



7521 Main Street, Suite 103
Omaha, Nebraska 68127

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

www.voicesforchildren.com

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February 22, 2017

To: Chairwoman Ebke and Members of the Judiciary Committee

From: Juliet Summers, Policy Coordinator

Re: LB 411—Change Nebraska Juvenile Code provisions relating to placement of siblings

An effective child welfare system minimizes trauma to children and ensures that a child's safety, sense of stability, and overall well-being are at the center of every decision. When a child experiences the trauma of removal from home into a foster care placement, every effort should be made to foster and support permanent, strong family relationships. Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 411 as an important measure to keep siblings in foster care together and encourage sibling relationships that can provide vital support and stability.

In 2015, 65% of children in out-of-home care were placed with all siblings and 82% were placed with at least one sibling.¹ More children in Nebraska are now placed with their siblings in out-of-home care than in previous years, but we still have room for improvement. For children in foster care, siblings can be a great source of emotional support, comfort, stability, and continuity. Research has found that children who are placed with siblings face fewer behavioral problems and perform better in school.² By requiring that the Department of Health and Human Services report on reasonable efforts made to achieve sibling placement and facilitate sibling visitation, and by allowing siblings the right to intervene in juvenile court proceedings for the limited purposes of requesting joint placement, visitation and ongoing interaction, LB 411 would facilitate the benefits of stable sibling relationships. Even when joint placement itself is not possible or in the best interests of a child, ongoing interaction and opportunities to support the sibling relationship can be prioritized so that the relationship is not lost.

We thank Senator Bolz for her commitment to Nebraska's children and this Committee for your time and consideration. We respectfully urge you to advance this legislation.

¹ Voices for Children in Nebraska, *Kids Count in Nebraska 2016 Report*, 69. Available online at: www.kidscountnebraska.com.

² National Center for Youth Law, *Keeping Sibling Together: Past, Present, and Future*. <https://youthlaw.org/publication/keeping-siblings-together-past-present-and-future/>.