

May 2026

Governor Jim Pillen
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MY STORY IS MY SUPERPOWER



2026
NEBRASKA CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH ACCEPTANCE

I am writing to add my support to the MANY families in Nebraska who have children experiencing mental health, behavioral health, and substance use challenges. Today, nearly **1 in 4 Nebraska children** are facing conditions such as anxiety, depression, and ADHD, making it clear that the need for support has never been greater. Our youth are experiencing increasing challenges at alarming rates. In Nebraska, **27.2% of high school students report feeling sad or hopeless** for extended periods of time, and each year an estimated **24,000 adolescents experience serious thoughts of suicide**. These numbers represent real children, real families, and real stories—each deserving of attention, care, and action.

At the same time, families are navigating a system that is stretched thin. Nebraska is facing a **severe shortage of behavioral health professionals, with 88 of 93 counties designated as shortage areas**, creating significant barriers to accessing timely and effective care. While progress has been made in expanding services, ongoing challenges such as workforce shortages, limited capacity, and long waitlists continue to hinder our ability to meet the growing demand.

Mental health, behavioral health, and substance use challenges among youth have a profound impact not only on individuals, but on families and communities. Many families struggle to find affordable, accessible, and appropriate services, often feeling overwhelmed as they try to navigate complex systems of care. A strong, well-supported behavioral health system that includes **EARLY INTERVENTION** and **PREVENTION** is essential to ensuring positive outcomes for Nebraska's children and must remain a priority for both policymakers and community leaders.

This year, the Pony Express Riders, Family-Run Organizations of Nebraska, and many partners across the state have come together to plan this event in recognition of the importance of youth mental health. We stand united in taking ACTION to build solutions that support children and families across Nebraska.

Our 2026 theme, "**My Story is My Superpower**," reminds us that every young person carries a story that matters. When children and families are empowered to share their experiences, they build resilience, foster connection, and help break down stigma. By listening to and uplifting these stories, we transform lived experience into strength, advocacy, and hope.

We invite you and fellow state and local leaders to join us in taking ACTION—by investing in services, strengthening the workforce, and, most importantly, listening to the voices of our youth and families. By doing so, we protect and uplift our most precious resource—our children. **Together, we can make a powerful and lasting difference!**

Here is what I would like you to understand about My My Child's My Family's situation:

Thank you for listening,
Signed: _____

City: _____