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January 22, 2014

To: Members of the Health and Human Services Committee

From: Sarah Forrest, Policy Coordinator – Child Welfare & Juvenile Justice

**Re: Support for LB 660 - Extending & Evaluating Case Management Pilot Project**

All of Nebraska's children deserve to grow up in safe, loving homes. Our child welfare system has a crucial role to play in ensuring all of Nebraska's children can thrive, by strengthening families and responding swiftly and thoughtfully when abuse or neglect does occur. Stable, quality case management is one factor which has been shown to have a positive impact on children and families, as well as child welfare system outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 660 because we believe it strengthens ongoing efforts to meaningfully and carefully reform our child welfare system. Extending and evaluating the Nebraska Families Collaborative's pilot project in the Eastern Service Area will positively impact the child welfare system in a number of ways:

**1. Ensuring Stability:** Only eighteen months ago, Nebraska's child welfare system was in chaos. A poorly financed statewide privatization effort meant caseworker turnover, loss of services in many parts of the state and widespread confusion. With the hard work and collaboration of many, including the Legislature, our system has been able to make progress on important measures with a period of case management stability. The passage of LB 561 last year has meant additional changes, and our system needs continued stability to minimize confusion.

**2. Gathering data:** LB 660 requires an independent evaluation that will allow Nebraska to assess case management performance and obstacles to providing effective services to children and families across the state. The evaluation will provide an important basis for future decisions on whether and how to shift Nebraska's semi-privatized case management and will provide important information on what additional changes are needed to ensure the best outcomes for children and families.

**3. Creating a solid foundation for ongoing reform efforts:** If Nebraska is to continue to see positive changes in the child welfare system, we need to make sure our focus is on the changes that will ensure the best outcomes for children and families. The largest positive outcomes for children and families come when states invest in building high-quality services that keep kids and families safely together whenever possible, reduce the trauma of foster care, and incentivize permanency. Nebraska's recent Title IV-E waiver gives our state an excellent opportunity to innovate carefully. Changes in case management at this juncture would take the focus away from these important efforts.

We urge you to advance LB 660 as part of a thoughtful, data-driven effort to continue the progress our state is making in caring for children and families.

<sup>1</sup> Well-trained caseworkers with manageable caseloads have been shown to have a positive impact on federal measures for safety, permanency, and well-being. "Caseload and Workload Management." Child Welfare Information Gateway. US DHHS: April 2010.