

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



REPRESENTATIVE LES GARA

Sponsor Statement

CSHB 126(HSS): Success for Foster Youth

While we work hard to increase the success rate of Alaska's 2,000 foster youth, the homelessness and criminal activity numbers remain disconcerting. HB 126 makes two important fixes that will improve the lives and success outcomes of our youth. Currently approximately 29% of our foster youth end up incarcerated after leaving care, and roughly 37% end up homeless at some point in their life.

Foster Care Until Age 21

Following federal legislation signed by former President George W. Bush in 2008, 30 states have extended foster care until age 21 where a youth and state agree an extension is warranted. For youth who are not ready to stand on their own, an extra year in care can help develop the life skills and stability needed to succeed. Foster youth often have no one to call for support after leaving care, and an extra year of stability can make a profound difference. Extending foster care to 21 has been a priority for youth advocates, and the federal Fostering Connections Act provides federal funding to states that join in this reform.

Allowing Foster Care Reentry

When a youth leaves foster care, they are unable to return if they realize they made a poor choice. Sometimes a youth, faced with a host of problems, will make a mistake in seeking emancipation or leaving care. HB 126 allows reentry if it is in the youth's best interest, and provides for the Department to attach conditions to the reentry when reasonable. Currently at least 15 states allow reentry.

I would appreciate your support of HB 126, and am happy to answer any questions you may have.