January 26, 2022

To: Senator Hughes and Members of the Executive Board

From: Aubrey Mancuso, Executive Director

Re: Support for LB 814

Voices for Children supports LB 814 because our state systems and policies should be structured to ensure that every child has an equal opportunity to grow up safe, healthy, and valued. We particularly support attaching racial impact statements to bills relating to juvenile justice. In spite of improvements to our juvenile justice system in recent years, disparities in outcomes based on race and ethnicity have remained persistent.

In Nebraska and nationally, the data suggest disparate treatment occurs throughout our juvenile justice system, with youth of color experiencing far different outcomes than their White peers for similar infractions. From the moment of arrest and the decision whether to divert, the disparities between Nebraska kids based on race and ethnicity grow larger the deeper we move through the juvenile justice system.

As our population continues to become more diverse, it is important that we adapt our systems and policies to ensure that they are fair to all our young people. Racial impact statements are meant to inform legislators of the effects of bills on communities of color so that they can take steps to avoid increasing disparities. To fully inform legislators and the electorate on the effect of legislation, it is imperative that racial impact statements are available to all stakeholders as early in the legislative process as possible. The racial impact statement could be a launching pad for informed discussion around the disparate impacts of proposed legislation, and the potential effects – positive or negative – on communities that have historically been marginalized by our systems.

In 2020, the legislature thoroughly studied the feasibility of creating racial impact statements through LR 217 and found viable models for creating racial impact statements. At least 9 other states have already adopted some form of racial impact statements in their policymaking process. Now is the time for the legislature to take the next step and require racial impact statements on bills.

We urge the committee to advance LB 814. Thank you.