



402-597-3100
voicesforchildren.com
317 S. 17th St., Suite 212
Omaha, NE 68102

March 13, 2025

To: Chairperson Hardin and Members of the Health and Human Services Committee

From: Anahí Salazar, Policy Coordinator for Voices for Children in Nebraska

RE: Support for LB 318- Require the Department of Health and Human Services to file a state plan amendment under the Medical Assistance Act for incarcerated youth

Young people deserve consistent and reliable health care, especially when they are under circumstances such as detention. Detention harms young people's physical and mental health, impedes their educational and career success, and often exposes them to abuse.¹ Voices for Children supports LB 318 because it would aid in the continuity of care for young people who may be in crisis.

Healthcare is crucial for young people in detention, awaiting trial, as it directly impacts their overall well-being and ability to cope with the emotional and physical challenges of the detention environment. Adolescents are at a stage in their development where both their bodies and minds are still growing, making them particularly vulnerable to the stresses and traumas of incarceration. LB 318 is simple in the fact that it extends Medicaid and CHIP coverage to young people who are detained, while they await trial. Currently young people are waiting an average of 49 days for their trial, specifically in DCYC.² Without access to adequate healthcare, including mental health support, young detainees may face long-term consequences such as untreated injuries, infections, or exacerbated mental health conditions, which can worsen during their time in detention.

Moreover, young people in detention are often dealing with significant emotional and psychological stress, including anxiety, depression, and trauma from past experiences, which can be intensified by the confinement. Access to mental health services, counseling, and psychiatric care is essential for addressing these needs. When detained individuals do not receive proper psychological care, they may struggle to participate in their legal proceedings or make informed decisions about their cases. Providing healthcare ensures that these young people can receive treatment for mental health issues and avoid further psychological deterioration during their time in detention. Terminating or suspending eligibility for individuals upon incarceration, has contributed to poor health outcomes for youth during their time in institutions and poor care transitions upon returning to their communities. LB 318 would cover a specific group of young people who are awaiting trial, and are already eligible for Medicaid and CHIP to have their health coverage. Incarceration, no matter the length of time, during adolescence has lasting effects, including worse health outcomes as an adult.³

The four Nebraska juvenile detention centers are most likely to be impacted by LB 318: Douglas County Youth Center (DCYC), Northeast Nebraska Juvenile Services (Madison County), Lancaster County Detention Center, Sarpy County Juvenile Justice Center. We have spoken with two of the detention centers about the impact of Medicaid suspension for youth in detention, and what LB 318 would mean. The staff we spoke with were enthused to hear about the bill as it would help streamline costs, noting they wouldn't have to bill counties outside of their county for youth treatment in their institution.

Additionally, proper healthcare is essential for maintaining the overall safety and security of detention facilities. When young people in detention do not have access to adequate medical care, preventable health issues can

¹The Sentencing Project, [Why Youth Incarceration Fails: An Updated Review of the Evidence – The Sentencing Project](#), By Richard Mendel, March 1, 2023.

² Graph from Douglas County Youth Center. Attached.

³ Barnert, E. S., Dudovitz, R., Nelson, B. B., Coker, T. R., Biely, C., Li, N., & Chung, P. J. (2017). How does incarcerating young people affect their adult health outcomes?. *Pediatrics*, 139(2).



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quickly escalate, potentially leading to outbreaks of contagious diseases or other health crises. Ensuring regular health checkups, vaccinations, and prompt treatment for injuries or illnesses helps to prevent these issues and maintain a healthier, safer environment for both detainees and staff. Ultimately, addressing the healthcare needs of young detainees is not only a matter of human rights but also a step toward ensuring they are treated fairly and given a chance to reintegrate into society after their legal proceedings. Access to services may provide youth with more stability. LB 318 creates an opportunity to better serve young people, especially as vulnerable a population as those young people who are being detained.

Thank you, Senator Rountree, for your support of all young people in Nebraska and to the Committee for your consideration.