

**Judiciary Committee**  
**LB 975**  
**February 17, 2016**

**Doug Weinberg, Director**  
**Division of Children and Family Services**  
**Department of Health and Human Services**

Good afternoon Senator Seiler and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Doug Weinberg (D-O-U-G W-E-I-N-B-E-R-G). I am the Director of the Division of Children and Family Services in the Department of Health and Human Services. I am here to testify in support of LB 975. Thank you, Senator Kolterman, for introducing this bill and working to ensure the children and families of Nebraska continue to receive child placing services from faith based service organizations.

The Department of Health and Human Services has a longstanding public-private partnership with a diverse group of faith-based and non-faith-based organizations that work with us, to find and retain safe, loving, and supportive homes for children. Currently, the Department contracts with 36 child placing agencies, 10 of which are faith based service organizations, which are currently serving 504 children, or 17% of the out-of-home population in the Division of Children and Family Services. There are approximately 3,000 children in out of home placements with all of our agencies today. As you can see by the numbers, Nebraska has a critical need to find and retain safe, loving and supportive homes for children, and faith based organizations play a big part in this. The state cannot afford to lose any providers as we work collectively with various agencies to find a safe and loving home for these children. The Department values the relationship we have with these Service Providers and recognizes the work they do for the children and families of Nebraska. LB 975 allows Nebraska's faith-based organizations to support the work of the Department, and maintain practices which are in alignment with their sincerely held religious beliefs.

Even with the accommodations provided in LB 975, my agency has access to other child placing agencies that can assume responsibility and safely place children in need.

This bill will not affect the Department and our policy to continue to license all prospective foster parents will remain in force. Additionally, the Department will continue to place with families according to the child's best interests.

On a final note, I want to briefly explain the fiscal note filed initially by my Department. A quick review of the bill was thought to potentially place our federal Title IV-E funding in jeopardy. After more careful review, since our placement agencies are not state actors, I am comfortable with our final fiscal note showing no fiscal impact of the bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. We believe LB 975 will help DHHS continue our mission of helping people live better lives.

I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.