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March 2, 2015

To: Members of the Judiciary Committee

From: Juliet Summers, Policy Coordinator – Child Welfare & Juvenile Justice

RE: Support for LB 265 – Change provisions relating to juveniles and child welfare

All children deserve the best opportunities to grow into a healthy and productive adult, and when they come into the care of the state, it is crucial that our response is child- and family-focused. Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 265 and its proposed amendments, which would strengthen oversight of all children in out-of-home and create the Out-of-Home Data Pilot Project.

When children are removed from their homes, whether by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) or by court involvement, they may continue to experience significant trauma throughout their placement. Prior to the passage of LB 561 in 2013, Nebraska youth who came into contact with the juvenile justice system were often served by DHHS and consequently under appropriate oversight mechanisms in place for the child welfare system, namely through the Office of the Inspector General of Child Welfare (OIG) and the Foster Care Review Office (FCRO). LB 265 would maximize already existing resources in the state to ensure that all children who are removed from their homes are provided appropriate and adequate services and supports for future success.

Provisions of the bill also create the Out-of-Home Data Pilot Project under the FCRO. As a project that draws on cross-agency collaboration to enhance our data collection process on out-of-home placement, we believe that this pilot could serve to complement our existing data systems. Improved data analysis and collection is crucial to ensuring that our progress in policy and practice are reflected in the futures of children who are in out-of-home care today.

We thank Senator Campbell for her continued efforts and interest in the well-being of children in Nebraska and respectfully urge the Committee to advance LB 265 forward. Thank you.

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