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January 29, 2014

To: Members of the Judiciary Committee

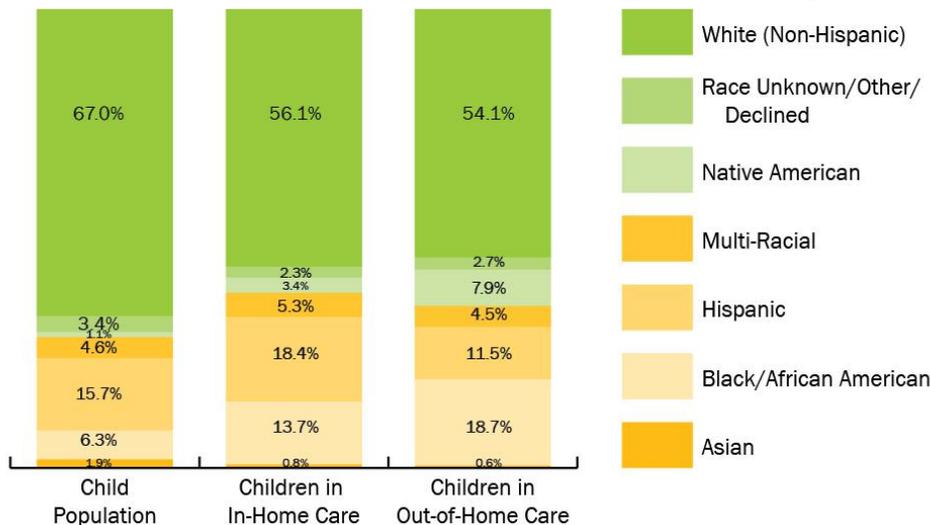
From: Sarah Forrest, Policy Coordinator – Child Welfare & Juvenile Justice

Re: Support for LB 928: Improvements to the Indian Child Welfare Act

Every child deserves to grow up in a safe and loving home. Our child welfare system is tasked with strengthening families to prevent abuse and neglect and responding thoughtfully and swiftly when this does occur. While Nebraska has made progress in reforming our child welfare system in recent years, there is still more work to do.

One issue in need of particular attention is the racial and ethnic disparities in our child welfare system. This is especially the case for Native American children, who although they only make up about 1 percent of the child population, made up nearly 8 percent of children in out-of-home care in 2012 (see chart below).¹

Children receiving in-home and out-of-home services by race & ethnicity (2012)



Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 928, which makes important clarifications to the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). It will enhance our state’s ability to provide culturally competent care to Indian children and families who come into contact with the child welfare system. Connection to culture and family is an integral part of children’s well-being, especially for Native American children in the child welfare system.² If children cannot safely remain at home, it is especially important to minimize the trauma of removal by maintaining connection to family and community.

We urge the committee to advance this bill as part of our state’s greater efforts to improve all of Nebraska’s children’s safety, permanency, and well-being and we thank you for your work on this important issue.

¹ Data reported in the 2013 Kids Count in Nebraska Report by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.

² “Serving Native American/Alaska Native Children in Foster Care,” CASA for Children, Winter 2009.