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February 15, 2018

**To:** Chairman Riepe and members of the Health and Human Services Committee  
**From:** Juliet Summers, Policy Coordinator at Voices for Children in Nebraska  
**Re:** **LB 1041 – Require training for foster care licensees regarding child sexual assault**

All children deserve to be safe from harm, and it is the duty of the state to adequately safeguard those who have already experienced abuse or neglect and the trauma of removal from their home and family. Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 1041, because it would provide an added layer of protection against potential sexual abuse of vulnerable children, by requiring specific training to prospective foster care parents.

Even one child sexually assaulted while in the care and custody of our state would be a tragedy and an outrage. The Inspector General of Nebraska Child Welfare identified **50 verified cases over the most recent three years of sexual assault or abuse of children in the state's care and custody. 27 of those children were state wards or in residential placement. The other 23 were in adoptive or guardianship homes. Half of all those highlighted in the report were abused by caregivers.** Additionally, there were other cases that the Inspector General found had been improperly screened out or not investigated properly.<sup>1</sup> All of the foregoing highlights the need for training in our providers as a basic, initial step: how to hear what youth in their care are telling them, how to identify the signs of sexual abuse or predation when youth aren't speaking, and how to respond swiftly and appropriately with what resources we have to offer.

A child who has suffered abuse or neglect, who has been taken from their home and family, who is a ward of the state, should never have to suffer the additional trauma of sexual abuse, nor deal with its lifelong consequences alone and without support. Foster care is meant to be a safe haven; not a place where traumas are compounded. To that end, Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 1041 as an important first step toward ensuring that the number of children sexually assaulted while in care goes from 50 to zero.

We thank Senator Wishart for bringing forward this important legislation, and this Committee for your time and consideration. We strongly urge you to advance it

Sincerely,

Juliet A. Summers

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<sup>1</sup>Summary Report of Investigation: Sexual Abuse of State Wards, Youth in Adoptive or Guardian Homes, and Youth in Residential Facilities. Office of the Nebraska Inspector General of Child Welfare. Reported July 2013 – October 2016.