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February 14, 2018

Senator Ebke, Chair – Judiciary Committee  
Room 1113, Nebraska State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509

**RE: Support for LB 836 – Provide for minors' consent to certain mental health services as prescribed**

Dear Chair Ebke and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

Our state's prosperity is determined by our ability to support the well-being of the next generation of Nebraskans. Access to mental health services is critical to the foundation of child development. Voices for Children supports LB 836 because it ensures that children are able to seek mental health services when needed.

Access to mental health assessment and treatment for children is serious and growing need in Nebraska. Mental health issues affect many Nebraska children and often impairs their ability to function. An estimated 39,080 Nebraska children face a mental or behavioral health condition needing treatment.<sup>i</sup>

Voices for Children believes that parents and guardians should be engaged in the process of developing an effective mental health treatment plan for their children. However, we also realize that there may be significant barriers to getting to the diagnosis and evaluation of mental health disorders among children. Research shows that some of the barriers to mental health services include (1) structural barriers, such as lack of providers, inability to pay, and transportation challenges; (2) barriers to perceptions about the severity of mental health problems among adults in a child's life, and (3) barriers to perception about mental health services, such as a lack of trust in providers or perceived stigma.<sup>ii</sup> Many families, especially those with financial stress or single-parent households may not have the bandwidth to facilitate proper mental health treatment for their children.

LB 836 eases this barrier by allowing children to seek help on their own if they so desire. The limited nature of the minor's consent without involvement from a parent or guardian also provides an opportunity for a licensed professional to engage with parents about any need for continued treatment and services.

We thank Senator Howard for her leadership on this issue and this committee for their time and consideration. We respectfully urge you to advance LB 836. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Julia Tse".

Julia Tse, Policy Coordinator

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<sup>i</sup> 2017 Kids Count in Nebraska Report, Voices for Children in Nebraska, 34,  
<http://kidscountnebraska.com/health/#behavioralhealth>.

<sup>ii</sup> Pamela L. Owens et al., "Barriers to Children's Mental Health Services," *American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 41, no. 6 (2002):731-738