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February 13, 2019

**To:** Chairman Lathrop and Members of the Judiciary Committee  
**From:** Juliet Summers, Policy Coordinator at Voices for Children in Nebraska  
**Re:** **Neutral letter from Voices for Children on LB 651 – Change funding provisions for the Community-based Juvenile Services Aid Program**

An investment in kids is an investment in Nebraska's future, and children deserve the most effective services that we can afford. Voices for Children in Nebraska is a strong supporter of the Legislature's investment in our state's kids through the Community Based Juvenile Services Aid fund. This fund is one the most forward-thinking uses of our state revenue, targeted to avoid greater costs down the line from incarceration and recidivism. Through it, Nebraska communities can plan and provide for the unique needs of their youth and families in an effective way to keep children out of detention and the court system.

Counties and tribes (or groups of counties and/or tribes) are required to submit a three-year comprehensive juvenile services plan in order to be eligible to receive funding through the program. These plans must be developed by a community team of juvenile justice stakeholders, be data-based including an examination of disproportionate minority contact, and identify research-based policies and practices that demonstrate positive outcomes, implementation strategies, and measurement of proposed impact.<sup>1</sup> The aid is distributed through a formula based on number of juvenile residents, and is intended to prioritize programs and services that divert youth from the juvenile justice system, reduce the population of youth in juvenile detention, and assist in transitioning youth from out-of-home placements.<sup>2</sup>

Direct services provided to youth are almost always going to have the greatest impact when it comes to prioritizing the use of this funding, and we laud Senator Wayne for his interest in ensuring the investment is targeted toward serving kids. However, we are all too aware of the reality that in many areas of our state, little or no infrastructure exists to carry out the intent of the Legislature through comprehensive planning or administration of the grant program. Strictly limiting use of the fund to direct services may have the unintended consequence of hamstringing or even eliminating efforts undertaken in rural counties to get juvenile justice reform off the ground. That would be a loss to the children of those counties.

We appreciate the intent of LB 651, and would be happy to collaborate with Senator Wayne and the Committee to craft an amendment avoiding unintended consequences to Nebraska kids. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Juliet Summers".

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<sup>1</sup> *Neb. Rev. Stat.* 43-2404.01

<sup>2</sup> *Neb. Rev. Stat.* 43-2404.02