



March 23, 2015

RE: LB 443

Dear Senator Sullivan:

Disability Rights Nebraska is the designated Protection and Advocacy organization for individuals with disabilities in Nebraska. We support LB 443.

Students who utilize the support services identified in LB 443 should have the ability to access mental health services as well. Access to mental health services is an essential tool for students' personal and academic development. As the National Disability Rights Network states: "Investing in a successful educational experience is the major route for individuals with disabilities to become independent, productive, and contributing members of their communities."¹ Students with mental health needs should not be excluded from receiving support services which can help them succeed and prevent a special education placement.

The 2014 report "Are the Children Well? A Model and Recommendations for Promoting the Mental Wellness of the Nation's Young People" from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation outlines the importance of providing mental health services to youth:

"Nationally representative data suggest that about half of Americans will experience a mental health concern at some point in their lives, and most will originate in childhood (see Table 1; note that different data sources were used for the two age groups, and prevalence figures may reflect historical changes in recognition/identification of particular diagnoses). In a study of adults who had been diagnosed with a mental illness at some point during their lives, half said that they had experienced symptoms by their mid-teens. Anxiety and impulse-control problems were particularly likely to appear early in life, with more than half appearing before age 12....research suggests that any inaccuracies are more likely to underestimate than to over-estimate the prevalence of childhood symptoms. It is clear that a large segment of our population will be affected by mental

¹ See National Disability Rights Network, <http://ndrn.org/en/issues/education.html>

health challenges at some point in their lives—often much earlier in life than was recognized in the past.”²

Additionally, some students who have mental or other behavioral health needs are subjected to the use of restraint and/or seclusion which access to mental health services could help to reduce.

Disability Rights Nebraska recommends LB 443 be advanced.

Sincerely,

Bradley A. Meurrens, MPA
Public Policy Specialist

BAM/jrm

cc: Sen. Baker; Sen. Cook; Sen. Groene; Sen. Kolowski; Sen. Morfeld; Sen. Pansing
Brooks; Sen. Schnoor

² “Are the Children Well? A Model and Recommendations for Promoting the Mental Wellness of the Nation’s Young People”, available at http://www.rwjf.org/content/dam/farm/reports/issue_briefs/2014/rwjf414424, p. 10