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January 26, 2017

To: Members of the Judiciary Committee  
From: Juliet Summers, Policy Coordinator for Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice  
**RE: LB 180—Provide for bridge orders transferring juvenile court jurisdiction of a juvenile to a district court**

An effective child welfare system minimizes trauma to children and families through timely avenues to permanency. Currently, children can spend lengthy periods as wards of the state even though they are safely in the care of a parent due to unnecessarily long court processes. A bridge custody order could shorten the amount of time a child spends as a ward of the state, reducing burdens on the time and resources of juvenile courts and the child welfare system. Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 180 as an effective process for removing children who are safely in the custody of a capable parent from the child welfare system.

When a child is safely placed with one legal parent by the juvenile court, a bridge custody order would transfer the case to district court, allowing the child welfare case to close more quickly. The majority of child welfare cases in Nebraska end in reunification with a parent.<sup>1</sup> However, in SFY 2015, 13.8% of child welfare cases opened after 2011 had taken over 18 months to close.<sup>2</sup> Some of these children would certainly have been positively affected by the proposed change that LB 180 makes to the law, allowing cases that ultimately close in reunification with a parent to close more quickly.

Additionally, faster case closures would reduce heavy burdens on caseworkers and the courts. The children that would receive bridge custody orders are safe in a permanent home and do not need to be in the child welfare system—every child that is on someone's caseload and doesn't need to be there is a drain on child welfare and court resources that could be used to keep other children safe. The best way to decrease child welfare caseloads is to support approaches that allow children to remain in safe homes and limit state involvement when it is unnecessary.

We thank Senator Bolz for her commitment to bettering the lives of children in Nebraska and urge the Committee to advance this bill.

Sincerely,

Juliet Summers

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<sup>1</sup> Kids Count 2016. Available online at: <http://kidscountnebraska.com/child-welfare/>.

<sup>2</sup> Nebraska Court Improvement Project, Through the Eyes of the Child Initiative. *Statewide Child Welfare & Juvenile Justice Trend Analysis*. January 2016.