



March 12, 2025

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

From: Katie Nungesser, policy coordinator for Voices for Children in Nebraska

**Re: LB 48, Establish a family resource and juvenile assessment pilot program**

Nebraska's young people deserve every opportunity to succeed, but too often, youth and families facing crises have nowhere to turn except the justice system—a system that was never designed to be the primary provider of social services. Voices for Children is in support of LB 48 which establishes a five-year pilot program creating Family Resource and Juvenile Assessment Centers in metropolitan areas across Nebraska. As an agency that interacts with youth and families impacted by the juvenile justice system, we have seen firsthand the urgent need for community-based support services that provide alternatives to court involvement.

The centers will serve as vital hubs of culturally relevant, comprehensive support. These will provide early intervention services, mental health resources, educational support, and family assistance—all designed to address the root causes that contribute to juvenile system involvement. Importantly, these centers will prioritize culturally competent services that reflect the diverse backgrounds of Nebraska's families, including Indigenous, Black, Latino, and immigrant communities. Too often, youth of color are disproportionately impacted by system involvement, and ensuring culturally relevant supports is a critical step toward equity and fairness.

This approach is both compassionate and cost-effective. Research consistently shows that early intervention and community-based services reduce recidivism, strengthen families, and promote positive outcomes for youth. By diverting young people from the justice system and connecting them with appropriate resources, Nebraska can save money while also ensuring better futures for its youth.

When children experience challenges, the best interventions with a proven track record of success are those that keep young people connected to school, family, and community while providing resources to address any issues. It is long past time for Nebraska to increase our commitment to community-based services that support the needs of kids and families. I urge the committee to advance LB 48, recognizing that keeping kids out of court and in their communities leads to better outcomes for families, public safety, and Nebraska as a whole.

Thank you Senator McKinney for your dedication to Nebraska's youth and to the committee for your time and consideration.