



February 2, 2026

To: Chairperson Murman, and members of the Education Committee

From: Anahí Salazar, Voices for Children in Nebraska

RE: Support for LB1146- Change provisions relating to reports by a school district relating to absences of a child from school

Education plays a crucial role in shaping children into healthy, productive adults. At Voices for Children, we connect with young people whose lives are shaped not just by their choices, but by the systems meant to support them. Schools should be places of stability, understanding, and opportunity, not a gateway into the juvenile justice system. Voices for Children supports LB 1146 as it moves Nebraska closer to that shared value and moves us towards best practices relating to absences from school.

There are many reasons students miss school that simply cannot be avoided. Absenteeism is a complex issue influenced by a combination of individual, family, and school-related factors. LB 1146 protects students whose absences are tied to these realities and ensures they are not pushed into the juvenile court system for circumstances outside their control.

This bill makes a critical and commonsense change by clarifying what should not be considered an unexcused absence. This includes absences related to illness, disability, pregnancy or parenting, homelessness, or services provided through IEPs, IFSPs, Section 504 plans, or the Education for Homeless Children and Youth program. These students already have legally recognized needs and protections. Treating absences connected to those needs as unexcused and subject to court referral does not improve attendance and instead exacerbates stress, trauma, and disengagement from school.

The most common reported reason from youth for missing school is sickness.¹ It is well documented that easily transmitted diseases such as influenza, or the common cold, or hand foot and mouth increase during the winter months. According to the CDC, Nebraska is currently labeled as a high activity state,² for influenza, all across the country and state, influenza has impacted millions of families. Parents are finding themselves having to take illnesses more seriously, considering the health of those around their child. Children with

¹ [Chronic Absenteeism Still a Struggle in 2024–2025: Selected Findings from the American School District Panel and the American Youth Panel | RAND](#)

² [Weekly US Map: Influenza Summary Update | FluView | CDC](#)

chronic illnesses such as asthma and type 1 diabetes, miss more school when they are having an increase in symptoms³, not always needing to go to a doctor to confirm that they need to treat their symptoms their treatments because they already have the medication.

Not only is physical health an increasing concern, many youth are struggling with mental health challenges after the pandemic, with increased anxiety and depression.⁴ LB 1146 would decrease the possibility of escalating a young persons anxiety as they try to recover, because they fear their parents and themselves would get in trouble with the courts if they keep missing school, hindering their recovery. Penalizing these absences undermines both student health and family decision making.

LB 1146 does not eliminate accountability. Schools still track attendance and intervene when students are chronically absent. The purpose of attendance data should be to identify when students need additional support and resources, not to funnel vulnerable young people into the justice system. By raising the referral threshold and expanding excused absences, this bill creates more opportunities for early, school based interventions that actually address the root causes of absenteeism.

Just like math and reading, chronic absence rates will not improve without ongoing attention and action. LB 1146 recognizes that kids who are struggling need support, not summonses. We thank Senator Conrad for her leadership in ensuring students have the resources they need to attend school, and we thank the committee for your commitment to policies that are fair, effective, and centered on the well being of Nebraska's children.

³ [School Attendance, Truancy & Chronic Absenteeism: What Parents Need to Know - HealthyChildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org/English/Health-Topics/Chronic-Absenteeism/Pages/School-Attendance-Truancy-and-Chronic-Absenteeism.aspx)

⁴ Stanford, 2023