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March 22, 2017

To: Chairperson Ebke and Members of the Judiciary Committee

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

Re: Support for LB 560-Change restrictive housing and inmate discipline provisions

All youth in the juvenile justice system are entitled to receive rehabilitative services for a second chance to succeed. Outmoded and inhumane practices like the use of extended solitary confinement mar children's opportunity for rehabilitation and recovery. **Voices for Children supports LB560, because it eliminates the use of solitary confinement for vulnerable populations like young adults.**

Nebraskans are all too familiar with the damage that can be done by extended stays in solitary confinement. Isolation is particularly dangerous for children. While research has shown that solitary confinement has negative neurological and psychological effects on adults, such as depression, panic attacks, and anxiety,ⁱ this effect is magnified in juveniles, whose brain centers are still under construction.ⁱⁱ Teenagers need healthy social environments to grow into well-adjusted adults, and extended segregation from their peer community is linked to increased mental health concerns and heightened rates of suicide. A recent study found that half of young people in detention facilities who committed suicide were room-confined at the time.ⁱⁱⁱ For these reasons, the United Nations prohibits juvenile solitary confinement, and the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) opposes its use.^{iv} Other organizations who support the elimination of the use of solitary confinement for juveniles include the American Bar Association, American Psychological Association, and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.^v

Not only does solitary confinement damage juveniles' mental health, it also prevents them from receiving important rehabilitative services such as education or drug treatment, services that ensure these young people are given the best possible chance to succeed post-release.

Last year, the Legislature passed LB 894, which included reporting requirements for facilities who serve youth and utilize seclusion and isolation in their treatment and housing of youth in detention facilities. The data required under LB 894 has begun to flow back in, detailing not only common use of solitary confinement among juveniles in placements from Youth Rehabilitative and Treatment Center-Kearney to the Nebraska State Penitentiary, but also extended, repeat stays in a secluded setting. For example, one young woman spent over 286 hours, or 11 days, in solitary confinement at the Nebraska Correctional Center for Women.^{vi}

For these reasons, Voices for Children strongly encourages the Judiciary Committee to advance LB 560 for the full consideration of the Nebraska Unicameral and thank Senator Schumacher for introducing this important piece of legislation.

Sincerely,

Kaitlin Reece, Policy Coordinator

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- ⁱ Laura Dimon, "How Solitary Confinement Hurts the Teenage Brain," *The Atlantic* (2014), <http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2014/06/how-solitary-confinement-hurts-the-teenage-brain/373002>.
- ⁱⁱ MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Adolescent Development and Juvenile Justice, "Issue Brief 3: Less Guilty by Reason of Adolescence," accessed January 15, 2016, www.adjj.org/downloads/6093issue_brief_3.pdf.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Lindsay M. Hayes, *Juvenile Suicide in Confinement: A National Survey* (National Center of Institutions and Alternatives, 2004), accessed January 18, 2016, <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/grants/206354.pdf>.
- ^{iv} Juvenile Justice Reform Committee, "Solitary Confinement of Juvenile Offenders," American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, accessed January 15, 2015, https://www.aacap.org/aacap/policy_statements/2012/solitary_confinement_of_juvenile_offenders.aspx.
- ^v "Stop Solitary for Kids Fact Sheet." Stop Solitary for Kids Campaign, accessed March 20, 2017. <http://www.stopsolitaryforkids.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/SSK-Talking-Points-v6-Sept-2016.pdf>
- ^{vi} "Juvenile Room Confinement." Nebraska Correctional Center for Women, accessed March 20, 2017. http://nebraskalegisature.gov/FloorDocs/105/PDF/Agencies/Correctional_Services_Department_of/631_20170111-151254.pdf