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January 30, 2020

To: Chairman Lathrop and Members of the Judiciary Committee
From: Juliet Summers, Policy Coordinator for Child Welfare & Juvenile Justice
Re: **LB 986 - Prescribe requirements for public colleges and universities regarding criminal history and juvenile court record information**

Our juvenile justice system should be structured to ensure all children can take the right steps to put their past behind them and move toward a better future. We all benefit from policies that hold youth accountable in age-appropriate ways and allow them the ability to grow out of and past their adolescent decisions. Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 986 because it offers young adults the opportunity to confidently approach the college admissions process without fear that their past will hinder their future goals and allows Nebraska's universities and colleges the privilege of cultivating these students' gifts and talents.

While revealing criminal history information as part of a college or university admissions process is often framed as a security issue, few studies have explored whether this practice leads to actual reductions in on-campus crime rates.¹ **By contrast, extensive research exists supporting the hypothesis that increasing access to education reduces future criminal behavior.**² Individuals, including youth, who have paid their debt to society should have the chance to advance in a chosen career field, pursue intellectual or creative passions, build positive peer and mentor relationships and earn an honest living. Moreover, when they are able to do so, their prospects for lifetime income and stability improve, impacting the prosperity of neighborhoods, communities, and our state as a whole.

LB 986 is not without precedent in the United States. Similar bills barring public colleges and universities from inquiring about criminal history have passed in Louisiana, Maryland, and Washington, and have been introduced in Illinois. The State University of New York's network of 64 schools dropped the felony conviction question from the application. Most notably, the Common App, the undergraduate college admission application used by 800 member colleges and universities in 49 states, including Nebraska, eliminated the criminal history question in 2018. However, individual schools may still require applicants to reveal juvenile criminal history information in their supplemental materials, necessitating measures such as LB 986 to ensure equitable public higher education access.

¹ Scott-Clayton, Judith. 2017. "Thinking 'beyond the Box': The Use of Criminal Records in College Admissions." *Brookings*. (<https://www.brookings.edu/research/thinking-beyond-the-box-the-use-of-criminal-records-in-college-admissions/>).

² *Ibid.*

Nebraska is home to several nationally and internationally recognized public colleges and universities, and LB 986 will ensure that young people seeking a better future for themselves, their families and communities, can confidently apply to these programs to forge a new path.

I'd like to thank Senator Pansing Brooks for bringing this bill, and the members of the committee for your time and consideration. I would urge you to advance it.