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February 12, 2018

To: Chairman Watermeier and members of the Executive Board
From: Juliet Summers, Policy Coordinator at Voices for Children in Nebraska
Re: LR 288 – to create the Child Welfare Death & Sexual Abuse Oversight Committee of the Legislature

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 LR 288, because the deaths and sexual abuse of children in care deserve the scrutiny of the legislative branch. This body, as much as the executive branch, has a duty to ensure it stops now.

In recent days, I have testified before other committees in the legislature on several bills responding to the outrages children have experienced in our system, and each time, the information feels like a punch to the gut. Even one child death or sexual assault while under the state's protection would be a tragedy. In recent years, Nebraska has witnessed many. The Inspector General of Nebraska Child Welfare has identified **50 verified cases over the most recent three years of sexual assault or abuse of children in the state's care and custody.**¹ That office has also investigated **32 deaths or serious injuries of children involved in our child welfare or juvenile justice systems since the start of FY 2015.**² These numbers are intolerable, and every effort must be made to remedy the systemic factors that underlie them.

Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LR 288, because this body has a duty of care to the children of our state, just as the executive branch agency does. External oversight is necessary and should be welcomed when flaws in the system add up to tragedies. To that end, Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 288, in the hope that this will be the year the Inspector General has zero child deaths or sexual abuses to investigate.

We thank Senator Bolz for bringing this resolution, and the Board for your time and consideration. We strongly urge you to advance it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Juliet A. Summers". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Juliet A. Summers

¹ *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.

² *Annual Report: 2015-2016 & 2016-2017.* Office of the Nebraska Inspector General of Child Welfare.