



voices for children

IN NEBRASKA

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February 7, 2014

To: Members of the Revenue Committee

From: Sarah Forrest, Policy Coordinator – Child Welfare & Juvenile Justice

Re: Opposition to LB 813 – Preserving Funding for County Services for Children and Families

In Nebraska, we pride ourselves in having built “the Good Life” for our children and families. The high quality of life that we enjoy was not created overnight and did not happen by accident. Instead, the education, health care and other public systems that we enjoy today have been planned for and paid for by the taxpayers of the past at both the state and local level.

Voices for Children in Nebraska opposes LB 813 because it would negatively impact the provision of critical services to children and families at the county and local level. Ongoing reform of our child welfare and especially our juvenile justice system hinges on effective partnership and shared responsibility between county and state government. At 65 percent of agricultural land valuation, county governments will be slotted to lose nearly \$22 million in revenue, which would diminish their ability to provide needed services to our state’s children and families.¹

Last year the Legislature enacted LB 561 to ensure young people in our juvenile justice system are held accountable for their actions in effective ways, close to home. While there is some funding for counties to provide juvenile justice services, counties have had to pick up some additional costs to make the bill successful. Nebraska needs our county governments to continue to invest in effective juvenile justice services if we want to see better outcomes for children, families, and public safety.

An analysis of the expected impact of the change in agricultural land valuation by Open Sky Policy Institute reveals that some of our counties which are the most in need of juvenile justice services will be the most severely impacted by these proposed changes. Of the four counties with the highest rates of juvenile arrests in 2012 (Keya Paha, York, Hall and Buffalo), three are slotted to lose more than \$400,000 each, and the other will lose 6.8% of its operating budget.

Without effective programs in our communities, our state will continue to struggle with high juvenile incarceration rates that produce poor outcomes and are much more costly to taxpayers. We urge this committee to reject LB 813 and similar proposals that would likely result in a decrease in available services to our children and families.

¹ “Higher property taxes for most if Nebraska lowers agricultural land valuations,” Open Sky Policy Institute.