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March 25, 2019

To: Chairman Stinner and Members of the Appropriations Committee

From: Julia Tse, Policy Coordinator for Economic Stability and Health

RE: Support for LB 327 - State intent to appropriate funds for an increase in rates paid to behavioral health service providers

Access to timely and appropriate behavioral health services ensures that children have the best start in life and can become healthy and productive adults. Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 327 because it ensures that children and families can access a robust system of behavioral health services.

It is estimated that 44,543 Nebraska children have a behavioral or mental health condition that requires treatment.ⁱ The erosion of reimbursement rates to behavioral health providers in Nebraska exacerbates the many barriers that children face in accessing appropriate treatment. In 2018, 81 of Nebraska's 93 counties were identified as areas with a mental health professional shortage.ⁱⁱ

Early treatment of behavioral health issues ensures children are on-track developmentally and can reach their full potential in adulthood. Early identification and treatment of behavioral health needs gives children the best start to life and can prevent more costly interventions later in life, particularly in our state child welfare system. In 2017, a child's behavioral problem, alcohol or drug abuse, or disability, was identified as a reason for removing a child from their home and into out-of-home care nearly 350 times.

LB 327 brings reimbursement rates to behavioral health providers through Medicaid and the Probation Administration closer to the cost of care. Both programs currently provide critical access to services for children and youth in Nebraska. **Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) connected 27,254 Nebraska children to mental health and substance abuse services** in FY 2017.ⁱⁱⁱ During the same year, **1,281 Nebraska youth served by juvenile probation received financial assistance for treatment services**, and a monthly average of **141 youth were placed out-of-home in a congregate treatment facility**.^{iv}

We thank Senator Bolz for her leadership on this issue and the members of this committee for their time and consideration. We respectfully urge you to advance LB 327.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Julia Tse", is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Julia Tse, Policy Coordinator

ⁱ *Kids Count in Nebraska 2018 Report*, Voices for Children in Nebraska, <http://kidscountnebraska.com>.

ⁱⁱ “Health Provider Shortage Areas,” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources & Services Administration Data Warehouse, <https://datawarehouse.hrsa.gov/topics/shortageAreas.aspx>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Data obtained from the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.

^{iv} “Juvenile Services Division Fiscal Year 2017-2018 Detailed Analysis,” Administrative Office of Probation, Juvenile Services Division, 2018, https://supremecourt.nebraska.gov/sites/default/files/files/14/12.2018_Juvenile_Detailed_Analysis.pdf.