

Judiciary Committee
LB 503
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Vicki Maca, Deputy Director
Division of Children and Family Services
Department of Health and Human Services

Good afternoon, Senator Ashford and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Vicki Maca (V-I-C-K-I M-A-C-A). I am the Deputy Director of Protection and Safety for the Division of Children and Family Services at the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. I am here to testify in support of LB 503.

LB 503 calls for renaming the Child Protection Act to the Child Protection and Family Safety Act and authorizes the Department of Health and Human Services to develop an Alternative Response implementation plan, in consultation with the NE Children's Commission, and to implement the Alternative Response plan in up to five demonstration sites on or after January 1, 2015.

Nebraska currently has one response to accepted reports of child abuse and neglect received by the hotline, which is to investigate. This investigation is an assessment focused on making a determination whether or not child maltreatment occurred and to identify who is responsible for the maltreatment.

When allegations are substantiated, the responsible party's name is placed on the Central Registry for Child Abuse and Neglect.

LB503 authorizes a second type of response to accepted reports, called Alternative Response. Alternative Response incorporates family-centered, strengths-based practices into child protective services by assigning low-risk families to an assessment track rather than an investigation.

The premise behind Alternative Response is that because there is no formal investigation, fault finding or connection to the Central Registry, and because the worker possesses strong family engagement and strengths-based assessment skills, family members are more open to collaboratively identify those supports and services that promote family stability and are more likely to voluntarily engage in them. Should threats to a child's safety be identified during an Alternative Response, the Department's assessment would immediately shift to a traditional investigation.

Thirty-four states currently utilize an Alternative Response pathway for reports of abuse neglect in some capacity. Alternative Response is an innovative system response

designed to prevent child maltreatment by strengthening families. Alternative Response allows Protective Services to engage with families early by providing an opportunity for families to identify and receive the supports and services they need before child safety is compromised.

As you may know, The Division of Children and Family Services recently submitted an application to the federal government for a IV-E Demonstration Waiver. In this waiver application, Nebraska identified Alternative Response as one of the major system interventions to improve child- safety outcomes.

The Department will be moving forward with Alternative Response in anticipation of the Title IV-E waiver being approved. This will allow the Department to use flexible federal dollars to fund services for families receiving an alternative response, and will not require additional state general fund expenditures.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.