelters to detention facilities.ⁱ In addition to being about 6-10 times more expensive than a foster family home, research shows that congregate placements are linked to increased juvenile justice involvement and conduct disorders.ⁱⁱ **Placement in a family-like setting provides children with improved outcomes in physical and emotional health; in 2013, there were only 1,770 licensed foster homes, but as of January 2015, there were 3,075 Nebraska children living in out-of-home care.**ⁱⁱⁱ

Ensuring that children are placed with families who can meet their needs is essential in reducing placement disruptions, which can exacerbate the various traumas often experienced by foster youth. Having too few homes force child welfare agencies to make placements based on what is available, rather than what is in the best interests of the child.^{iv} Due to overcrowding, safety concerns, and the inability of the current foster parent to provide the necessary emotional support, **a third of Nebraska children in care reviewed in June 2014 reported residing in 4 or more different placements throughout their lifetimes.**^v Studies show that children who are subjected to placement instability are at greater risk of behavioral and mental health problems, educational difficulties, and juvenile delinquency.^{vi} With an estimated 2 million adults in the U.S. interested in fostering and adoption, eliminating suitability barriers can prove to be a powerful resource to providing the best permanency options for children in care by expanding available options.^{vii}

Additionally, **LB 647 would prevent arbitrary and discriminatory practices. Nebraska is one of only two states that explicitly restrict foster placements on the basis of sexual orientation.**^{viii} Child welfare experts and medical authorities alike are in consensus that practices preventing same-sex fostering and parenting do not support the best interests of children, with most states reflecting this perspective in their policies.^{ix} Children in care come from diverse backgrounds and experiences, and so it is imperative to have foster parents from a cross-section of demographics to ensure that children are placed in homes that will nurture and support healthy development.

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LB 647 removes discriminatory barriers to licensure for families who otherwise have the knowledge, skills, capacity and experience to meet the needs of children in out-of-home care. We urge the committee to advance LB 647 as a key part of ensuring our most vulnerable children get the care and love they deserve.

ⁱ *Kids Count in Nebraska 2014 Report.*

ⁱⁱ Ryan, J.P. et al., *Juvenile Delinquency in Child Welfare: Investigating Group Home Effects*, Chicago: University of Illinois at Urbana, 2008.

ⁱⁱⁱ Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, *CFS Point in Time Report*, January 2015.

^{iv} John McMahon, "Foster Care Placement Disruptions in North Carolina," *Fostering Perspectives* 10(2005): 1.

^v *Nebraska Foster Care Review Office Annual Report*,

^{vi} Children and Family Research Center, "Multiple Placements in Foster Care: Literature Review of Correlates and Predictors," University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2005.

^{vii} Gates, G.G. et al., *Adoptions and Foster Care by Gay and Lesbian Parents in the United States*. Los Angeles: Williams Institute, 2007.

^{viii} "Adoption and Foster Care," Family Equality Council.

^{ix} See Child Welfare League of America, *Position Statement on Parenting of Children by Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Adults*; American Academy of Pediatrics, *Policy Statement: Promoting the Well-Being of Children Whose Parents Are Gay or Lesbian*; American Medical Association, *Resolution on Partner Co-Adoption*; American Psychiatric Association, *Position on Adoption and Co-parenting of Children by Same-sex Couples*; American Psychological Association, *Policy Statement, Sexual Orientation, Parents, and Children*; American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, *Policy Statement: Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Parents*; North American Council on Adoptable Children, *Position Statement: Gay and Lesbian Adoption and Foster Care*.