February 5, 2021



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., MBA

 *Treasurer*

 Gary Bren

 Wes Cole, MBA

 Al Davis

 Noah Greenwald, JD

 Daniel Gutman, JD

 Tim Hron, MA, LIMHP

 Susan Mayberger, MA

 Melanie Morrissey Clark

 John Stalnaker, JD

 Charlie Stephan

 Katie Weitz, PhD

 Aubrey Mancuso, MSW

 *Executive DIrector*

Thank you, Chairperson Lathrop and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Julie Erickson and today I am representing Voices for Children in Nebraska in opposition of LB 537.

When youth are struggling, how our system responds matters. We can either get it right, or compound the damage done. Decades of research has shown that what works in combating juvenile crime are thoughtful responses aimed at changing underlying beliefs, engaging family and community around a child, and providing positive solutions.[[1]](#footnote-31691) In direct contrast, time and again we have seen that detaining juveniles does not work. Voices for Children in Nebraska opposes LB 537 because it reverses several years of progress in juvenile justice reform.

LB 537 provides that youth under 14 may be placed at YRTC and youth under 12 may be detained if they pose a significant risk to the physical safety of themselves, others, and/or property. *Detention is not and has never been a rehabilitative response or the right answer for children at risk to themselves.* When we place a young person in detention who is already suffering – from a mental health disorder, addiction, or history of trauma – we compound that suffering rather than resolving it. *Without demonstrated benefit,* we expose the child to:

* Worsened mental health and increased rate of suicide
* Increased likelihood of juvenile recidivism
* Decreased likelihood of returning to school and completing education
* Increased likelihood of going “deeper” in the system
* Increased likelihood of adult recidivism and incarceration

Detention is not just a bad place for low-risk, no-risk, or mentally ill youth; it is arguably the worst place.[[2]](#footnote-5592)

**Further, in Nebraska, our total annual admissions to juvenile detention facilities have fallen dramatically through concerted efforts and investments in alternatives. LB 537 undoes several of the juvenile justice reform efforts done by the Nebraska legislature.** LB 537 would increase our overall juvenile detention admission numbers, subjecting our kids to the unintended harms of detention. When a child acts out, society has a choice in how to respond. How we choose to structure our system and investments has real and lasting consequences for kids and communities. We thank the Committee for your time and consideration on this important matter and we respectfully urge you to not advance LB 537.

1. Lipsey et al. Improving the Effectiveness of Juvenile Justice Programs: a New Perspective on Evidence-Based Practice. Center for Juvenile Justice Reform: December 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-31691)
2. This list has been adapted from multiple studiescompiled in: 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> [↑](#footnote-ref-5592)