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March 15, 2019

To: Chairman Lathrop and Members of the Judiciary Committee
From: Juliet Summers, Policy Coordinator at Voices for Children in Nebraska
Re: LB 458 – change provisions related to child abuse and neglect

Dear Chairman Lathrop and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

When children experience abuse and neglect, it is important that our state's response be swift, child-focused, and minimize subsequent trauma. Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 458, which would make a number of clarifications and changes to ensure appropriate investigation and ongoing treatment team recommendations for difficult cases through accredited Child Advocacy Centers (CACs) in our state.

The nationally-accredited CACs in Nebraska provide invaluable services to our state's most vulnerable children. When children are brought to a CAC, their physical, emotional, and psychological needs are supported and met by a multidisciplinary and highly trained team. In cases of maltreatment, our state has a responsibility to provide trauma-informed and coordinated services that seek to keep children safe. Voices for Children supports LB 458, because it provides statutory parameters that will ensure children receive appropriate referrals to CAC multidisciplinary investigation and treatment teams.

We would offer two recommendations, which I have shared in advance of the hearing with Senator Lathrop and his staff:

1. Children do best in their own home whenever we can maintain for safety with appropriate services. In this regard, we would note that the definition on page 3, lines 11-20, of "drug-endangered child" is quite broad, and the language of "is at risk of ... harm or neglect ... including harm resulting from inhalation, ingestion, or absorption" could describe any child in any home where, for instance, marijuana is smoked or simply possessed - even if the parent never imbibes around the child or at all - because there is always a "risk of" absorption even if that risk never materializes.

Coupling this broad definition with the requirement on page 9, lines 17-18 and 30, "law enforcement *shall notify and share* with the local child advocacy center *any report* involving allegations of ... a drug-endangered child" this broad definition could produce a massive influx of required reports to CACs for cases which may not require that level of investigation and could be best served with a lighter touch. To this end, we would recommend closely examining and tightening the language in the definition of drug-endangered child.

2. Our child welfare system produces significantly disparate outcomes for children based on race and ethnicity, and the data makes clear that we don't always get our system response right for children to achieve timely stability, safety and permanency. One solution is to infuse inclusivity, diversity, and lived experience into decision-making bodies wherever possible. There are already sections of the bill highlighting disparity and

disproportionality in our child serving response and encouraging training and consultation for multidisciplinary team members, and these provisions are a strength of LB 458. We would propose further commitment to inclusion by adding required membership to multidisciplinary treatment teams reflective of racial and ethnic communities that are disproportionately affected by our child-serving systems, and individuals with lived experience in those systems.

Voices for Children would be happy to assist in any way, should the Committee be willing to consider these recommendations. I would like to thank Chairman Lathrop for his work in bringing this issue forward, and the Judiciary Committee for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Juliet Summers". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".