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March 13, 2017

To: Members of the Business and Labor Committee

From: Julia Tse, Policy Associate

RE: Support for LB 420 – Adopt the Fair Chance Hiring Act

Children need stability to thrive, and parents provide the foundation for child well-being. Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 420 because it removes a significant barrier to a strong family foundation for many Nebraska children who are already facing other adversities.

Ensuring that fair-chance employment policies are in place is an essential feature of a fair system that does not construct roadblocks when Nebraskans who were formerly incarcerated or convicted are walking the path to re-entry. Such barriers are counterproductive to strong communities and they are also harmful to the many children of parents who have a conviction history.

Children have paid a hidden and heavy cost for mass incarceration in our state. It is estimated that at least 41,000 Nebraska children, or nine percent of all children in our state, have had a parent in jail or prison at some time in their childhood. The loss of a parent under any circumstance is devastating, and the developmental science research tells us that there is much cause for concern. Without proper intervention, children who experience severe adversity and trauma in childhood suffer a lifetime of poor outcomes by a number of dimensions—physical and mental health, educational achievement, economic stability, and justice involvement.¹ Parental incarceration leaves a dramatic ripple effect on children and the communities in which they live.

There are many opportunities to ensure that children who have been affected by the justice system are positioned for long-term success. As a state, we can continue to invest in and support our children through the support systems on which they rely. Parental employment is crucial to household stability, and allows parents to be able to provide the love and care that every child needs. Challenges to meeting basic needs is the most basic barrier that children face when a parent is incarcerated or jailed, and LB 420 is an important first step to ensuring that such challenges do not continue upon re-entry.

We thank Senator McCollister for bringing this important issue forward and this committee for their time and consideration. We respectfully urge you to advance LB 420.

¹ Jack P. Shonkoff, et al, "The Lifelong Effects of Early Childhood Adversity and Toxic Stress," *Pediatrics* 129, no. 1 (2012):236.