

January 28, 2026

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

From: Katie Nungesser, Director of Youth Justice and Child Welfare Policy

Re: LB 928, Require notifications by the Department of Health and Human Services to fictive kin of a child who has been removed from the home

When children experience trauma, our system should do everything possible to maintain safe, stable connections. For this reason, Voices of Children in Nebraska is in strong support of LB 928. Voices for Children in Nebraska is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that works to improve systems that impact children and youth across our state, with a particular focus on children involved in the child welfare system. We partner closely with young people and families to elevate their experiences and ensure policy decisions are grounded in what children need to be safe, stable, and supported.

To ground my statements in who we are talking about, in 2023 more than 5,000 children in Nebraska received out of home services in Nebraska and had a 3A petition. The breakdown of out-of-home placements by age below shows us that most kids in out-of-home care are school aged or older. To us, this means they should be a part of the conversation about who is a trusted adult in their life. The following data shows the age breakdown of children placed out of home.

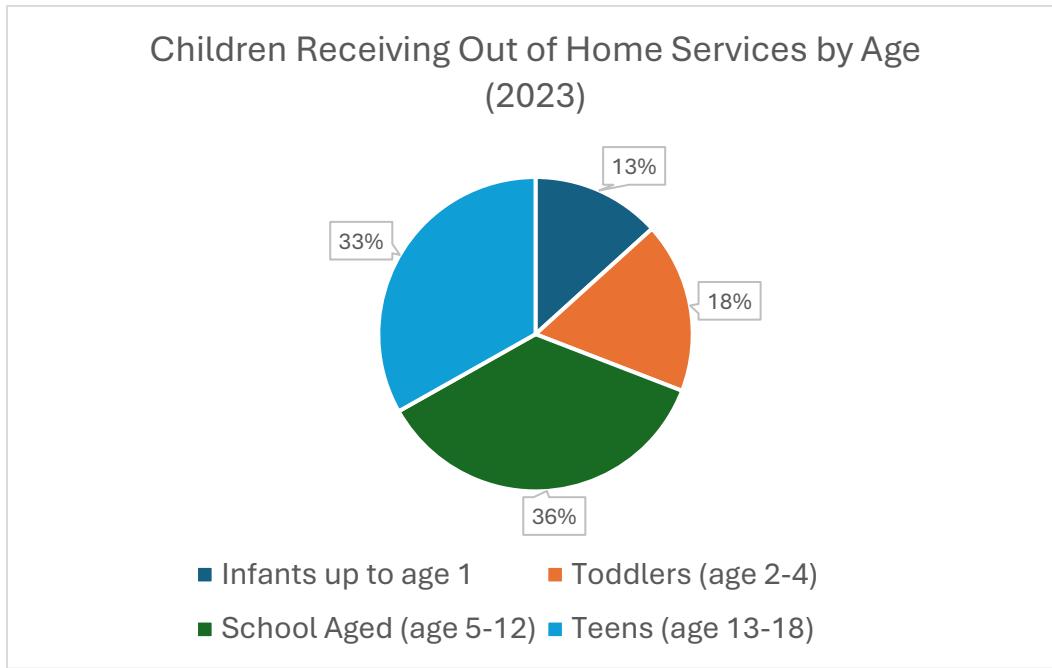


Figure 1 Source: Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services

When children are removed from their homes, the disruption and trauma they experience is profound. Placement decisions made in the earliest moments of removal can have lasting impacts on a child's sense of safety, belonging, and well-being. Research and lived experience consistently show that children fare better when they are placed with adults they already know and trust. These relationships can ease trauma, reduce placement instability, and help children maintain connections to their family, culture, school, and community.

LB 928 strengthens Nebraska's child welfare system by formally recognizing fictive kin and ensuring these trusted adults are included early in the placement process. By defining fictive kin as adults with emotionally significant, preexisting relationships with a child, this bill acknowledges the reality of children's lives and support networks. For many children, especially those from communities that rely on extended and chosen family systems, meaningful caregivers are not always connected by blood, marriage, or adoption. These people may be beloved teachers, coaches, mentors, or family friends – people who know and care for the individual child and are willing and able to step up.

Including fictive kin within existing kinship definitions and notification requirements ensures that these important adults are not overlooked during a child's removal. Requiring the identification, location, and notification of fictive kin expands the pool of potential placements and increases the likelihood that children can remain with someone they know, rather than entering foster care with strangers. This is not to undercut the generosity or care that agency foster families offer to children coming into foster care, but to acknowledge the truth that the trauma of removal and placement is reduced for children when they have a trusted, pre-existing relationship with a potential caregiver.

From the perspective of youth who have experienced foster care, being placed with someone familiar can make the difference between feeling lost and feeling protected. It can preserve routines, maintain sibling and community ties, and provide emotional continuity during an otherwise destabilizing time. LB 928 moves Nebraska closer to a child-centered approach that prioritizes relationships and stability for children who have already experienced neglect or abuse.

Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 928 because it reflects best practice, honors the voices of impacted youth, and advances a more humane and effective child welfare system. We urge the committee to advance this bill and take an important step toward improving outcomes for children and families across our state.

We thank Senator von Gillern for your work to make Nebraska better for all kids and thank this committee for your time and your and consideration on this matter.