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January 30, 2017

To: Members of the Education Committee

From: Kaitlin Reece, Policy Coordinator for Economic Stability and Health

**RE: Support for LB 428**

All children deserve a chance to grow up in a safe, supportive environment free from the stresses of hunger and poverty. Teen births are highly correlated with poverty and other negative outcomes including health problems, low educational attainment, and involvement in the foster care system and criminal justice system, with a cost to taxpayers of \$9.4 billion in one year alone.<sup>1</sup>

The first step to addressing this challenge is prevention and teen births in Nebraska are the lowest they've been in a decade. In 2015, there were 1,397 babies born to teen mothers. Of these, over 70% were born to mothers aged 18 or 19 years old.<sup>2</sup>

However, we still need to ensure that teen parents are given every opportunity to succeed and have a pathway out of poverty. For many, if not all, that pathway is education. Families in which a parent has received at least an associate's degree stand to earn on average \$30,000 more each year than families in which a parent does not have a high school diploma (\$32,906 vs \$75,399). For families with a parent who received a bachelor's degree, the difference is nearly \$78,000.<sup>3</sup> Sadly, only 38% of teen mothers who give birth before age 18 obtain their high school diploma and less than 2% of these mothers go on to receive a college degree by age 30.<sup>4</sup>

Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 428 because of its potential to help teen parents remain in school and graduate, giving these young families every chance to avoid a life mired in poverty. Voices for Children also supports the provision that requires the State Department of Education to develop a model policy for adoption by school districts. This requirement creates an important baseline for our state, ensuring that whether a teen parent attends school in Wisner or Omaha, they are given the same opportunities to succeed and thrive.

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<sup>1</sup> The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. "Counting it Up: The Public Costs of Teen Childbearing, Key Data." December 2013. Available online: <http://thenationalcampaign.org/sites/default/files/resource-primary-download/counting-it-up-key-data-2013-update.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Kids Count 2016. Available online at: <http://kidscountnebraska.com/>

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. Historical Income Tables: Families. Table F-18: Educational Attainment of Householder, Families with Householder 25 Years and Over by Median and Mean Income. Available online at <http://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-income-families.html>

<sup>4</sup> Van Pelt, Jennifer. "Keeping Teen Moms in School—A School Social Work Challenge." Social Work Today. Vol 12 No 2. Available online at <http://www.socialworktoday.com/archive/031912p24.shtml>