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March 21, 2019

To: Chairman Stinner and Members of the Appropriations Committee
From: Juliet Summers, Policy Coordinator at Voices for Children in Nebraska
Re: **LB 703 – appropriate funds to the Community Based Juvenile Services Aid Program**

An investment in kids is an investment in Nebraska's future. Voices for Children in Nebraska strongly supports the Legislature's investment in our state's youth through the Community Based Juvenile Services Aid fund and would urge you to advance LB 703 and incorporate this additional appropriation into your final budget package.

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 in an effective way to keep them out of detention and the court system whenever possible. The aid is distributed to counties through a formula based on number of juvenile residents, and prioritizes 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.¹

Notably, our juvenile arrest rate and detention admissions have dropped dramatically in recent years. **The total number of youth admitted to detention centers in 2017 was 1,614 – down from 3,930 in 2011.**² This fund is not alone responsible for the drop, but it is a vital piece of the puzzle – it is Nebraska's investment in communities to cover up-front costs that prevent greater fiscal impacts down the line. Successful completion of diversion is far less expensive than even the shortest court case. Since overuse of detention is linked to increased recidivism in juvenile and adult systems,³ investing in alternatives to detention to keep kids and communities safe is crucial to our bottom line.

To this end, I would combine my testimony on this bill with a broader comment about the Agency 78 (Crime Commission) budget and thank you for putting more money back into the fund in your initial report than was recommended in the agency budget. Recognizing it is a difficult fiscal climate, I hope you'll consider incorporating this bill to increase the pot of funding, or at the least, not implementing the 4% cut to this fund. We know that getting our system response right for youth in juvenile justice pays dividends in reduced recidivism down the line.

¹ *Neb. Rev. Stat.* 43-2404.02

² Data provided by individual detention centers. Published in *Kids Count Nebraska 2018* and *Kids Count Nebraska 2012*, respectively.

³ Barry Holman & Jason Ziedenberg. *The Dangers of Detention: The Impact of Incarcerating Youth in Detention and Other Secure Facilities*. Justice Policy Institute: available online at http://www.justicepolicy.org/images/upload/06-11_rep_dangersofdetention_jj.pdf

As our state edges ever closer to a crisis in our adult correctional system, every dollar spent in diverting youth away from criminal behavior and into positive community supports is a dollar we won't regret. I'd like to thank Senator Vargas for his tireless commitment to Nebraska youth, and this committee for your time and consideration.