Welcome to the NJJA Webinar Series
Legislative Advocacy 101:
Everything you didn’t learn in Civics class (or have forgotten) about the Nebraska Unicameral

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Webinar Road Map

- About Voices for Children
- Introduction to the Nebraska Unicameral
- Legislative Advocacy
- Staying Informed
About Voices for Children

Voices for Children in Nebraska is the independent voice building pathways to opportunity for all children and families through research, policy and community engagement.

We will engage the public and state leaders to build systems removing obstacles and promoting opportunities for ALL children to lead healthy, secure and fulfilling lives.
We believe that ALL children deserve an equal opportunity to succeed in life.

- Informed research drives our direction
- When a policy is good, we support it; when it is harmful, we fight it; when it is missing, we can create it.
- Community engagement is how we support systems change
Areas of Focus

› Child welfare
› Early childhood
› Economic stability
› Physical and behavioral health
› Juvenile justice
Research & Data

- Data-driven advocacy
  - Elevate public understanding and awareness of children’s issues
  - Measure and monitor children’s well-being
**Index of Race & Opportunity Overall Score**

- White, non-Hispanic: 89
- Black/African American: 31
- American Indian: 24
- Asian/Pacific Islander: 79
- 2+ Races: 63
- Hispanic: 55

**Nebraska poverty by race and ethnicity (2013)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Percent of children in poverty (17 and under)</th>
<th>Percent of population in poverty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White non-Hispanic</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>47.2%</td>
<td>33.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian and Alaska Native</td>
<td>43.3%</td>
<td>38.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Other Race</td>
<td>32.0%</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or More Races</td>
<td>26.2%</td>
<td>23.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>33.2%</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**White families’ median income is 1.7x higher than the median income of families of color.**

**Equality Before the Law: A Index of Race & Opportunity for Nebraska Children**

Nebraska was founded under values of opportunity and equality for all, but when looking at the data and research on Nebraska’s children and families, a harsher reality is uncovered—one of disparity and lack of equitable chance of future success and opportunity for children of color. In response to this, the Index of Race & Opportunity for Nebraska Children was created. A composite score of 13 indicators of child well-being was calculated to highlight disparities in opportunity and measure progress toward race equity and inclusion.

**10.5% of Nebraskans were of color in 2014. By 2050, this is expected to increase to 30%.**

**Indicators:**

**Education**
- 3- and 4-year-olds enrolled in school
- Reading proficiency at 3rd grade
- 16-24-year-olds employed or attending school

**Health**
- Children with health insurance coverage
- Infants receiving adequate prenatal care

**Juvenile Justice**
- Youths who have completed a diversion program successfully
- Youths who have completed probation successfully

**Economic Stability**
- Children living above the Federal Poverty Level
- Median family income
- Children living in a low-poverty areas

**Child Welfare**
- Children not involved in the child welfare system
- Children who are wards of the state, but are living at home
- Children who are living in out-of-home care, but have done so in 3 or fewer placements

**Overall Index Scores**
- White non-Hispanic: 89
- Black/African American: 31
- American Indian: 24
- Asian/Pacific Islander: 79
- 2+ Races: 63
- Hispanic: 55

**Recommendations:**
1. Improve collection methods of racial and ethnic data.
2. Use the 7 steps to advance and embed race equity and inclusion at all levels of policy creation.
3. Use data to target interventions and investments to yield the greatest impact.
Introduction to the Unicameral

- Ours is the only unicameral body in the country—while many other states have hundreds of legislators and thousands of bills that may never pass, our lawmaking processes and senators are highly accessible to anyone!

- Standing committees are organized around various public policy areas (such as the HHS Committee), which facilitate the initial processing of legislation. Committee chairs are very important in stewarding this process, and members have and develop varying levels of expertise in the issue. Committee lists are available at http://www.leg.ne.gov/.
Introduction to the Unicameral

- Each legislature is made up of two sessions over a biennium, which consists of a short (60-day) session in even-numbered years and a long (90-day) session in odd-numbered years. Each session convenes on the first Wednesday after the first Monday in January of each year. The time between sessions is called the interim, during which committees are studying a variety of issues through legislative resolutions that have been passed.
- Bills must be introduced within the first 10 days of session. Bills that are voted quickly out of committees have the best chance of advancing further during that session.
Introduction to the Unicameral

- Bills that are given priority status are generally considered ahead of other bills in debate. Each senator may select one priority bill, committees may select two, and the speaker may select up to 25.
- The Speaker of the body is elected by senators and prepares the agenda and calendar.
- Be strategic with contacting senators—you may contact the Committee Clerk to find out when a bill have an exec session (where it will be voted on), or the Speaker’s office to find out when it will be scheduled for debate on the floor.
Introduction to the Unicameral

- A constitutional amendment passed in 2000 limited senators to serve only two consecutive 4-year terms (eligible for election after 4 years away). As a result, in this upcoming year, at least 30 of our 49 senators will have no more than 2 years of experience. At least 11 of them will be freshmen senators. Many of the legislative leaders— the Speaker, and Committee Chairs— with historical and technical knowledge will be leaving in 2017.

Your expertise and perspective matters!
How a Bill Becomes a Law in Nebraska

As the only unicameral, or one house, Legislature in the country, Nebraska’s process for taking an idea and making it a law is relatively straightforward. Here is the path a bill takes to become a law:

1: May be indefinitely postponed at this stage. This is basically the same as “killing the bill.”
2: May be amended at the stage.
3: May be returned to the Select File for additional amendments.
4: Bill goes to E&R for edits to grammar, punctuation and to include amendments.

Idea proposed

Bill introduced & numbered

Public Hearing

General File

Select File

Governor Vetoes or Approves

5 Day Wait

SIGNED

VETO

Legislative Override

Committee can vote to indefinitely postpone or “kill” the bill

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Introducing legislation

1. Present your idea to a senator
   ◦ Start early! The summer can be a good time to start, since the Legislature will not be in session.
   ◦ If you’re unsure where to start, it can be a good idea to turn to your home senator, or one with some expertise in the issue area.

2. Work with the senator’s staff
   ◦ Provide the research that you have gathered. Legislative staff will bring draft language to a Bill Drafter to ensure that it is consistent with existing statute.
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Supporting (or opposing) legislation

- In Nebraska, all introduced bills receive a public hearing before its assigned committee, where anyone can come to testify in support, opposition, or a neutral capacity.

- Senators want to hear what you have to say! There are only 49 of them, and they are all responsive to letters, emails, and in-person visits.

- You can find contact information for your local representative here: http://www.nebraskalegislature.gov/senators/senator_find.php
Preparing for a hearing

- Hearing dates are available online at http://www.leg.ne.gov/. The order of hearings is typically as listed on the website, but may change at the last minute, so be prepared to wait!
- Decide if you are able or willing to deliver oral testimony in person. Most testifiers bring copies 10-12 copies of their written testimony for the committee members and staff.
- Prepare your testimony; ensure that it is concise and use relevant facts. Most committees only allot 3 minutes to each speaker.
- If you are working with others who plan to testify, coordinate speaking order by expertise or topic in advance.
What to do at committee hearings

- Sheets are provided at the doorways of committee hearing rooms. You must hand a completed sheet in to the clerk before testifying.
- The committee chair will explain housekeeping rules prior to the start of the hearing. You will be timed and a light system will be in front of you signaling a warning, then a stop. Before beginning, you will state and spell your name for the record.
- Be prepared to modify your oral testimony; try not to repeat points that previous testifiers have made. Thank the senators for their time and effort.
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Written testimony

- If you are unable or unwilling to testify in person, you can submit written testimony to the committee clerk via email (call the committee chair’s office to confirm an address), submit it in person at the hearing, or have someone else submit it for you.
- Indicate whether you would like your testimony to be included in the official record (to be published in the committee statement).
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Writing a letter

- Introduce yourself— if you are a constituent, identify yourself as such
- Explain the issue and your position succinctly, including any relevant facts and personal experiences
- Thank the Senator for their time and attention
- Include your name, address, and email address
- Do not accuse or threaten, and be sure to have factual information
- When sending letters to multiple Senators, address each individually and try to personalize the letter if you know anything about them or their district
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Sending an email

- Prepare the email as you would when sending a letter
- Senators often respond very quickly to email (except for Senator Chambers!)
- Send and address each email individually—do not send a mass email to multiple individuals
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Making a phone call

- Introduce yourself— if you are a constituent, identify yourself as such
- Be prepared to talk to a staff member if the Senator is not available
- Be brief and offer to send follow-up materials or to be available for follow-up questions in the future
- Thank them for their time and attention
Staying Informed

- Every session, hundreds of bills are brought … How can you stay on top of what’s happening?
- Let us do the work for you, by joining Voices for Children’s listserv, Advokid: http://voicesforchildren.com/advokid/
  - During session, weekly e-mail blasts highlight what’s happening in the NE Legislature regarding juvenile justice, child welfare, family economic stability, and children’s health
- Join me and NJJA next month for a deep dive into all the juvenile justice legislation introduced in January 2017!

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