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To: Chairperson Hansen and members of the Health and Human Services

From: Spike Eickholt on behalf of Voices for Children in Nebraska

Re: Support for LB 772 - Create the Residential Youth Parenting Facility Grant Program

Children deserve stability and security, and all parents want the best for their kids. However, providing safety and stability can be challenging for young parents, particularly those exiting state care, who may have lived trauma and are often still in the process of growing up themselves. We are here today to support LB 772, creating a grant fund for a residential facility for pregnant and parenting youth at risk of homelessness in Nebraska, because it will provide a needed resource for young parents who are struggling to create a brighter future for their children.

Voices for Children has a long history of advocacy around our child welfare and juvenile justice systems, and we note that populations of young people involved in these systems of care are most likely to reap the benefits of LB 772. Data show that **youth in foster care experience pregnancy at two to three times the rate of the general population; it is estimated that 50% of girls in foster care will become pregnant by age 19¹**. Approximately 1 in 10 young adults in Bridge to Independence, our state extended foster care program, are parenting themselves.²

Simultaneously, youth exiting state care are at greater risk for homelessness or instability in housing. We know that teen pregnancy and housing instability are correlated: **A 2017 report from the Holland Children's Institute found that 50% of female youth living on the street and over 30% living in emergency shelters had been pregnant at least once³**.

The facility to be created with LB 772's grant funds would provide pregnant and parenting homeless youth stability, support, and resources with which to build a life. Personal accounts recorded by Family Voices United highlighted that expectant and parenting youth yearn for **connections to their peers, honoring their mental health needs and accessing resources and support in programs to help develop their parenting skills and relationships⁴**. LB 772 presents an opportunity for our state to invest not only in a stable living environment, but in facilitating networks of support for these young people and their children as they develop skills, relationships, and a connected community to lean on. As the saying goes, to raise a child it takes a village.

Thank you to Senators Hughes, Dungan and Brewer for sponsoring this bill to improve the lives of pregnant and parenting youth in Nebraska, and thank you to this Committee for your time.

¹ Aparicio, Elizabeth M., et al. "My Body Is Strong and Amazing": Embodied Experiences of Pregnancy and Birth among Young Women in Foster Care." *Children and Youth Services Review*, vol. 98, Mar. 2019, pp. 199–205.

² According to data provided by the Department of Health and Human Services for the 2023 Kids Count in Nebraska Report (pending).

³ Future Unknown: The Outlook of Teen Pregnancy in Nebraska." *Holland Children's Institute*, Holland Children's Institute, Jan. 2017,

⁴ Share Your Perspective: Expectant and Parenting Youth." *Share Your Perspective: Expectant and Parenting Youth | Family Voices United*, Family Voices United, 30 Dec. 2021,

