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February 5, 2024

To: Chairman Murman and Members of the Education Committee  
From: Juliet Summers, Executive Director, Voices for Children in Nebraska  
Re: LB 1270 – regarding the Door to College Scholarship

Young people in Nebraska exiting our juvenile justice system need reliable resources and accessible opportunities that will ensure their wellbeing and success. Opportunities for educational advancement can increase young people’s job and career track, setting them on the path to success in adulthood. Voices for Children supports LB 1270 because it provides a small but important clean-up to a scholarship fund supporting eligible youth who have previously been committed to our state Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Centers (“YRTCs”).

The Door to College Scholarship Act, created in LB 705 by this Committee and Legislature last year, aims to support young people who have graduated from YRTC high schools or who have gone on to graduate from high school following a period of commitment in a YRTC. We support this clean-up legislation for both its goals:

- 1) **Ensuring that students are not time-limited to one year to apply following commitment to YRTC.** In juvenile court, the traditional education pathway is frequently disrupted – including by commitment to a long-term facility such as a YRTC. For students who return from their commitment while still in high school, the reality is that it may take longer than a year to finish course credits to graduate, much less to be ready to apply for college and scholarship programs. Eliminating language limiting the application to a year following commitment will allow more students to apply and receive the benefit of the scholarship.
- 2) **Permitting DHHS to verify a student’s eligibility without otherwise breaking confidentiality or record-sealing laws.** When a student has participated in an educational program, such as high school at a YRTC, their student records are protected under FERPA. When a young person has successfully completed probation and their term of juvenile court jurisdiction, all record of it is sealed – and can only be unsealed through court order. Specifying permission to the agency to allow them to verify a student’s prior commitment solely for the purpose of checking eligibility under the scholarship’s provisions will

ensure that student confidentiality remains broadly protected, while allowing their application for the scholarship to be fairly considered.

We all want a Nebraska that sets young people up for success, and increasing access to education can offer students with prior system involvement real opportunity to thrive in adulthood.

We would like to thank this committee for supporting LB 705 last year in creating this scholarship, and Senator Murman for bringing this bill to ensure its implementation is functional for applicants who are pursuing a brighter future. We would respectfully urge you to advance it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Juliet Summers", with a horizontal line above the first few letters.

Juliet Summers  
Executive Director