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January 18, 2018

To: Chair Ebke and Members of the Judiciary Committee

From: Julia Tse, Policy Coordinator for Economic Stability and Health

RE: Support for LB 776 to provide requirements for inmate access to telephone or videoconferencing systems in county and city jails

All children need stable and loving relationships with adults that they can learn from and trust. Criminal justice reform has been at the center of discussion in recent years in Nebraska and across the country, and along with it, growing concern over what happens to children when their parents are incarcerated. Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 776 because it would ease one form of adversity that many Nebraska children experience during parental incarceration.

It is estimated that at least 41,000 Nebraska children have been impacted by parental incarceration, or 9% of all children in our state.ⁱ Last year, Voices for Children coordinated a series of listening sessions with Nebraskans who have been touched by parental incarceration. The loss of a parent to incarceration almost always sets in motion the loss of a source of income and the abrupt loss of a key figure in life. Though most parents and grandparents we spoke to said that budgets were tighter and there were fewer hands to help, they all understood the importance of maintaining contact between children and their parents, oftentimes making sacrifices or taking on second jobs to bear the added cost of contact.ⁱⁱ

The research confirms what many Nebraskans told us: the trauma of separation can never be undone, but there is much more that our state can do to reduce the harm that children experience during parental incarceration. Brain science on adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) shows that stressful events trigger strong and lifelong biological changes that produce poor outcomes in development, mental and physical health, and risk-taking behaviors. These effects only serve to exacerbate the difficulties of everyday life for many children—incarceration already disproportionately affects communities that are also low-income, high in crime and violence, and heavily under-resourced in their ability to provide necessary supports and services.

Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 776 because it is a first step in a key movement to ensure that criminal justice policy is informed by a long-term vision for the children who are left behind. The financial exploitation of a child's need to be in touch with their parent is immoral and short-sighted. Instead, we must support parents in their role so that they can continue to be a source of support, financial stability, and love upon their release from jail.

We thank this committee for their work and Senator McCollister for his commitment this issue. We respectfully urge you to advance LB 776. Thank you.

ⁱ The Annie E. Casey Foundation, *A Shared Sentence: The Devastating Toll of Parental Incarceration on Kids, Families, and Communities*, April 2016, available at: <http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-asharedsentence-2016.pdf>.

ⁱⁱ Voices for Children in Nebraska, "Left Behind by Justice: Children of Incarcerated Parents in Nebraska," March 2017, available at: <http://voicesforchildren.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/CIP-IB-2017.pdf>.