

To: Members of the Judiciary Committee

We, the undersigned, are writing to express our strong support for LB 180 to provide for bridge orders transferring juvenile court jurisdiction to a district court for custody matters when the safety of a child is not at stake. LB 180 is the result of work by the Legal Parties Taskforce of the Children's Commission, which identified this model as a solution that would, in some cases, permit DHHS to safely withdraw as the legal guardian of the child, and the juvenile court to close the child welfare case in a more timely fashion. This recommendation appeared in the 2016 Children's Commission Annual Report.

When there are concerns about a child's safety or well-being, a child welfare case is opened in the juvenile court. Sometimes, when the parents are separated, a child may safely be placed by the juvenile court with one legal parent but not the other parent that was involved in the abuse or endangerment. In such a case, when one parent has been determined to be capable of providing a safe and stable home, the child welfare case can end by means of a "bridge order" to transfer the case to the district court. The bridge order would address matters of physical and legal custody and parenting time, and would docket the case before the appropriate district court for consideration of a more permanent custody order.

Too often in Nebraska, children are waiting for lengthy periods as wards of the state under the supervision of the juvenile court not for safety reasons but for the district court to modify the underlying custody order. These lengthy waits contribute to the burden on our juvenile courts and to the costs borne by our Department of Health and Human Services. By contrast, the bridge order model has been successfully used in other states to close cases in a timely manner when the child is safely placed with a parent, but custody has not yet been resolved by the district court.

We strongly urge you to support LB 180 to reduce costs, ease overburdened juvenile court dockets, and increase timeliness to permanency for children and families who do not need to linger in our child welfare system.

Sincerely,