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January 22, 2014

To: Members of the Health and Human Services Committee
From: Sarah Forrest, Policy Coordinator – Child Welfare & Juvenile Justice
Re: Support for LB 853 – Implementing Bride to Independence Programming

Last year the Nebraska Legislature took an important step towards ensuring young adults in the child welfare system have the supports and services they need to successfully transition to adulthood. By extending programs to youth who would have previously “aged out” of the child welfare system, as well as subsidies for families who provide loving homes to youth age sixteen and older, the Legislature made a significant, positive investment that will help put young people on the road to success. Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 853 because it makes clarifications to LB 216 which will allow for better implementation of the Bridge to Independence Program.

As an active participant in the Young Adult Voluntary Services and Supports Advisory Committee, we are especially eager to see the clarifications that make it clear that guardianship subsidies will extend until the age of twenty-one. This will ensure that the program contains no disincentives to permanency and that families who provide young people a loving home in their older teen years will have additional supports to make their transition to adulthood successful.

Teenagers are more likely than younger children in the child welfare system to exit to a permanent guardianship. LB853 is an important piece of strengthening guardianship for older youth in care and the families of which they are a part. This bill complements LB 908, introduced this year by Senator Coash, which takes further steps to make sure that this form of permanency meets the best interests of children.

We would like to thank the Health and Human Services Committee for its important investments in young adults in our child welfare system last year, and encourage you to facilitate the program’s successful implementation with advancement of LB 853. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can provide any important information on extending guardianships.