



### Sponsor Statement

**HB 264 An Act requiring the Department of Family and Community Services to adopt a uniform screening tool; requiring shelters for runaway minors to screen minors for victimization relating to sexual abuse, sex trafficking, and commercial sexual exploitation; requiring the Department of Family and Community Services to screen children in need of aid for victimization relating to sexual abuse, sex trafficking, and commercial sexual exploitation; and relating to the duty of the Department of Family and Community Services to investigate the experiences of missing children in need of aid who have been located.**

*“An Act requiring the Department of Family and Community Services to screen children in need of aid for victimization relating to sexual abuse, sex trafficking, and commercial sexual exploitation...”*

**House Bill 264** addresses a critical issue highlighted by the National Foster Youth Institute, revealing that up to 60% of child sex trafficking victims have a history in foster care. Additionally, a federal study in 2021 and 2022 found that a third of 335 at-risk youth surveyed reported running away or being expelled before falling victim to trafficking. Recognizing the heightened risk for kids in the system and runaways, this bill proposes a vital step in safeguarding their well-being.

The legislation requires the Department of Family and Community Services, along with each local office, to adopt a uniform screening tool specifically designed to identify children who are victims of sexual abuse, sex trafficking, or commercial sexual exploitation. House Bill 264 emphasizes the need for a systematic process of targeted inquiry, crucial for identifying youth who may have experienced or are at risk of experiencing child sex trafficking (CST).

The screening process becomes paramount as it can be broadly applied to all youth or a specific subset with identified risk factors. Given that youth involved in trafficking may be hesitant to disclose their experiences due to fear, shame, or mistrust, and professionals may be reluctant to broach the sensitive topic, standardized screening tools become imperative.

Legislation mandating the use of a uniform screening tool is pivotal in creating a standardized and comprehensive approach across Alaska. Such legislation underscores the commitment to child protection, ensuring that every child, regardless of their background or circumstances, is given a fair chance to disclose their experiences. By adopting this proactive approach, House Bill 264 aims to create an environment where victims feel supported and empowered to share their experiences, signaling a significant step towards protecting vulnerable youth in the state.