



Hello, Action Alert Partners!

As we approach July 20th, when our state legislature reconvenes, I am asking for support for LB 1061, which had reached final reading at the time the legislature recessed due to the corona virus.

In summary, LB 1061, which was introduced by Senator Crawford, amends the Child Protection and Family Safety Act which delineates the procedures used in response to a report of child abuse or neglect, including alternative response, and the rights and responsibilities of the persons involved in those reports. The Child Protection and Family Safety Act was enacted September 1, 2019. LB 1061 seeks to modify the Act with the addition of child advocacy centers to play a role in alternative response to reports of child abuse or neglect.

Alternative response means a comprehensive assessment of (a) child safety, (b) the risk of future child abuse or neglect; (c) family strengths and needs; and (d) the provision or referral for necessary services and support. Alternative response is an alternative to traditional response and does not include an investigation or a formal determination as to whether child abuse or neglect has occurred.

A child advocacy center means a community-based organization that provides an appropriate site for conducting forensic interviews and referring victims of child abuse or neglect and appropriate caregivers for such victims to needed evaluation, services and supports. Such a community based organization must be a member in good standing of a state chapter of child advocacy centers. In Nebraska, there are seven such child advocacy centers which serve all 93 counties.

These centers are located in Omaha, Lincoln, Scottsbluff, Kearney, Grand Island, Norfolk, and North Platte, Nebraska. All are members in good standing with the Nebraska Alliance of Child Advocacy Centers.

Child Advocacy Centers offer best practices in the serving of abused children through a comprehensive approach to services for victims and their families. Child Advocacy Centers stress coordination of investigation and intervention services by bringing together professionals and agencies as a multidisciplinary team to create a child focused approach to child abuse cases. Key components of a child advocacy center include forensic interviewing, medical evaluations,

advocacy and support, therapeutic intervention, case review and tracking. **The goal is to ensure that children are not re-victimized by the very system designed to protect them.**

Forensic Interviews

When requested by law enforcement, child protective services or county attorneys, a Child Interview Specialist will conduct a video-taped forensic interview with the child. One of the goals of this interview is to reduce the number of times the child must tell the story of his/her abuse. Reducing the number of interviews reduces the trauma for the child.

Medical Exams

The medical staff performs complete examinations for children referred for sexual abuse, physical abuse and neglect, and for children entering the foster care system (varying on location). Referrals for sexual abuse examinations are made by Child Protective Services, Law Enforcement, physicians and hospital emergency room departments.

Advocacy

An advocate will assess each child's needs and refer them to appropriate therapy, support groups, and other resources. Families also receive help in "understanding the system." Regular follow-up contact with the family is done to ensure a better case outcome.

Case Staffing/Case Review

A multi-disciplinary team consisting of law enforcement, child protective services, medical professionals, prosecution, school personnel, and Child Advocacy Center staff regularly reviews cases and discusses general issues. The team also works toward making changes and finding solutions to problems in reporting and investigating child abuse, as well as other identified system issues.

The League Position for Support

Statement of Position on Early Intervention for Children at Risk, as adopted by the 1994 Convention reads: The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that early intervention and prevention measures are effective in helping children reach their full potential. The League supports policies and programs at all levels of the community and government that promote the well-being, encourage the full development, and ensure the safety of all children. These include:

- **child abuse/neglect prevention**
- teen pregnancy prevention
- quality health care, including nutrition and prenatal care
- early childhood education
- developmental services, emphasizing children ages 0-3
- **family support services**
- **violence prevention**

ACTION STEPS:

Contact your state senator as soon as possible and ask for continued support for LB 1061 during the final days of this session. Tell them the addition of child advocacy centers is vital to continued success in treating child abuse cases.

Talking Points:

The inclusion of child advocacy centers in statute is important for intervention and treatment for child abuse cases.

Child advocacy centers serve all 93 counties.

Child advocacy centers offer forensic services in child friendly environments with staff specifically trained to interact with child victims.

Child advocacy centers can serve children and their caregivers, no matter what their primary language may be.

The Department of Health and Human Services can absorb the expense of continuing alternative response with minor cost to the department.

As usual, contact your state senator as a constituent, not speaking for the League. Your state senator can be reached by email using the format: first initial last name@leg.ne.gov. For example, amorfeld@leg.ne.gov. Or you may call the Capitol switchboard at 402 471-2311 and ask for your senator's office.

I would appreciate hearing from you with any feedback from the senators and/or their staff members.

With much appreciation for your activist partnership,

Sherry Miller, VP for Action, LWVNE