

# Disability Rights Nebraska

Protection and Advocacy for People with Disabilities

March 19, 2020

Dear Senators:

Disability Rights Nebraska is the designated Protection and Advocacy organization for people with disabilities in Nebraska, writes to support consideration of LB 1149.

Youth involved in juvenile court are disproportionately people living with a mental health condition: according to national experts, 70% of youth in custody have a mental health diagnosis.<sup>1</sup> That's more than three times higher than the rate of disability in the general population. As juvenile detention facilities and YRTC settings have expanded in number of youths in custody, it is important that they adopt only evidence-based strategies to care for these vulnerable youth to ensure the best possible outcomes for them rather than simply warehousing children until they are pushed into the adult criminal justice system without rehabilitation and care.

LB 1149 is further necessary to ensure that the young people in YRTC custody continue to have access to family visitation. Studies<sup>2</sup> repeatedly show that when people are in touch with family even while in custody, they are less likely to end up in detention again—keeping family ties strong thus prevents recidivism, strengthens mental health and wellbeing, and improves long term community safety. LB 1149 will ensure communication with family will be given the priority it deserves.

Disability Rights Nebraska recommends advancing LB 1149; at a minimum, given the unique nature of this session, the legislature should give robust discussion of the proposal components in a subsequent session.

If there are further questions or comment, please feel free to contact me at your earliest convenience: [brad@drne.org](mailto:brad@drne.org) or 402-474-3183.

Sincerely,

Bradley A. Meurrens, MPA  
Public Policy Director  
Disability Rights Nebraska

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<sup>1</sup> National Alliance on Mental Illness, "Juvenile Justice," <https://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-Public-Policy/Juvenile-Justice>

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Travis, McBride, and Solomon. 2006. "Families Left Behind: The Hidden Costs of Incarceration and Reentry." The Urban Institute. <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/families-left-behind> Also Duwe, Grant 2011. "Blessed Be the Social Tie That Binds: The Effects of Prison Visitation on Offender Recidivism." Criminal Justice Policy Review.