



7521 Main Street, Suite 103
Omaha, Nebraska 68127

(402) 597-3100
www.voicesforchildren.com

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Bruce Meyers
President

Amy Boesen
Vice President

Lorraine Chang, JD
Secretary

Michael Beverly, Jr.
Treasurer

Gary Bren
Wes Cole, MBA
Al Davis
Noah Greenwald, JD
Gatsby Gottsch Solheim, JD
Eric Johnson
Susan Mayberger, MA
Melanie Morrissey Clark
Edelweiss Rothe
Dulce Sherman, MA
John Stalnaker, JD
Charlie Stephan
Katie Weitz, PhD

Aubrey Mancuso, MSW
Executive Director

January 29, 2020

To: Chairman Lathrop and Members of the Judiciary Committee
From: Juliet Summers, Policy Coordinator for Child Welfare & Juvenile Justice
Re: **LB 924 – Change provisions relating to racial profiling and require law enforcement training**

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. Unfortunately, children of color, particularly African American and American Indian youth, are overrepresented in nearly all juvenile justice systems across the country, and Nebraska is no different.

In Nebraska, Black/African American youth make up only 5.9% of the total youth population, but in 2018 represented 22.9% of youth arrested by law enforcement. Similarly, only 1.1% of the total Nebraska youth population are American Indian or Alaska Native but in 2018, they represented 2.4% of youth arrests.¹ Because the impacts of a system response such as arrest can last for a lifetime, the social cost of this inequity can be devastating to children of color, their families, their communities, and society. We must do everything we can to ensure it is a fair reflection of truly dangerous behavior, rather than informed or influenced by individual biases.

In the fall of 2018, Senator Howard sponsored an interim study, LR 418, which examined disproportionality and disparity in our child-serving systems. Over the course of this study, listening sessions were held statewide to engage youth and families regarding their experiences of the child welfare and justice systems. One of the baseline recommendations flowing from those listening sessions was to require training in implicit bias, cultural competency, and race equity in the frontline workers and system stakeholders who make life-changing decisions regarding youth every day. LB 924 is a natural extension of that recommendation to law enforcement officials, who are frequently the first point of system contact for families. This bill isn't the only solution to layered and deeply embedded societal problem, but it is an important foundation. Dismantling system barriers to racial and ethnic equity is necessary to improve our justice system for every youth it touches. Training in implicit bias is important for all who work within that system.

I'd like to thank Senator Chambers for bringing this bill, and to thank the members of the committee for your time, attention, and commitment to all children in Nebraska.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Juliet Summers".

Juliet Summers

¹ Kids Count in Nebraska Report 2018, p 24 and 75.