



February 10, 2026

To: Chairperson Murman and members of the Education Committee

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

Re: Support of LB 855, Adopt the Youth Early Intervention and Support Act

Every year, we see children enter the child welfare and juvenile justice systems not because they were dangerous, but because they were unsupported. Voices for Children in Nebraska is in support of LB 855 because this bill reflects a shared commitment to identifying needs early, responding with compassion, and building systems that support children before what they are facing escalates into crisis.

When children are struggling, it is not because they are “bad kids,” but because they are carrying unmet needs, trauma, instability, and stress that show up in their behavior, attendance, learning, and health. The early warning signs named in this bill are not disciplinary problems. They are signals that a child and their family need support.

The approach LB 855 takes clearly centers prevention. The early support system created in this act is explicitly non-punitive and trauma-informed. It is designed to connect students and families to help, without surveillance, punishment, or system involvement. This distinction matters deeply for families who already experience fear and mistrust of institutions based on historic harm, over-policing, and over-reporting.

We strongly support the bill’s emphasis on coordinated, cross-sector collaboration. Too often, families are forced to navigate fragmented systems where schools, health providers, behavioral health services, and community organizations operate in silos. LB 855 creates a structure that allows those systems to work together in a coordinated way, using existing relationships and professionals rather than building costly new bureaucracies. This is a smart, efficient approach that strengthens what already exists in communities.

The inclusion of community health workers is particularly powerful. Community health workers are trusted connectors who understand local culture, language, and barriers to access. They are uniquely positioned to build trust with families, identify social determinants of health, and connect households to resources before problems escalate into reports, removals, court involvement, or system entry. This is exactly the kind of upstream investment that keeps families intact and children safe.

We also appreciate the strong safeguards in this legislation. The explicit protections around FERPA and HIPAA, the prohibition on referrals to law enforcement or child welfare based

solely on early indicators, and the requirement to monitor for disproportionate impact all demonstrate a serious commitment to equity, privacy, and harm prevention. These guardrails are critical to ensuring that early support does not become another pathway into system involvement for marginalized communities.

From a prevention standpoint, this bill represents what effective policy should look like. It shifts Nebraska away from crisis response and toward early care. It reduces reliance on punitive systems and increases access to community-based support. It strengthens families instead of separating them. And it addresses root causes instead of downstream consequences.

This bill would support work already being done in Nebraska to address Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), which are potentially traumatic events occurring before age 18.

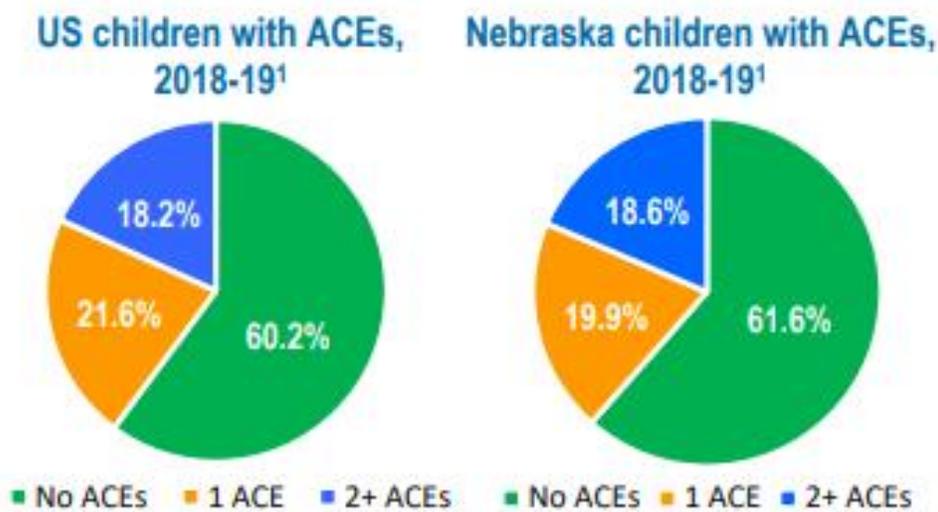


Table 1: National & NEBRASKA CHILD outcomes by ACEs, (2018-2019 NSCH) ^{1,4,5}

Figure 1 Source: National Survey of Children’s Health in 2019

According to the National Survey of Children’s Health in 2019 almost 40% of Nebraska schools aged children has experiences at least 1 ACE with almost 20% experiencing two or more of the following:

Categories of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

The standard 10 types of ACEs are:

- Abuse: Physical, Emotional, Sexual
- Neglect: Physical, Emotional
- Household Dysfunction:
 - Parental separation or divorce
 - Substance abuse in the household
 - Household member with mental illness or suicide attempts
 - Incarcerated household member
 - Witnessing intimate partner violence (specifically, mother treated violently)

Researchers have expanded the list to include community-level stressors that cause similar trauma:

- Witnessing community violence
- Living in unsafe neighborhoods
- Experiencing racism or discrimination
- Food insecurity or poverty
- Bullying (by peers or adults)

LB 855 creates a different pathway for kids that are struggling, one that says Nebraska will respond to struggling children with help, coordination, and care instead of punishment, court involvement, and system entry. For these reasons, we strongly support LB 855 and urge the committee to advance this bill. It is a thoughtful, humane, and evidence-informed approach that aligns with Nebraska's responsibility to protect children, strengthen families, and prevent harm before it becomes irreversible.

Thank you for Senator McKinney for introducing this bill and this committee for your commitment to Nebraska's children and families.