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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 support of LB 568.   
  
Education is critical to children’s growth into healthy, productive adults. School attendance is one among several factors that impact children’s educational success. Efforts to ensure attendance are important but must focus on resolving obstacles to attendance for children and families in a supportive rather than punitive manner. Chronic absenteeism should be resolved with supportive services rather than providing a pathway deeper into the juvenile court or juvenile justice system. For these reasons we support LB 568, which removes truancy as a juvenile status offense under court jurisdiction and reduces the risk of a juvenile encountering the juvenile justice system unnecessarily.

Student success and positive educational outcomes absolutely are important to the future of Nebraska, and research supports the association between high rates of absenteeism and poor educational outcomes. The U.S. Dept. of Education defines chronic absenteeism as missing fifteen or more days of school each year. In Nebraska, during the 2018-2019 school year, 67,804 (22%) students were absent 10-19 days. While 16,252 (5.3%) students were absent 20-29 days, and 12,854 (4.2%) students were absent 30 or more days.[[1]](#footnote-200) LB 568 does not propose to ignore the issue of chronic absenteeism, but rather implement a smarter approach to improving attendance that yields improved outcomes for our youth and families. As lawmakers you must ask yourself the question, “should we continue to rely on formal court processing for school attendance issues when data and research show that such interventions do not have a positive impact on young people’s educational success?”

The problem with Nebraska’s current approach to improving school attendance through the court system is that the financial support is targeted at the end of the system, rather than investing in early intervention, to address the situation before it becomes chronic. Further, these cases clog the court system and do not allow probation to focus on higher-risk youth who do warrant system supervision and services. LB 568 is designed to correct that issue by investing in community-based interventions that have proved effective to encourage and support school attendance.

The juvenile justice system’s goal is to provide accountability and rehabilitation to youth whose actions violate the law and endanger public safety. When possible and appropriate, youth should be diverted from the system as often as possible and have their needs met without being pushed into the juvenile justice system. This is especially true when it comes to youth who are referred to the court for being absent from school or other status offenses. Inappropriate juvenile justice system involvement been shown to have a negative impact on educational achievement and increase likelihood for behavioral health challenges.[[2]](#footnote-8360) It is important that our Nebraska state dollars are committed to addressing absenteeism are directed to the most effective and proven programs in order to make a positive impact on lives of Nebraskans.

For all these reasons, we thank Senator Pansing Brooks for bringing this bill and thank the Committee for considering this critically important matter. We respectfully urge you to advance LB 568.

1. Kids Count in Nebraska Report 2020. Voices for Children. P 53 [↑](#footnote-ref-200)
2. Salisch, A & Trone, J. From Courts to Communities: The Right Response to Truancy, Running Away, and Other Status Offenses. Vera Institute: December 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-8360)