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February 18, 2015

To: Members of the Health and Human Services Committee

From: Julia Tse, Child Welfare Policy Associate

RE: Support for LB 243 – Create a pilot project relating to family finding services

All children deserve loving and permanent relationships with adults that they can trust and learn from, especially as they transition into adulthood. Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 243, which implements a family finding pilot project.

The Family Finding model seeks to address the many challenges that foster youth face by engaging family members who are able to provide a lifelong support network. It is crucial that foster youth receive adequate supports and services that minimize trauma, and it is equally important to consider their needs in the way of social networks and connections. In addition to the trauma that led to their initial placement, children in foster care often experience additional stressors during their time in the system, the consequences of which we know to be long-lasting on physical and emotional well-being.

Research shows that **social support can both mediate and buffer the stressful experiences of maltreatment and placement, with foster youth who have stronger sources of support demonstrating better outcomes in mental and psychological health.**¹ Other studies focusing specifically on kinship foster placements show that **maintaining cultural and familial ties can produce improved outcomes in placement stability, behavioral and mental health, educational achievement, and overall well-being.**²

Family Finding programs across the country have shown positive effects on legal and emotional permanency.³ By expanding permanency options, whether in the form of a forever home or a lifelong source of support, the model is especially important for older youth or those who may be considered “hard to place.” **In 2013, 260 Nebraska youth “aged out” of the foster care system. Nearly 37% of youth who aged out had been in care for 3 years or more, and another 25% had been in care for 2-3 years.**⁴ Although our state foster care system has seen progress in recent years, youth who leave the system without a family represent a particularly vulnerable population that would benefit from family finding efforts.

¹ Salazar, A.M. et al, “Understanding Social Support’s Role in the Relationship between Maltreatment and Depression in Youth with Foster Care Experience,” *Child Maltreatment* 16(2), 2011.

² Winokur, M. et al, “Kinship Care for the Safety, Permanency, and Well-being of Children Removed from the Home for Maltreatment: A Systematic Review,” *Campbell Systematic Reviews* 2, 2012.

³ Vandivere, S. and Malm, K., “Family Finding Evaluations: A Summary of Recent Findings,” *Child Trends*, 2015.

⁴ *Kids Count in Nebraska 2014 Report*.

LB 243 presents an opportunity for Nebraska to utilize a national model to further our efforts in ensuring that all children in our state foster care system have the best opportunity to become happy and healthy adults. We want to thank Senator Bolz and the committee for their leadership on this issue and respectfully urge the committee to advance LB 243.