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February 12, 2018

Senator Groene, Chairman – Education Committee
Room 1525, Nebraska State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509

RE: Support for LB 901 - Adopt the Panhandle Beginnings Act to provide certain services to school-age children

Dear Chairman Groene and Members of the Education Committee,

Children are Nebraska's greatest resource, and we all benefit when all children have the opportunity to reach their full potential in adulthood. Voices for Children supports LB 801 because it eases barriers to school success for children who have mental health needs.

Brain development research shows that positive interactions with others and their environment in childhood shapes the foundation on which their brain architecture is built. When children experience stressful circumstances for a prolonged period of time, their brain's response systems to continued stress are fundamentally changed.ⁱ Without proper social support and treatment, these responses are manifested internally and externally, oftentimes in the form of increased risk-taking behavior. Mental and behavioral health issues often come to head in the classroom, and without the appropriate resources, children with these needs face significant barriers to academic success. In fact, it is estimated that 50% of students 14 years old and older with a mental illness drop out of high school, and as many as 70% of youth involved in our juvenile justice system have an identified mental disorderⁱⁱ

Adequate treatment of behavioral and mental health needs ensures that children are able to develop and function properly. However, barriers to access are significant for children and families, especially those living in rural counties. In 2017, 83 of Nebraska's 93 counties were identified as areas with a mental health professional shortage area.ⁱⁱⁱ Access in the Panhandle is particularly challenging, as families often must travel long distances for treatment.

LB 801 would begin to address a critical demand in our state by creating a day treatment center where children can access specialized educational programs that meet their mental health needs. We thank Senator Stinner for his leadership on this issue and the Committee for their time and consideration. We respectfully urge you to advance LB 801. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Julia Tse".

Julia Tse, Policy Coordinator

ⁱ "Adverse Childhood Experiences and the Lifelong Consequences of Trauma," American Academy of Pediatrics, 2014, https://www.aap.org/en-us/documents/ttb_aces_consequences.pdf.

ⁱⁱ "Mental Health Facts: Children and Teens," National Alliance on Mental Illness, <https://www.nami.org/getattachment/Learn-More/Mental-Health-by-the-Numbers/childrenmhfacts.pdf>.

iii "Health Provider Shortage Areas," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources & Services Administration Data Warehouse, <https://datawarehouse.hrsa.gov/topics/shortageAreas.aspx>.