October 23, 2015

Dear Senator Morfeld and members of the Judiciary Committee,

Thank you for bringing and considering LR 186, raising awareness of the all-too-real problem of human trafficking in the state of Nebraska, and the current need for services suited to assist victims and survivors. Every day, individuals are trafficked in Nebraska in both sex and labor trades, and we know this is happening across the state.

During the 2015 legislative session, Voices for Children and Nebraska Appleseed provided testimony and input on LB 294 about our concern with maintaining Nebraska’s Safe Harbor provisions, protecting victims of trafficking from prosecution and the further trauma of juvenile lock-up. We are heartened both by the Legislature’s commitment to addressing the needs of those victims, and by the focus in the plan recently released by the Attorney General that balances the prosecution of traffickers and consumers with provision of services and assistance for victims and survivors. An important takeaway from the LB 294 hearing was that Nebraska has too many gaps in services, and we are currently unable to adequately respond to victims.

You will hear more detailed testimony today from local analysts who are tracking Nebraska data on trafficking, from service providers who offer victim assistance but are spread thin, and from national experts on best practices on responding to human trafficking, among others. This letter is intended only to express our continued interest in and support for state investment in an effective emergency response and effective network of services for victims statewide.

On this note, we wish to take the opportunity to specifically stress the importance of a clear, coordinated approach between law enforcement and the Department of Health and Human Services when presented with an underage victim of trafficking. This will require dovetailing policies and procedures, and intensive training of front line staff in both A) the law’s requirements for investigation, placement, and filing for court jurisdiction and B) trauma-informed approaches to meeting victim needs while pursuing prosecution of the perpetrators. Our hope and vision for the future of this system is a true “no wrong door” model, where victims are empowered to become survivors.

Thank you again for your time and consideration. We are eager to assist in any measure coming out of this important legislative resolution.

Sincerely,

Juliet Summers & Julia Tse
Voices for Children in Nebraska

Sarah Helvey, Becca Brune & Katie Pitts
Nebraska Appleseed