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To: Chairperson Murman and Members of the Education Committee
From: Anahí Salazar, Policy Coordinator for Voices for Children in Nebraska
RE: Oppose LB 374- Adopt the Parents' Bill of Rights and Academic Transparency Act

Education content standards should be accurate, fact- and evidence-based, and allow for children to safely explore ideas and concepts that may be challenging in age-appropriate ways. Parents have a fundamental right in the home to instill their family values, beliefs, and traditions. In public education, particularly in the fields of science and social studies, there may sometimes be a push and pull between teaching to academic rigor, and accommodating parents' varied belief systems. Voices for Children opposes LB 374 because it swings too far in one direction of this push and pull, and would have a chilling effect on our classrooms as a "marketplace of ideas" to the detriment of our state's children.

There is one section in LB 374 addressing suicide risk assessments, and without a doubt, we are experiencing a mental health crisis among our youth. Voices for Children would support a standalone bill to build and fund additional suicide prevention efforts in schools, including risk assessments administered by trained professionals, and a comprehensive safety plan for how to respond when students are experiencing suicidal ideation or making attempts. To be clear, LB 374 does not do that, and in many ways, the bill's other provisions could negatively impact student mental health.

Specifically:

- LB 374 places presumptions in favor of flagging and even removing learning materials for *all* students when individual parents object. By instituting burdensome documentation and reporting requirements for any items flagged as "Parent Review Recommended" LB 374's provisions could result in schools simply taking the easier course and removing any such materials off the shelves. This is a slippery slope, because what one parent identifies as worth removing based on their privately held beliefs may be a material that opens windows of understanding or saves another child's life.
- LB 374 also essentially prohibits so-called "attitude or belief examinations" but defines them so broadly they could include anything from simple get-to-know-you activities to explorations or

discussions of ancestry, heritage, and traditions aimed at building inclusivity and understanding in the classroom. Students thrive when they are able to share who they are and where they come from, and learn from others who may be different.

- LB 374 purports to uphold Title IV and VI of the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964, but is framed in such a way it could in fact chill age-appropriate yet challenging conversations about the history of systemic racism in our country and ways to address it. We of course support prohibiting teaching that any race is superior or inferior. But prohibition of “professing ideas” around these topics and specifically prohibiting discussion of ‘advantageous treatment’ could have the effect of eliminating discussion about the benefits and drawbacks of policies such as affirmative action, reparations, desegregation, school busing, land restoration, and more. Discussions of systemic racism and its impacts actually have the opposite effect of racial – such discussions help us understand how systems, structures, and policies over time contribute to outcomes for individuals. These are conversations that students should be having, in age appropriate and supportive ways, as they prepare to be the future leaders of America.
- LB 372 places a teacher’s individual, sincerely-held religious beliefs above the purview of the school, district, or department of education to develop appropriate content standards. A biology teacher should not be able to refuse to teach evolution because they believe in a different creation story. A speech teacher should not be able to refuse to teach female students because they believe women should not be leaders outside the home. Again, we have a slippery slope.

The right to a quality public education is a right that accrues to the child, and we have great trust in our public schools to offer that education in partnership with parents in ways that allow children to safely grow, discover, connect, and flourish. For all these reasons, Voices for Children opposes LB 374 and would respectfully urge you not to advance it. Thank you for your time and consideration.