



February 3, 2016

Senator Kathy Campbell  
Chair, Health and Human Services Committee  
Room 1402, State Capitol  
Lincoln, NE 68509

Chairwoman Campbell and members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

My name is Sarah Helvey and I am a Staff Attorney and Director of the Child Welfare Program at Nebraska Appleseed. Nebraska Appleseed is a nonprofit organization that fights for justice and opportunity for all Nebraskans.

On behalf of Nebraska Appleseed, I am here to testify in support of LB 866.

As some Committee members are aware, Nebraska Appleseed was a strong supporter and very involved in the creation and implementation of the Bridge to Independence Program (B2I) in Nebraska, which provides extended services and support including a monthly stipend, health care coverage and case management support, for young people who age out of foster care to age 21. Nebraska is one of 22 states (and the District of Columbia) that has taken this option under federal law based on research showing these types of programs can improve otherwise poor outcomes experienced by this population, where, for example, over 50% experience homelessness and less than 2% finish college (compared with 23% of the general population).<sup>1</sup>

The original bill to establish the B2I program, LB 216 introduced by Senator Amanda McGill, initially included young people in the juvenile justice system. However, Senator McGill reluctantly introduced an amendment to LB 216 to remove the juvenile justice population from inclusion in the B2I program in 2014 due to budgetary constraints, but added a requirement to the bill for the B2I Advisory Committee to develop specific recommendations for “expanding or improving outcomes for similar groups of at-risk young adults” in the future.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Marci McCoy-Roth (July 2011), Child Welfare and Youth Homelessness: The Fostering Connections Act, available at [http://www.childtrends.org/Files//Child\\_Trends-2011\\_07\\_14\\_SP\\_CWHomelessness.pdf](http://www.childtrends.org/Files//Child_Trends-2011_07_14_SP_CWHomelessness.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-4513.

LB 866 is the result of that statutorily established recommendation requirement and represents a first step in providing supports and improving outcomes for this population.

Young people aging out of the juvenile justice system are often very similarly situated to young people aging out of the foster care system. Many have histories of abuse and neglect and do not have a safe or supportive home situation. But they are not currently eligible for the existing B2I program if their case was not filed as a (3)(a) (i.e., child abuse and neglect case under Nebr. Rev. Stat. § 43-247(3)(a)). More broadly, youth aging out of the child welfare and juvenile justice systems share “the negative developmental impact that the trauma they experienced has caused” and “compromised social and family networks” and these challenges similarly exacerbate the already difficult transition to young adulthood.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, unfortunately, youth who age out of the juvenile justice system often face even worse outcomes than their peers who age out of the child welfare system, with even lower rates of involvement in education and employment and higher rates of substance abuse and mental health problems.<sup>4</sup> For both populations, it can be devastating to reach the age of majority and have services abruptly end. On the other hand, connecting young people to supportive individuals and services can make a difference.

LB 866 would allow young people who age out of the juvenile justice system to access critical independent living services to help connect them to housing, education and work supports. The B2I program has implemented a youth-directed model of case management that has been a very well received culture shift and we would expect this could serve as a model for the Transition to Adult Living Success Program and similarly make a real difference for these young people.

We also strongly support that LB 866 requires the collection of data and an evaluation of the program’s efficiency in achieving goals. We think this will be important for the Legislature to consider taking additional steps to improve outcomes for this population in the future.

We want to thank Senator Bolz and the Committee for your commitment to older youth in our child welfare and juvenile justice systems, and respectfully request that you vote to advance LB 866 out of committee.

Sincerely,  
NEBRASKA APPLESEED

Sarah Helvey, J.D., M.S.  
Director, Child Welfare Program

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<sup>3</sup> Altschuler, D., Stangler, G., Berkley, K., and Burton, L. (2009). *Supporting Youth in Transition to Adulthood: Lessons Learned from Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice*, available at <http://www.jimcaseyyouth.org/sites/default/files/documents/Georgetown%20child%20welfare%20and%20juvenile%20justice.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*