



February 7, 2024

To: Chairperson Wayne and Members of the Judiciary Committee

From: Katie Nungesser, Policy Coordinator for Voices for Children in Nebraska

RE: Support of LB 876, Adopt the Newborn Safe Haven Act

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Voices for Children supports Safe Haven laws, such as the one proposed in LB 876, as we value all children and want them to grow up safe and loved. These laws are a tool ensuring the immediate well-being of newborns facing challenging circumstances. While Safe Haven laws prioritize the safety of the child, we also recognize the importance of providing parents with adequate support to help them navigate the difficulties they may be experiencing. By extending the surrender window, LB 876 allows for more time for parents to make informed decisions and explore available resources or seek support, potentially preventing unnecessary separations.

LB 876's inclusion of additional surrender sites and options within communities is a commendable step. They offer a safe option for parents, making the process more accessible, anonymous, and reducing potential barriers to seeking help.

As we advocate for the safety of newborns through Safe Haven laws, it is equally crucial to advocate for increased support for parents in Nebraska. While these laws serve as an immediate solution to a newborn's safety, we should strive to create an environment where parents do not feel compelled to rely on Safe Haven as their sole option. Research consistently shows that children who maintain a bond with their biological parents experience better physical, cognitive, and psychosocial outcomes.

We see Safe Haven laws as one important but small component in an overarching system response that supports family strengths, invests in community supports, and destigmatizes parenthood. Supporting mothers to prevent them from feeling compelled to surrender their babies involves addressing various factors that contribute to their decision-making process. I have attached a list of some of the areas we feel can effect positive change for children and families at risk of entering our child welfare system. Suggestions include comprehensive prenatal care, accessible mental health services, reducing stigmas, crisis intervention, financial support and resources including affordable childcare and housing options, just to name a few.

By implementing a combination of these strategies, communities and policymakers can contribute to creating an environment where mothers feel supported, empowered, and capable of raising their children with the assistance they need. Voices for Children believes LB 876 is a commendable effort to enhance our existing Safe Haven laws in Nebraska. We urge you to support this bill and continue conversations on how to support keeping families together.

Respectfully,

Katie Nungesser

Strategies we believe that can be implemented to assistance and encourage mothers:

Comprehensive Prenatal Care:

Ensure access to affordable and comprehensive prenatal care services.

Promote education on the importance of prenatal care for both the mother's and baby's health.

Provide resources for mothers to address health concerns during pregnancy.

Accessible Mental Health Services:

Offer accessible mental health services to address maternal mental health concerns.

Reduce stigma around seeking mental health support during and after pregnancy.

Integrate mental health screenings into routine prenatal and postnatal care.

Financial Support and Resources:

Implement programs that provide financial assistance to pregnant women and new mothers, particularly those facing economic challenges.

Connect mothers with existing social support programs, such as food assistance, housing support, and childcare subsidies.

Parenting Education and Support:

Establish parenting education programs to equip mothers with the necessary skills and knowledge.

Offer support groups and mentorship programs to connect mothers with experienced parents who can provide guidance.

Community Outreach and Education:

Increase awareness about available community resources and support services.

Conduct outreach programs to connect with vulnerable populations and ensure they are aware of the assistance available to them.

Flexible Work and Childcare Options:

Advocate for policies that support flexible work arrangements for mothers, allowing them to balance work and family responsibilities.

Promote affordable and accessible childcare options to ease the burden on mothers who may struggle with childcare responsibilities.

Strengthening Social Networks:

Encourage the development of social networks for mothers within communities.

Foster connections between mothers to create a supportive community where they can share experiences and advice.

Education and Career Support:

Implement programs that provide educational and career support for mothers, including scholarships, vocational training, and job placement assistance.

Advocate for workplace policies that accommodate the needs of working mothers.

Crisis Intervention Services:

Establish crisis intervention services that offer immediate assistance to mothers facing challenging circumstances.

Ensure that helplines and emergency support services are widely publicized and easily accessible.

Reducing Stigma:

Work to eliminate the stigma associated with single motherhood, unplanned pregnancies, and seeking help.

Promote a supportive and non-judgmental culture that encourages open discussions about the challenges of parenting.