



7521 Main Street, Suite 103
Omaha, Nebraska 68127

(402) 597-3100
www.voicesforchildren.com

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Eric Johnson
President

Katie Weitz, PhD
Vice President

Lorraine Chang, JD
Secretary

Bruce Meyers
Treasurer

Amy Boesen
Gary Bren
Wes Cole, MBA
Al Davis
Jeremy Fitzpatrick, JD
Aaron Ford, MBA, MSW
Noah Greenwald, JD
Gatsby Gottsch Solheim, JD
Susan Mayberger, MA
Dulce Sherman, MA
John Stalnaker, JD

Aubrey Mancuso, MSW
Executive Director

February 8, 2019

To: Chairman Lathrop & Members of the Judiciary Committee
From: Juliet Summers, Policy Coordinator for Child Welfare & Juvenile Justice
Re: Support for LB 389 as amended by AM 209, to change provisions relating to termination of parental rights

Our child welfare system should function to strengthen families and minimize trauma to children through swift and thoughtful action. Voices for Children in Nebraska supports the white paper copy of LB 389, as an overdue update to our statute governing termination of parental rights (TPR).

In 2017, just over half (50.7%) of all children exited foster care by reunifying with their original families.¹ This is good but could be better, because family reunification, if possible, is the best outcome for children, and meaningful family engagement, assessment, case planning, and service delivery are key in achieving stable and successful reunification.² To that end, we had a concern with the introduced bill's provision shortening the timeline to TPR for children under age four. We appreciate Senator Howard's willingness to compromise by removing that provision, and we look forward to working together on solutions to speed the process to permanency for children in their tender, bonding years.

Where family reunification is not possible due to risk or safety needs, however, children deserve swift and thoughtful action in moving to an alternative permanency plan. To that end, we support LB 389's inclusion of a parent or co-parent's prior sexual assault, labor trafficking, or sex trafficking of another minor child as a ground for TPR without requiring reasonable efforts to reunify the family first. Removing the ground "unfit by reason of debauchery" modernizes our statute, and the replacement language is clearer and more concrete in what must be proven to show a parent's substance use or abuse rises to the level requiring TPR.

We know there is much work still to be done to achieve timely permanency for children lingering in limbo in our child welfare system, but LB 389 is a sound step in the right direction for children who cannot find permanency through family reunification.

I would like to thank Senator Howard for taking on this issue on behalf of Nebraska's vulnerable children. I would also like to thank the Committee for your time and consideration, and for all your hard work on behalf of our state's children.

¹ Voices for Children in Nebraska. *Kids Count in Nebraska Report, 2018*. p 76

² *Family Reunification: What the Evidence Shows*. Child Welfare Information Gateway Issue Brief: June 2011. Available at https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/family_reunification.pdf