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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 for LB 149- Eliminate the prohibition on suspending a student in prekindergarten through second grade

RE: Oppose for LB 430- Provide an additional exception to the prohibition on suspending a student in prekindergarten through second grade and change provisions relating to short-term and long-term suspension under the Student Discipline Act

Children are the future of Nebraska. No student in Nebraska should feel like they have failed at school, especially at such an early age. Early suspension predicts later grade suspensions, placing the child on track for negative school attitudes and outcomes. Voices for Children opposes LB 149 and LB 430 because it will allow Nebraska school districts, to suspend young students in pre-kindergarten through second grade.

Education is a key indicator of future opportunity for children, and we should make every effort to ensure that our education system is setting students up for success. When disciplinary processes are structured to maximize time in the educational environment, students are set up to succeed in their education. Not allowing children to participate in school can have long lasting effects. Research suggests that suspension can contribute to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) such as emotional and physical neglect. Preschool starts as early as age 3, these are our smallest students, who like older children are trying to learn social behaviors. When looking at what leads to suspensions, we can see that most children are exhibiting developmentally appropriate childlike behavior such as yelling, stomping, and not standing or sitting still. When we punish children for being themselves and doing what is developmentally appropriate, we are sending them the incorrect message.

Children who are suspended are more likely to enter the juvenile justice system. Research highlights the alarming rates of suspension and expulsion for students of color, particularly Black boys. Black children represent 17 percent of public preschool enrollment, but 31 percent of preschoolers who were given multiple out-of-school suspensions. What children learn if they are suspended is that they are "bad," that something is wrong with them, and this feeling heightens as children are suspended more and more, creating pre-school to prison pipelines.

There are a multitude of other nonpunitive things that can be done instead of keeping kids out of school. What children need is adults who can help them process their needs. Children do not have the capacity to handle intense emotions. That is why Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) teaching is so important. SEL teaches empathy, how to share, how to interact with others, this is pivotal social skills to thrive in life, outside of the school setting but in real life scenarios. Schools need resources to effectively address challenging behaviors that meet the need of their students.

All children deserve a meaningful opportunity to thrive in their educational environment starting from a young age, and we all benefit when they do so. Procedures and policies that rely too heavily on exclusion from school result in lower educational attainment not only for suspended or expelled students, but for the student body as a whole. Studies have shown that schools with a higher reliance on exclusion as a form of discipline actually score

lower on academic achievement tests among the total student body, even when controlling for socioeconomic and demographic factors. Because early childhood education is the foundation of future learning, keeping small children involved in their classroom is crucial to building their future success in school and in life.

Specifically, the language around what *could* be considered as harmful is very vague. This leaves the reason for why a student would be suspended too broad and might be interpreted differently based on each person. Causing incongruent reasoning behind suspensions.

Children should be in schools, getting an education and accessing social skills. A better approach would be to teach and model for students instead of punishing by exclusion. We respectfully urge the Committee to not advance LB 149 and LB 430.