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February 12, 2018

To: Chairman Watermeier and members of the Executive Board
From: Juliet Summers, Policy Coordinator at Voices for Children in Nebraska
Re: LB 1078 – Require reporting on sexual abuse of children in care

All children deserve to be safe from harm, and it is the duty of the state to adequately safeguard those who have already experienced abuse or neglect and the trauma of removal from their home and family. Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 1078, because it would ensure that allegations of sexual abuse of children in care continue to be investigated and reported to the Legislature.

Even one child sexually assaulted while in the care and custody of our state would be a tragedy and an outrage. The Inspector General of Nebraska Child Welfare recently identified **50 verified cases over the past three years of sexual assault or abuse of children in the state's care and custody.**¹ Twenty-seven of those children were state wards or in residential placement. The other 23 were in adoptive or guardianship homes. Half of all those highlighted in the report were abused by caregivers. Unfortunately, these numbers are almost certainly an underrepresentation of the true number of children exploited while in the state's care. First, because there were other cases that the Inspector General found had been improperly screened out or not investigated properly.² Second, because the report did not include youth on probation who were not placed in facilities governed by the Division of Public Health.

In the report, the IG identified 18 recommendations to the Department of Health and Human Services to improve response to allegations of child sexual abuse, and seven action items for the broader child welfare system.³ It is vital that the office continue to investigate and report to the Legislature not only on the numbers of youth sexually abused while in care, but on the progress made regarding those recommendations. It is important that such investigation include youth on probation, who are also under the state's supervision. Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 1078, because it provides the appropriate statutory requirement and authority for the IG to do so.

We thank Senator Crawford for bringing forward this important legislation, and this Committee for your time and consideration. We strongly urge you to advance it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Juliet A. Summers".

Juliet A. Summers

¹ *Summary Report of Investigation: Sexual Abuse of State Wards, Youth in Adoptive or Guardian Homes, and Youth in Residential Facilities.* Office of the Nebraska Inspector General of Child Welfare. Reported July 2013 – October 2016.

² *Id.* at 2.

³ *Id.* at 73.