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March 7, 2019

**To:** Chairman Howard and Members of the Health & Human Services Committee  
**From:** Juliet Summers, Policy Coordinator at Voices for Children in Nebraska  
**Re:** **LB 332 – Change eligibility requirements and other provisions of the Young Adult Bridge to Independence Act**

Youth who have been involved in our child welfare system deserve access to ongoing support in maintaining safety, well-being, and stability. This is particularly important for young people exiting our child welfare system on the cusp of adulthood who have not found permanency in a lifelong family. The sudden transition from structural supports to complete independence can be a difficult path to navigate safely. Thankfully, Nebraska has an excellent extended foster care program in Bridge to Independence (a.k.a. "Bridge" or "b2I") to assist young adults navigate between foster care and independent adulthood. Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 332 because it will include additional, similarly-situated young people in the program, while providing statutory clarifications that will eliminate or resolve certain fiscal complications the program has faced.

I have been privileged to sit on the Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee, which is tasked with monitoring the program and making recommendations for improvements. One of our statutory imperatives is to develop specific recommendations for expanding the program to similar groups of at-risk young adults.<sup>1</sup> Though to be clear I am not representing the committee here today, by my reading, LB 332 represents the direct recommendations we have made,<sup>2</sup> approved through the Nebraska Children's Commission, to include young adults experiencing disrupted guardianships as a similar "at-risk" population. Additionally, there are some clean-up provisions in the bill and amendment, hammered out between the advisory committee, Children's Commission, and the Department, which we hope should allow us to draw down more federal child welfare reimbursement for program participants through Title IV-E. There are also provisions aimed at fiscal responsibility, balancing the desire of all parties to maximize inclusion in the program with the necessity of prioritizing the program for young people who most need and will benefit from it.

The work of the advisory committee is by no means complete, and I am sure I will be back before this committee in future talking about Bridge, as we look at further expansions and ways to make the transition to adulthood better supported for the deserving young adults coming out of our child-serving systems without supportive family structures to fall back on.

I'd like to thank Senator Bolz for being a constant champion of this program and Nebraska's unconnected young adults, and this Committee for your time and dedication to improving our systems for all children. I would urge you to advance LB 332.

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<sup>1</sup> *Neb. Rev. Stat.* 43-4513(1)

<sup>2</sup> Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee. *Annual Report 2018*. Available at: [http://www.childrens.nebraska.gov/PDFs/Reports/B2I/B2i%20Advisory%20Committee%20Report%20\(Final\)%202018.pdf](http://www.childrens.nebraska.gov/PDFs/Reports/B2I/B2i%20Advisory%20Committee%20Report%20(Final)%202018.pdf)

