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7521 Main Street, Suite 103 Omaha, Nebraska 68127

(402) 597-3100

www.voicesforchildren.com

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Thank you, Chairperson Arch and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Julie Erickson and today I am representing Voices for Children in Nebraska as a proponent of LB 202.

For young people exiting our child welfare and juvenile justice systems on the cusp of adulthood, the sudden transition from structural supports and requirements to complete independence can be a difficult path to navigate safely. Thankfully, Nebraska has an excellent extended foster care program to assist young adults leaving the foster care system without having achieved permanency in a family setting as they find their way into adulthood (Bridge to Independence, a.k.a. “b2I”). I am here today on behalf of Voices for Children, to voice our strong support for LB 202, which would extend eligibility for the b2I program to a subset of youth exiting juvenile probation without family supports.

At the age of nineteen, when juvenile court jurisdiction runs out, some Nebraska youth may find themselves abruptly homeless and without support. Studies have shown navigating adulthood without family support can mean a grim outlook in many areas, including educational attainment, economic well-being, physical and mental health, and criminal justice involvement.1 These are young adults who, without a support system, are at the highest risk to drop out of school, fail in their vocational plans, and recidivate – this time burdening our adult correctional system. We believe that by providing a system of supports to young people who would otherwise be set adrift after system involvement, Nebraska can ensure their safe transition to a productive and healthy adulthood – benefitting our state as a whole. For these reasons, we strongly support LB 202.

I’d like to thank this Committee for all your time and commitment to ensuring our systems serve and protect Nebraska’s vulnerable populations, and to thank Senator Pansing Brooks for her dedication to Nebraska’s young people.