



Covenant House Alaska

Crisis Center • Community Services Center • Transitional Living

Representative Les Gara and Senator Bettye Davis
State Capitol
Juneau, AK 99801

February 23, 2009

Dear Representative Gara and Senator Davis,

Thank you for introducing legislation to address the needs of foster care youth, both while they are in the state's custody and when they "age-out" of the current system. Providing resources and support to our foster care children decreases the need for long-term public assistance and criminal justice resources. Responding to research that clearly identifies proven strategies for assisting our youth to independent adulthood is not only compassionate, it is fiscally sound policy.

Between 35% and 50% of foster care youth become homeless after being released from care. Covenant House Alaska (CHA) serves the homeless and at-risk youth of our state through four main programs (50% of CHA youth have been involved in the foster care system). Our Crisis Center provides shelter, food, clothing, primary health care and support resources to homeless youth. Our Community Services Center is a drop-in center that provides case management, employment assistance, educational tutoring, counseling and substance abuse referrals and life skills training. Two different programs, Rights of Passage and Passage House help youth transition to independent living and self-sufficiency. Youth can participate in either program for 18 months with up to 12 months of additional aftercare.

Through these programs, CHA is certain that increased job training, educational opportunities, rental assistance and social worker visits will benefit children in foster care. Similarly, offering consistency whenever possible through maintaining one school for children despite changes in foster care placement is essential. CHA appreciates the multi-faceted approach HB 126 and SB 105 offers.

Thank you for sponsoring this legislation and providing a voice to youth in foster care.

Sincerely,

Deirdre A. Cronin
Executive Director

Opening Doors for Homeless Youth

A Division of Covenant House of the State of Alaska

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