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The Youth Reentry and Transitional Support Act

LB 962 (2026)

"Supporting youth potential, fortifying families, and strengthening communities."

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The Youth Reentry and Transitional Support Act: LB962

I. Youth Reentry and Transition Act, Purpose:

The purpose of the Youth Reentry and Transitional Support Act is to ensure youth in congregate care placements or who are transitioning from Probation receive coordinated transition planning and supportive services designed to promote successful reintegration into their families, schools, employment, and communities. The program will be offered to youth under court jurisdiction and placed on probation, a ward of the Court and/or a ward of the State, while ensuring that youth and families have consistent opportunities to develop personalized, structured, supportive transition plans as they return home/back to the community. Through this collaboration, youth will be empowered with skills and services needed to become valued neighbors who strengthen our local communities.

II. LB962 Leadership Team Mission:

The Youth Reentry and Transitional Support Act- Leadership Team brings together multiple State entities to work cooperatively to come into alignment and agreement on how to best enact the Youth Reentry and Transitional Support Act of 2026. Transition plans will include specific provisions and ensure coordination which will be informed by validated assessment tool(s). Through this collaboration, we have created the program's rules and regulations that will provide intensive support to youth and families, empowering them by connecting programs and services to support them as youth transition back to the community.

III. Membership:

1. Nebraska State Department of Education
   A. Nebraska VR (Vocational Rehabilitation)
2. Nebraska State Department of Health and Human Services
   A. Division of Children and Family Services
   B. Office of Juvenile Services
3. Nebraska Department of Labor
4. Administrative Office of the Courts and Probation, Juvenile Services Division
5. Service Providers: (Detention, Shelter, Independent/Transitional Living, Group Homes and Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facilities (PRTF))

IV. Guiding Principles

1. **Begin Transition Planning at Entry, Not Exit**
   The Act emphasizes discharge planning upon entry as best practice. Transition planning should begin early and continue throughout the out-of-home placement and reentry process for the youth. The goal is to utilize and promote a relational framework to support transitioning to a home-like setting in the community.
2. **Family and Youth Engagement**
   Transition planning should include the youth and family, or guardian. Transition plans must be family-centered and supported by community-based providers, including credible messengers.
3. **Individualized, Holistic, and Assessment-Driven Support**
   Transition plans must be individualized, use validated assessments, and incorporate evaluations and treatment, education, employment, housing, and restorative justice goals guided by a consistent set of rules and regulations.
4. **Consistent, Frequent Review and Adaptation**
   Weekly or monthly reviews by youth's support team ensure youth's transition plan remains responsive and adaptive based on changing needs.
5. **Cross-Agency Collaboration**
   By ensuring a collaborative team approach DHHS, OJS, Probation, Education, Employment, Facilities, Providers, and other appropriate partners should coordinate responsibilities and avoid unnecessary duplication of services by ensuring clarity of roles.
6. **Emphasize Long-Term Stability and Reintegration**
   Transition planning should focus on continuity of behavioral health, medical, Medicaid, education, housing, employment, identification documents, and other supports identified for the youth.
7. **Program Fidelity**
   The setting of minimum training standards for credible messengers, how to record and analyze data, and including nuanced measures of recidivism to ensure positive outcomes for youth and families.

V. Rules and Regulations

1. **Planning:**
   - **A.** DHHS and AOCP shall have their own transition plan format so long as it includes provisions outlined in the Youth Transition and Reentry Act.
   - **B.** Transition plans shall use validated assessment instruments, identified by each individual entity, in collaboration with the youth, youth's family and/or guardian, and youth support team.
   - **C.** Transition plans shall be individualized based on the needs of the youth and include the following:
     - **1)** Evaluation and treatment services including continuity of behavioral health, medical, and Medicaid services.
     - **2)** Enrollment of eligible youth into programs/services offered by the State Department of Education.
     - **3)** Individualized employment plan with career and training pathways for youth obtaining employment.
     - **4)** Services matched to the risk and need of the youth to community-based providers, including credible messenger mentoring or in-home supportive or behavioral health services.
     - **5)** Coordination with family resource centers to support youth and family when appropriate.
     - **6)** Housing stabilization strategy and safe placement.
     - **7)** School reentry or educational advancement plan.
     - **8)** Assistance for youth in applying for Medicaid benefits and plan to maintain eligibility.
     - **9)** Assistance to obtain identification documents and public benefits.
     - **10)** Family engagement and restorative justice objective reforms.
   - **D.** Youth eligible to participate in Bridges to Independence (B2i) shall be referred to the program.

2. **Joint Responsibilities:**
   - **A.** Frequency of the transition plan review will depend on youth's placement type, as outlined below. Youth in short-term placement will be reviewed and adjusted on a weekly basis and monthly for youth in all other placement types. Plans may also be reviewed and adjusted at any time based on a change in the youth and/or family's risk, need, and/or responsivity.
     - **1)** Short-term placements: secure and staff secure detention, shelter, and crisis-stabilization.
     - **2)** Other placement types: group homes, treatment facilities, youth rehabilitation and treatment centers (YRTC).
   - **B. Collaborative establishment of the Youth Reentry and Transitional Act:** The Department of Education, Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Juvenile Services, Administrative Office of the Courts and Probation, Department

of Labor, and community-based organizations shall work collaboratively to establish the Youth Reentry and Transitional Support Program.

C. **Identification of youth's support team**: Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Juvenile Services, and/or Administrative Office of the Courts and Probation will work with the youth and parent/guardian to establish the appropriate members of the youth's support team based on validated assessment and youth's current risk, need, and responsivity. The youth's support team will be established prior to the transition plan being created.
D. **Transition planning upon admission to facility or placement on probation**: A transition plan shall be developed for each youth upon admission to a facility or admission to another congregate care placement or probation supervision. The plan should be developed using validated assessments instruments, screenings, and evaluations.
E. **Participation in individualized transition planning**: The youth, parent/guardian, and all identified youth support team members will be part of the establishment and ongoing review of the youth's transition plan. Frequency of plan review is discussed in Rules and Regulations section of this document.
F. **Monthly Family Team Meetings**: The youth, parent/guardian, and youth support team will participate in monthly family team meetings while youth are in a facility or on probation supervision.
G. **Integration of necessary supportive services or inclusion of other state entities**: The youth's support team will connect with other state entities (such as Department of Education, Nebraska VR, Department of Labor, etc.) when identified for a youth and/or family. Necessary referrals for service and collaboration will be sent in a timely manner to ensure the proper integration of services prior to a youth's transition from placement or out of Probation supervision.
H. **Supervision following reentry**: The youth's support team will implement the youth transition plan with support from Department of Health and Human Services and/or Administrative Office of the Courts and Probation, Juvenile Services Division as appropriate based on youth's case.
I. **Review of individualized transition plan following return to community**: The youth, parent/guardian, and youth support team will review youth's individualized transition plan at least monthly for the first ninety (90) days after returning from placement with a focus on utilizing community-based services to support the youth and family after system involvement.
J. **Completion of individualized transition plan:** A youth's transition plan remains active upon reentry into the community for at least ninety (90) days, until identified needs are met, plan goals are achieved, and/or upon discharge from supervision. Should a youth remain active due to the above circumstances, their transition plan would end at the age of 19 (age of majority) although discharge supports could continue.

VI. Cross-System Roles:

1. **Department of Health and Human Services- Division of Children and Family Services (CFS)**: CFS collaborates with other state partners and the youth's support team to develop each youth's transition plan starting at admission, ensuring it includes education, services, and support needed for successful return to the community. The agency provides oversight and guidance through multiple staff roles and ongoing collaboration with the youth's support team. CFS also facilitates regular family team meetings, connects youth to needed services, and provides supervision after reentry. When eligible, CFS refers youth to programs like Bridge to Independence and integrates transition planning into existing child welfare and Medicaid systems.
2. **Department of Health and Human Services/Office of Juvenile Services (OJS):** OJS partners with CFS, Probation, and NDE to participate in developing each youth's transition plan. The office provides supervision and programming for youth in its custody, conducts monthly reviews of transition plans, and integrates this work into its existing case-management resources. OJS and Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Centers (YRTCs) begin transition planning starting at the point of commitment, monthly plan reviews, and coordination of services such as education, behavioral health, employment, and housing supports. Their involvement ends once a youth is no longer in OJS custody, though they may participate in early post-reentry family team meetings if needed.
3. **Administrative Office of the Courts and Probation, Juvenile Services Division:** Probation collaborates and coordinates youth transition planning by engaging district officers, reentry officers, supervisors, and leadership in consistent communication, policy implementation, and collaboration with courts, providers, and facilities. Probation staff collaborate with the youth's support team to create, update, and monitor transition plans; facilitate family team meetings; and maintain ongoing engagement with youth and families throughout detention, out-of-home placement, and YRTC commitments. Across all levels, Probation ensures compliance with protocols, tracks progress, and supports smooth transitions back to the community.
4. **Nebraska Department of Labor (NDOL):** NDOL supports individuals by helping them prepare and access employment through job search assistance, career planning, labor market information, and reentry-focused workforce services. The department identifies employment barriers, provides referrals to community resources, and connects youth with work-based learning, training, and Registered Apprenticeship opportunities. NDOL screens youth for Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act eligibility and offers supportive services when applicable.
5. **Nebraska State Department of Education (NDE)**: NDE provides statewide guidance, technical assistance, and professional development to help schools meet

their responsibilities under LB 962 and meet educational needs of eligible youth. Through its System-Involved Youth Department, NDE supports districts, Rule 18 schools, interim-program schools, and special purpose schools with enrollment, credit evaluation, graduation planning, educational continuity and coordination of special education services. Through its **Finish Strong Initiative**, NDE promotes educational stability and successful graduation for systems-involved youth by reducing barriers to enrollment, supporting credit transfer and recovery, and providing flexible pathways toward meeting the 200-credit graduation requirements established under NDE Rule 10. Through coordination with schools, residential facilities, and partner agencies, Finish Strong helps youth maintain academic progress and access meaningful opportunities to graduate and transition successfully into adulthood.

A. **Nebraska VR:** VR works with schools and other organizations across the state to help students who experience disabilities, aged 14 to 21, plan for the future and prepare for careers that match their skills, abilities, and interests. The scope of Nebraska VR Pre-Employment Transition Services is to provide students with exposure to various jobs and career paths through exploration activities.

6. **Service Providers: Detention, Shelter, Independent/Transitional Living, Group Homes, and Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility (PRTF):**

   A. Nebraska juvenile facilities shall begin transition planning at intake and work collaboratively with the referring agency to implement early, coordinated, family-centered transition planning that continues through the youth's reentry into the community. Facilities are responsible for maintaining consistent engagement with the youth's support team and family, providing regular updates on progress in programming, and ensuring continuity of care across placements and services. This includes coordinating behavioral health, medical, educational, vocational, and restorative justice supports, and supporting the wrap around services necessary to promote stability and successful reintegration.

VII. Resources:

1. **Nebraska Department of Labor (NDOL) Resources:**

   A. **Workforce Services**: Includes job search assistance, resume and interview preparation, career planning, and providing information on Labor Market Information.

   B. **Reentry Services**: Connecting system-involved youth with employment services while working through potential barriers and providing appropriate community referrals for NDOL Programs.

   C. **Registered Apprenticeship**: Connecting system-involved youth with Registered Apprenticeship opportunities. This includes Earn-and-Learn Opportunities that combine paid employment and training.

D. **Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Youth**: Determines if a youth qualifies for WIOA. Youth can then receive occupational training or work-based learning, which may include assistance for those opportunities.

E. **NEworks**: Connecting youth to available Nebraska jobs and career resources for employment.

F. **Jobs for America's Graduates Nebraska (JAG):** Connect youth to JAG, a school program that helps middle and high school students finish school and find jobs. JAG helps youths overcome obstacles and challenges to achieve personal and career success after high school and helps them to become valued employees.

G. **Workforce Pell:** Connects justice-involved youth to short term, career-focused training, industry-recognized credentials, registered apprenticeships, and employment opportunities. Through NDOL and workforce partners, eligible youth could access Workforce Pell funded training aligned with Nebraska's high demand industries. This partnership would strengthen individualized employment and education plans, reduce financial barriers to training, and support successful transitions into the workforce. NDOL's role would be to coordinate employer partnership, workforce referrals, apprenticeship opportunities, and access to approved training programs.

2. **Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) Resources**:

A. **Guidance & Clarification:** Develop and disseminate guidance to help school districts understand their responsibilities related to LB 962 and how those responsibilities intersect with existing education laws, (such as §79-303.01, "Finish Strong Nebraska") and requirements.

B. **Technical Assistance:** Provide technical assistance to districts and schools regarding enrollment, records, credit evaluation, graduation planning, educational continuity, and other educational needs of eligible systems involved youth.

C. **Rule 18 & Specialized Schools**: Provide targeted support to Rule 18 schools, interim programs, and special purpose schools, recognizing their unique role in serving students who may be transitioning from or between systems.

D. **Professional Development**: Through the Systems-Involved Youth Department, provide professional development and training for school administrators, counselors, registrars, and other school personnel regarding the educational needs and rights of systems-involved youth.

E. **Education & Career Pathways**: Help schools connect eligible youth with existing NDE educational, career, technical education, and other appropriate state resources.

F. **IDEA & Rule 51 Guidance**: Provide guidance and technical assistance regarding the rights of eligible students with disabilities and the responsibilities of LEAs under IDEA and Rule 51 throughout reentry and transition.

G. **Educational Continuity**: Support districts in addressing the timely transfer of special education records and continuity of IEP services when students enter, leave, or transition between educational and residential settings.

H. **IDEA Secondary Transition**: For students of transition age, support coordination between reentry planning and the student's IDEA-required postsecondary goals, transition assessments, transition services, course of study, and other IEP transition components.

3. **Nebraska VR Resources:**

   A. Nebraska VR provides Pre-Employment Transition Services which include job exploration, work readiness training, work-based learning experiences, post-secondary education counseling, and instruction in self-advocacy.

VIII. Fidelity & Sustainability:

1. The youth's transition plan should serve as basis for ongoing planning and measurement of progress once they have integrated back into the community following an out-of-home placement.
2. During the first ninety (90) days following a youth's reentry from placement, family team meetings shall be conducted every thirty (30) days with the youth, youth's family and/or guardian, and support team.
3. A youth's individualized transition plans will be monitored separately by each entity to ensure they follow provisions outlined in the Youth Transition and Reentry Act, while also adhering to the state agency's policies and protocols.
4. Staff from each state agency or service provider shall receive continuous training, as designated by their agency, as it relates to youth transition planning, youth/family engagement, adolescent development, and accessing community-based resources.
5. As youth reenter from out-of-home placement or transition from probation supervision, there should be an intentional step to activate youth's natural supports- such as relatives, coaches, mentors, etc. These may be members of the youth's support team while they are in out-of-home placement.
6. Members of a youth's support team will remain actively involved in the youth's case while identified areas of development or transition goals are still in progress. Support team members are not required to continue support once identified goals or areas of development are achieved for the youth and/or family.
7. The Youth Transition and Support Act does not require services to be provided by the Office of Probation Administration after a term of probation has ended or the Department of Health and Human Services or Office of Juvenile Services after the youth has left the care, custody, and a control of the department.

IX. Best Practice Data Elements to Consider:

1. Youth have a transition plan and the support team established.
2. Youth/family services implemented upon discharge.
3. Youth can reintegrate back into family, kinship, and/or community-based placement permanently.
4. Education stabilization or completion.
5. Employment attainment and retention.
6. Access to and sustainability of state services (Medicaid, SNAP, etc.).
7. Recidivism as defined by the agency.
8. Youth and family engagement survey- questions could include (available federal, philanthropic, or reallocated funds could be utilized to fund):
   - **A.** The support and services helped the youth/family stabilize after reentry.
   - **B.** Stable housing and/or other basic needs were successful.
   - **C.** Youth/family engaged in services or supports.
   - **D.** Spent anytime incarcerated post discharge.

X. Credible Messenger:

Best practice training for credible messengers is essential to ensure youth and families receive services which targets reduction of individualized risk. Providers are responsible for creating training models which include the following elements and follow service definitions or contracts in providing this, as well as proof of completion to the payment entity. Providers shall utilize national experts and resources in creation. Some resources to explore include; Annie E. Casey Foundation, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, National Center for Juvenile Justice, National Resource Center for the Transformation of Youth Justice, Center for Youth Justice, National Association of State Head Injury Administrators (NASHIA) and the Brain Injury Associate of Nebraska (BIA-NE).

4-Phase Training Model Outline:

1. Phase 1: Foundations of the Credible Messenger Identity (Weeks 1-2)

This phase focuses on the psychological transition from "lived experience" to professional mentoring.

- **A. Transforming Story into Strategy**: Safely sharing personal narratives as a tool for connection.
- **B. Professional Boundaries**: Navigating relationships with youth, court officials, and law enforcement. Training should specifically address:
  - **1)** Refer to youth by their formal name, not their gang or street names (unless otherwise approved by the professional team).
  - **2)** Do not take youth to inappropriate places while providing services. (i.e. liquor stores, vape and smoke shops, your house, your family members' houses, casinos, and similar establishments.).

3) Know the rules of the agency or facility you are working with. Do not break the rules, as this will affect your access to the youth. It will also encourage the youth to be defiant toward the programming they are involved in.

4) Know yourself and have self-control. Create and enforce boundaries regarding what you will and will not do. Understand your weaknesses and strengths, trauma, triggers and biases. Do not let any of these put you in a situation that allows you to justify breaking agency or facility rules.

5) Messengers need to be genuine-not perfect, not fake-but acknowledge your faults and show your pursuit of self-improvement, days and nights must match those you serve (Live the lifestyle you are encouraging).

6) Messengers must maintain appropriate boundaries with all youth and their families and support their success in completion of court conditions and not cover up for violations and should report violations to professionals immediately.

7) Messengers must keep all conversations with youth, family, facility staff and agency staff professional and refrain from using profanity. Confidentiality is a must, cannot share information or gossip about clients.

8) Messengers must not bring contraband or any unapproved item into an agency or facility.

9) Messengers should not form inappropriate relationships with young people or their family members and should not serve as therapists, counselors, preachers or teachers.

10) Messengers should not provide unauthorized gifts or assistance to youth and their family members (individualized gifts used as incentives or small recognition gifts can be considered with approval from the professional team).

11) Messengers should not deliver messages to other parties for young people. Especially if the youth are in a facility or placement.

12) Messengers should not post pictures of youth on social media or messages for youth on social media.

C. **Code of Ethics**: Maintaining confidentiality, mandated reporting, and safety protocols.

D. **Overcoming Vicarious Trauma**: Recognizing personal triggers and managing emotional burnout.

2. **Phase 2: Adolescent Development & Trauma-Informed Care (Weeks 3-4)**

This phase provides the necessary clinical and developmental context for understanding youth behavior.

A. **Adolescent Brain Development**: Understanding risk-taking, impulsivity, and executive functioning.

B. **Trauma's Impact on Behavior**: Recognizing how fight, flight, freeze, or fawn manifests as aggression.

C. **Brain Injury**: Understanding of Brain Injury-Informed Competencies and personal experiences with brain injury, whether their own or that of someone close to them.

D. **Racial and Ethnic Equity**: Navigating systemic bias within the juvenile justice framework.

E. **Positive Youth Development (PYD)**: Shifting focus from youth deficits to strengths and potential.

3. **Phase 3: Intervention Strategies & Skill Building (Weeks 5-6)**

   This phase delivers the core operational tools required for daily mentorship interactions.

   A. **Restorative Justice Circles:** Facilitating conflict resolution and community repair.

   B. **De-escalation Techniques:** Defusing verbal and physical conflicts safely in community and facility settings.

   C. **Motivational Interviewing:** Using open-ended questions to guide youth toward positive behavioral changes.

   D. **Goal Setting and Life Mapping**: Teaching youth how to create concrete education and employment plans.

4. **Phase 4: Field Integration & Capstone (Weeks 7-8)**

   This final phase ensures the training translates smoothly into active field deployment.

   A. **Case Management & Documentation**: Learning to track youth progress without sacrificing trust.

   B. **Shadowing and Practicum**: Observing experienced mentors and participating in co-facilitated sessions.

   C. **System Navigation**: Understanding court processes, probation requirements, and school re-enrollment.

   D. **Graduation and Credentialing**: Earning program completion certifications alongside partner agencies.

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2. **Nebraska State Department of Health and Human Services**

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   b. Office of Juvenile Services
      Email: DHHS.OJSAdministrators@nebraska.gov

3. **Nebraska Department of Labor**

   Email: NDOL.ReentryServices@nebraska.gov

4. **Administrative Office of the Courts & Probation**

   Website:
   https://nebraskajudicial.gov/probation/juvenile-probation-services-division

   Phone: 402.471.2141

5. **Douglas County Youth Center**

   Phone: 402.444.7492