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February 9, 2021

Senator Dan Hughes, Chair  
and Members of the Executive Board of the Legislative Council  
State Capitol, Lincoln NE

RE: LR 29 (M. Cavanaugh) Provide for appointment by the Executive Board of a special committee known as the *Eastern Service Area Child Welfare Contract Special Investigative and Oversight Committee* of the Legislature.

### **Support**

*Please include this position statement from the League of Women Voters of Nebraska as part of the public hearing record for LR 29.*

Dear Senator Hughes and Members of the Executive Board of the Legislative Council:

The League of Women Voters of Nebraska supports LR 29 to appoint a special committee, known as the *Eastern Service Area Child Welfare Contract Special Investigative and Oversight Committee* of the Legislature, to immediately convene a thorough review of the selection process of the St. Francis contract as well as the financial and programmatic activities during the next year. As part of that process, LWVNE urges the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services to develop a clear contingency plan to return the cases to NDHHS if St. Francis cannot meet its contracted standards.

For some background, Nebraska NDHHS launched its first privatization effort 10 years ago without sufficient funding or defined parameters. Six of the seven agencies contracted went out of business, filed bankruptcy or withdrew within the first two years. PromiseShip in the Eastern Service Area remained standing. In 2020, when a new RFP was developed by NDHHS, PromiseShip outscored St. Francis in every area except cost, which was too heavily weighted in the scoring. St. Francis bid 60% of what PromiseShip proposed and what PromiseShip had spent during the previous year. It was clear from the beginning that St. Francis had grossly underbid.

Nebraska taxpayers and the Legislature will now spend 72% more than St. Francis' original contract, which was signed in July 2019. The trauma and upheaval in changing providers in 2019 and then providing inadequate care will affect the future of these children for years to come. The three key child welfare measures worsened in the last year: (1) Children being reunited with their parents in a timely and permanent manner, (2) Children getting adopted in a timely manner and (3) Children leaving foster care for permanent homes.

Saving costs on the back of our most vulnerable children in Nebraska is a blight on our state. It is critical that the Legislature take the lead in examining the procurement process and never allow this mistake to

be repeated. The LWVNE supports policies and programs that respect the rights of children, promotes their well-being and ensures their safety.

Please advance this bill to General File for full floor debate.

Sincerely,

Joanna Lindberg, Social Policy Committee

Carol Dennison, Director of Social Policy

Dianne Bystrom, Co-President

Linda Duckworth, Co-President

League of Women Voters of Nebraska