



7521 Main Street, Suite 103  
Omaha, Nebraska 68127

(402) 597-3100  
www.voicesforchildren.com

#### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Eric Johnson  
*President*

Katie Weitz, PhD  
*Vice President*

Lorraine Chang, JD  
*Secretary*

Bruce Meyers  
*Treasurer*

Amy Boesen  
Gary Bren  
Wes Cole, MBA  
Al Davis  
Jeremy Fitzpatrick, JD  
Aaron Ford, MBA, MSW  
Noah Greenwald, JD  
Gatsby Gottsch Solheim, JD  
Susan Mayberger, MA  
Dulce Sherman, MA  
John Stalnaker, JD

Aubrey Mancuso, MSW  
*Executive Director*

March 28, 2019

**To:** Chairman Stinner and Members of the Appropriations Committee  
**From:** Juliet Summers, Policy Coordinator at Voices for Children in Nebraska  
**Re:** **LB 326 – Appropriate funds to the Department of Health & Human Services**

Our state systems should be structured to ensure that every child has an equal opportunity to grow up safe, healthy, and valued, and the state's response to child maltreatment or youthful misbehavior should not be dictated by a child or family's race or ethnicity. Voices for Children supports LB 326 as an important foundational step to reduce disparities and disproportionality in our child welfare system.

**Research shows that families of color are no more likely to abuse or neglect their children than White families, within similar income groups.**<sup>1</sup> However, African American and American Indian children are involved in child protection systems, including in Nebraska, at a rate that is disproportionate to their presence in the general population. Numerous studies have shown that racial disparities occur at various decision points in the child welfare continuum.<sup>2</sup> In Nebraska, White, non-Hispanic youth make up 69.4% of our total youth population (age 0-17); 14.5% are White, Hispanic; 6.6% are multi-racial or non-White Hispanic; 5.7% are Black/African American; 2.6% Asian/Pacific Islander; and 1.1% American Indian or Alaska Native.<sup>3</sup> **However, children of color are more likely to enter the child welfare system than white, non-Hispanic children. And once involved with the child welfare system, children of color in Nebraska are also more likely to be removed from their homes<sup>4</sup>, spend longer periods of time in out-of-home care and experience greater placement instability.<sup>5</sup>** Because the impacts of childhood trauma – including those caused by the system response itself - can last for a lifetime, the social cost of this inequity is devastating to children of color, their families, their communities, and society.

Over the course of the summer and fall, listening sessions were held pursuant to Senator Howard's interim study LR 418, examining disproportionality in our state child-serving systems. One of the baseline recommendations flowing from those listening sessions with individuals and families who had direct experience of the system led to the idea behind this bill: training in cultural competency and race equity isn't the only solution to a layered societal problem, but it is an important foundation. Dismantling system barriers to racial and ethnic equity is necessary to improve our child welfare system for each innocent child it touches. We are grateful to Senator Quick for sponsoring LB 326, and would respectfully urge the Committee to advance it and incorporate this appropriation into your final budget package.

---

<sup>1</sup> Dettlaff, A. J., Rivaux, S. L., Baumann, D. J., Fluke, J. D., Rycraft, J. R., & James, J. (2011). *Disentangling substantiation: The influence of race, income, and risk on the substantiation decision in child welfare*. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33(9), 1630-1637.

<sup>2</sup> Kruse, K. S. (2013). *Differences in racially disproportionate reporting of child maltreatment across report sources*. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, 7, 351-369.

<sup>3</sup> Voices for Children. *Kids Count in Nebraska Report 2018*, p 72.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> *Id.* at 75