January 27, 2022

To: Senator Lathrop and Members of the Judiciary Committee

 From: Aubrey Mancuso, Executive Director

 Re: Support for LB 831

All children need stable and loving relationships with adults that they can learn from and trust. Even when parents make choices that negatively impact their families, children often continue to have a bond to their primary caregivers that endures. Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 831 because it recognizes the importance of prioritizing parental relationships even in the face of involvement with our criminal justice system.

There are many children in communities across our state and nation paying a high price due to mass incarceration. Estimates from a report published a few years back show that there were about 41,000 Nebraska children who had a parent incarcerated at some point in their lives. Parental incarceration is one of a number of Adverse Childhood Experiences (known as ACEs), which are stressful events or circumstances that can trigger a prolonged activation of the body’s stress response system. Left unchecked by protective factors or other interventions, this prolonged stress response can significantly impact a child’s future. Because of the persistent racial disparities in our criminal justice system, children and families in communities of color are more significantly impacted by parental incarceration.

Several years ago, Voices for Children organized a series of listening session with Nebraskans who had personal experiences with parental incarceration. During these sessions it was clear that the emotional and economic well-being of children is significantly impacted and that our justice system has often given little attention to the needs of children in this circumstance. Given that the majority of parents experiencing incarceration will ultimately return to their family and community, finding ways to preserve familial relationships can contribute to better outcomes for both parents and children.

The earliest months of a child’s life are particularly important for establishing a bond with a parent. Our criminal justice system already recognizes this through programing available for mothers at York. LB 831 would allow additional options for pregnant or parenting mothers in our criminal justice system and can contribute positively to the future well-being of children in this circumstance.

We urge the committee to advance LB 831. Thank you.