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January 20, 2017

To: Chairman Watermeier and the Executive Board

From: Juliet Summers, Policy Coordinator for Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice

RE: LB 6—Provide for release of a summarized report by the Office of Inspector General of Nebraska Child Welfare and LB 207—Change provisions relating to powers and duties of the Office of Inspector General of Nebraska Child Welfare

All children deserve the best opportunities to become healthy and productive adults, and we must ensure that our state child protective system is working to enhance, rather than undercut, those opportunities. To that end, Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 6 and LB 207, both of which would allow the Office of the Inspector General of Child Welfare to continue to protect vulnerable children and improve our system response for all youth in our state's care.

The OIG collects vital information on child well-being and must be able to use this information to identify and correct systemic and structural issues. If the OIG is not permitted to release important findings more than once a year in an Annual Report, some issues of concern may not be highlighted and important concerns may not be addressed in a timely manner. LB 6 would allow the Inspector General to address critical issues as they arise, and the public to become aware of proposed solutions sooner, better protecting Nebraska's children.

An office that investigates when things have gone wrong, but keeps those investigations confidential and uses its power only to make recommendations to improve system response is a special tool. With this in mind, LB 207 would expand the OIG's power to make recommendations by ensuring that the OIG receives more complete information.

The Office of the Inspector General of Child Welfare serves an important and independent role in ensuring that all children involved with the child welfare and juvenile justice systems in our state are kept safe and given the proper supports and services that they need to succeed. Voices for Children supports these bills in the understanding that they will further the important work of the Inspector General.

We thank Senator Krist for his ongoing support for the Office of Inspector General of Child Welfare and this Committee for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Juliet Summers