



February 27, 2026

To: Chairperson Murman and members of the Education Committee

From: Katie Nungesser, Voices for Children in Nebraska

Re: Support of LB 1216, Provide for educational services for prisoners

Every young person deserves the opportunity to learn, grow, and prepare for a meaningful future, regardless of their circumstances. Access to quality education for individuals 21 years of age and under in state custody reflects our commitment to equity, rehabilitation, and human dignity. Voices for Children is in support of LB 1216 as it focuses on providing educational opportunities, empowers young people to build skills, earn credentials, and contribute positively to their communities, strengthening both their futures and the safety and well-being of Nebraska as a whole.

LB 1216 affirms a clear and important principle. Young people do not lose their right to education because they are incarcerated. By ensuring that individuals under the age of twenty-one who have not earned a high school diploma or high school equivalency credential receive meaningful access to education, this bill centers educational equity, opportunity, and long-term success for some of Nebraska's most vulnerable students.

Education programs in correctional settings should be understood as a long-term public investment. Strong evidence shows that when people have access to education while incarcerated, they are less likely to return to the justice system, and community safety is strengthened.¹ These programs also improve people's chances of finding stable employment and earning sustainable incomes after release, contributing to healthier local economies. From a fiscal standpoint, the return is clear: the public gains more in economic and social benefits than what is spent providing education opportunities to incarcerated young people.

System involved young people already experience disrupted schooling, learning gaps, and unmet special education needs. Incarcerated individuals are twice as likely to have the lowest literacy proficiency and are twice as likely to not have obtained a high school diploma.² Not only can the state see financial benefits from offering more education in our facilities, but there can also be a major impact on the person incarcerated. Education in prison significantly improves mental health, increases self-esteem, reduces anxiety, and can help create hope for the future.

This bill aligns correctional education with minimum standards set by the State Department of Education. This alignment strengthens educational integrity. When curriculum, instruction, and

¹ (Stickle, B., Schuster, S. S., & Sprick, E. (2024, November 26). How states can improve education programs in prisons (Policy Brief No. S2024-02). Mackinac Center for Public Policy. <https://www.mackinac.org/s2024-02>)

² (Bender, K. (2018, March 2). Education opportunities in prison are key to reducing crime. Center for American Progress. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/education-opportunities-prison-key-reducing-crime/>)

programming meet state standards, students can earn credits, build transferable skills, and pursue credentials that have real value beyond confinement. This creates continuity between correctional education and Nebraska's broader public education system.

LB 1216 supports successful educational reentry. Education is one of the strongest predictors of long-term stability and opportunity. Young people who leave custody with education, vocational skills, and credentials are more likely to continue their education, secure employment, and build stable futures. This strengthens families, communities, and Nebraska's workforce.

From an education and youth justice perspective, access to quality education is a foundational right and a public investment in Nebraska's future. When the state commits to educating young people in its custody, it affirms their capacity for growth, learning, and contribution to society. It strengthens accountability, promotes educational equity, and builds pathways to stability and success.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge the Education Committee to advance LB 1216 and support meaningful access to quality education for young people in the custody of the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services. The vast majority of these young people will return to our neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces. They are still our future, and ensuring they have access to education is essential to their success and to the strength of our communities.

Thank you, Senator McKinney, for introducing this legislation and to this committee your time and attention.