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February 21, 2018

To: Chair Ebke and Members of the Judiciary Committee
From: Juliet Summers, Policy Coordinator for Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice
RE: Letter of support for LB 981, to authorize court jurisdiction to 21 with consent of the juvenile

We all benefit when youth are well-supported in transitioning to healthy adulthood. Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 981, because it will provide a safety net for a small number of youth involved in the juvenile justice system who desire and would benefit from extended court oversight.

In SFY 2015-2016, there were 271 youth placed on juvenile probation at age 18, and 374 total 18-year-olds who were supervised by juvenile probation at some point in the year.¹ Under the current law, court jurisdiction cuts off automatically when a youth turns nineteen, regardless of whether or not she has completed the terms of her probation, finished a course of court-ordered treatment, or otherwise successfully rehabilitated herself.

Imagine a seventeen year old charged with substance possession. An overloaded juvenile court docket means she isn't formally adjudicated on the charge until she is almost eighteen. The judge orders a chemical dependency evaluation; getting that completed and returning to court takes another few months. The evaluation recommends a course of outpatient treatment. It takes a little while for her probation officer to help her mom find an available provider, work out the payment, set up transportation, and get her started in treatment. Most addicted people need at least three months in treatment to really stop or reduce their drug addiction, and longer treatment periods result in better outcomes.² By the time she is starting her treatment, this young woman has barely any time to reap its benefits and turn herself around.

LB 981 would provide a little breathing room for young adults like this one. Because the bill requires that any extensions of jurisdiction be voluntary, it is unlikely to affect more than a handful of cases each year. The impact would be limited to those cases where everyone, including the young person, is in agreement with continued probation oversight. **I would recommend an amendment to ensure that the agreement is limited to a specific term or particular treatment plan, so that a one-time agreement does not open the door to continuing jurisdiction for years without a specific, identified plan to be pursued.**

Offering the opportunity to fully complete a rehabilitative plan is good policy, both for the youth who is asking for help, and for the community that will reap the benefit of a fully rehabilitated young adult. We thank Senator Baker for bringing this bill, and would respectfully urge the Committee to advance it.

Sincerely,

Juliet Summers

¹ *Juvenile Services Division Fiscal Year 2015-2016 Detailed Analysis*. Nebraska Judicial Branch.

² *Principles of Adolescent Substance Use Disorder Treatment: a Research-Based Guide*. National Institutes on Drug Abuse. January 2014.