



7521 Main Street, Suite 103  
Omaha, Nebraska 68127

(402) 597-3100  
www.voicesforchildren.com

#### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Michael Beverly, Jr., MBA  
*President*

Danita Webb, Ed.D.  
*Vice President*

Tim Hron, MA, LIMHP  
*Secretary*

Gary Bren  
*Treasurer*

Jill Batter, Esq.  
Al Davis  
Daniel Gutman, J.D.  
Christina Kahler  
Bruce Meyers  
Emily Mwaja  
Patty Pansing Brooks  
Kimara Snipes  
John Stalnaker, J.D.  
Kate Noble Weitz  
Lia Whitehead

Juliet Summers, J.D.  
*Executive Director*

February 22, 2023

To: Chairperson Wayne and Members of the Judiciary Committee  
From: Anahí Salazar, Policy Coordinator for Voices for Children in Nebraska  
**RE: Support for LB 14, change provisions related to student attendance and require plans for excessive absences.**

For young people exiting our child welfare and juvenile justice systems on the cusp of adulthood, the sudden transition from structural supports and requirements to complete independence can be a difficult path to navigate safely. Thankfully, Nebraska has an excellent extended foster care program to assist young adults leaving the foster care system without having achieved permanency in a family setting as they find their way into adulthood, Bridge to Independence (B2I). Voices for Children strongly supports LB 14, which would extend eligibility for the B2I program to a subset of youth exiting juvenile probation without family supports.

It is crucial to note that many, if not all, of the youth LB 14 would support are *the same population of youth as B2I currently serves*. They are young adults who have been system involved. Many or most experienced significant childhood trauma earlier in life. Many or most are likely to have been the victim of a child welfare case in their past. Every single one of them, based on the parameters of the bill, *should be currently eligible for a child welfare case* except that they just too old for it to be filed under our current law.<sup>1</sup>

For instance: a young child is exposed to parental drug use and abandoned by caregivers. A child welfare case ends in termination of parental rights and later adoption. As the child grows older, the trauma of those experiences manifests in behavioral health issues and periods of acting out – but because he is older, the case that the county attorney files is now a probation case instead of child welfare. During this new case, he gets placed out of home and does well, but family ties are fractured and over time his adoptive family backs out of his life. He is now alone, successful in his court-ordered placement and doing well on probation, but without the open court case would be homeless. He turns 18, and even though he has been abandoned again by family, he is too old for the county attorney to file a new child welfare case which would allow him to enter Bridge to Independence. The judge prolongs the case as long as she can, until the boy turns 19, but then jurisdiction automatically ends and he is back out on the street with nothing. LB 14 would be a literal lifesaver for this young person, who is twice a victim of child neglect and has done all we've asked of him to get on the right track, but lacks a supportive family and doesn't currently have the right type of court docket.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Neb. Rev. Stat. 43-245; Neb. Rev. Stat. 43-247(3)(a)*

These cases aren't frequent, but they do happen. Probation officers in our state have literally driven young people like this to homeless shelters on their 19<sup>th</sup> birthday. Navigating adulthood without family support can mean a grim outlook in many areas, including educational attainment, economic well-being, physical and mental health, and criminal justice involvement. These are young adults who, without a support system, are at the highest risk to drop out of school, fail in their vocational plans, and recidivate – this time into our adult correctional system. We believe that by providing a system of supports to young people who would otherwise be set adrift after system involvement, Nebraska can ensure their safe transition to a productive and healthy adulthood – benefitting our state as a whole. For these reasons, we strongly support LB 14.

Every young person has the right to experience emerging adulthood and successfully transition to adulthood with equitable access to opportunity. I would like to thank this Committee for all your time and commitment to ensuring our systems serve and protect Nebraska's vulnerable populations, and to thank Senator Dungan for his dedication to Nebraska's young people.