Ensuring a smooth implementation of the Young Adult Voluntary Services and Support Act

The Young Adult Voluntary Services and Support Act (LB 216) was passed in the 2013 Legislative session to create an age-appropriate, youth-focused, and voluntary program of services and support to 21 for young people who age out of foster care. This program has since been titled “Bridge to Independence.”

LB 853, introduced by Senator Amanda McGill, will strengthen the original bill, allow for a smoother implementation, and provide clarity on specific aspects of the Bridge to Independence program. These minor - but necessary - changes will make the program work best for young people.

Current Status

We are currently waiting for the federal government to approve DHHS’s state plan amendment authorizing federal matching funds for the program. This approval could come any day now, and the program would then begin within 60 days. LB 853 needs to move forward so the program will be ready for a smooth implementation.

LB 853 is the next step toward implementation

The Young Adult Voluntary Services and Support Act created an Advisory Committee to make initial recommendations regarding implementation of the program and to provide ongoing oversight.

The Advisory Committee, involving a wide variety of professionals and stakeholders, including representatives from DHHS, began meeting in July 2013 and has accomplished a great deal of work since.

Two rounds of recommendations created by the Advisory Committee have been accepted by the Children’s Commission and submitted to DHHS, the HHS Committee of the Legislature, and the Governor. The majority of these recommendations do not require legislation, but some were recommended as statutory changes. A few other necessary corrections were also identified through this collaborative process.

The Bridge to Independence program is a proven program that will help remove barriers for young people with experience in Nebraska’s foster care system. LB 853 is necessary so that the Bridge to Independence program is implemented in the best way possible for these young adults.
This bill does four primary things:

1. LB 853 updates statutory language to reflect the new title of the program
   - Replaces “extended services program” with “Bridge to Independence program” and updates the new caseworker title to “Independence Coordinator” (both of these name changes were recommended by the Advisory Committee with input from young people)

2. LB 853 provides guidance on how to implement the requirements of the program so DHHS is better able to serve young people
   - Provides additional guidance on what Independence Coordinators should work on with young people
   - Ensures young adults are regularly informed about their right to an attorney and to request additional court hearings as needed
   - Ensures all young adults leaving the program receive information about community resources that may be of assistance to them
   - Requires that Independence Coordinators help young adults prepare for their annual permanency review hearings and 6-month case reviews
   - Specifies that supervisors of Independence Coordinators should also have specialized training in providing transition services and support to young adults
   - Encourages the active participation of young adults in the 6-month case reviews

3. LB 853 also clarifies juvenile court jurisdiction and process
   - Provides reference to the juvenile court’s jurisdiction in existing statute
   - Specifies that the document DHHS is required to file with the juvenile court be a petition (instead of a report) and that a record be made of the permanency review hearings
   - Expedites permanency review hearings
   - Offers clarification on the juvenile court’s authority to review the legal rights and entitlements of young adults under this Act

4. LB 853 makes some technical changes
   - Removes an incorrect federal reference
   - Eliminates an inadvertent statutory inconsistency to permit extended guardianship subsidies beyond age 19 as intended by LB 216
   - Changes existing statute to reflect that the new Bridge to Independence program incorporates the Former Ward program