

Advisory Board on Alcoholism
and Drug Abuse



Alaska Mental Health Board

ALASKA MENTAL HEALTH BOARD
ADVISORY BOARD ON ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG ABUSE
431 NORTH FRANKLIN STREET, SUITE 200
JUNEAU, ALASKA 99801
(907) 465-8920

February 23, 2011

Representative Les Gara
Alaska State Legislature
State Capitol, Room 500
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Re: Support for HB 33

Dear Representative Gara,

On behalf of the Alaska Mental Health Board and the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, I would like to express our thanks and appreciation for the commitment that you and your co-sponsors have made to improving the lives of Alaskan children in foster care. HB 33 continues that process of system improvement, and we support the small but very significant changes that better prioritize the needs of foster children.

Being removed from your home, even when that home is not a safe or healthy environment, is traumatic. Being removed from your home and then separated from your brothers and sisters compounds the initial harm caused by abuse or neglect exponentially. While we know this from research and study, the Boards recognized fully the devastating effect this separation has on foster children when we heard from youth involved in the 2011 Youth Policy Summit. No child should have to beg, plead and fight for years to see a brother or sister, and yet we heard how this is the case for far too many youth who grow up in foster care.

HB 33 also prioritizes family connections as an important source of strength, support and resiliency for children and youth who experience abuse or neglect by making family placements easier in rural Alaska. Too often children in rural Alaska are placed with foster parents in urban communities rather than with relatives in villages, with the justification that the rural homes fail to meet foster care licensing standards. How can an aunt in a village where no one has running water ever hope to care for a niece or nephew who is in need, if there is no reasonableness standard in determining a safe physical environment for placement? HB 33 provides that element of reason to family placement decisions.

We are grateful for your continued advocacy for Alaska's children and are glad to be able to support HB 33.

Sincerely,

J. Kate Burkhart
Executive Director

cc: Representative Bill Thomas
Representative Bob Herron
Representative Berta Gardner



National Association of Social Workers

401 E. Northern Lights Blvd., Suite 205
Anchorage, Alaska 99503
907-332-NASW (6279) Fax: 907-332-6270
1-800-478-NASW (6279)
director@naswak.org
<http://www.naswak.org>

January 2nd, 2011

Representative Les Gara
State of Alaska
State Capitol, Room 500
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182

Dear Representative Gara:

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) – Alaska Chapter, a membership organization that represents over 500 social workers across the State of Alaska, supports The Alaska Foster Family Protection Act.

The mission of NASW is to enhance the effective functioning and well-being of individuals, families, and communities through its work and through its advocacy. The Alaska Foster Family Projection act upholds this mission by ensuring that Alaska's most vulnerable children can more easily transition into safe and permanent homes. The increase in the number of rural foster care placements is especially crucial so youth in rural Alaska can continue to live in their home communities. Research demonstrates that youth from rural communities, and specifically Alaska Native youth, have more promising futures when they are able to maintain connection with their communities and tribes.

Thank you for your consistent attention to child welfare issues in Alaska. We look forward to working with you on behalf of children and families in our state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "M. Loomis". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Meg Loomis, MSW
Executive Director

National Association of Social Workers



January 26, 2011

The Honorable Les Gara
Alaska House of Representatives
State Capital
Juneau, AK. 99801-1181

RE: HB 33: Stability and Opportunity for Foster Youth

Dear Representative Gara,

The members of the Alaska Behavioral Health Association would like to inform you of their support for this legislation. Its intent is consistent with the goals and values of the members that provide services in our state and also provides opportunities to expand a system that is currently incapable of meeting the needs of youth.

Our providers have experienced tremendous difficulties in placing children and youth back in their home communities when a foster home is required due to the home situation of the biological parents. Frequently, homes may be available but they don't meet the more ridged codes and standards that govern construction in metropolitan areas. While no one would ever want a child placed in an unsafe environment, we are aware that minor code violations can be prohibitively expensive to repair and a foster home can be lost.

We hear reports from providers that it often takes up to six months or more from the time a family begins the application process and they are finally able to accept a child in their home. We appreciate the careful attention to ensure that a child is placed in a safe environment; however, redundancy and over-attention can become a barrier rather than a safe guard.

Thank you for your commitment to foster children and working to make their lives better.

Sincerely,

Donn Bennice, Ph.D.
President



Alaska Baptist Family Services
Anchorage, AK

Alaska Children's Services
Anchorage, AK

Alaska Family Services
Palmer, AK

Covenant House of Alaska
Anchorage, AK

Family Centered Services of Alaska
Fairbanks, AK

Juneau Youth Services
Juneau, AK

Kenai Peninsula Community Care
Center
Kenai, AK

Maniilaq Association
Kotzebue, AK

Nome Children's Home
Nome, AK

North Slope Borough Children's
Services
Barrow, AK

North Star Behavioral Health
Anchorage & Palmer, AK

Presbyterian Hospitality House
Fairbanks, AK

Providence Behavioral Health
Systems
Anchorage, AK

Residential Youth Care
Ketchikan, AK

Searhc
Sitka, AK

The Boys and Girls Home of Alaska
Fairbanks, AK

The Salvation Army Booth Memorial
Home
Anchorage, AK

Youth Advocates of Sitka
Sitka, AK

March 7, 2011

Senator Bettye Davis
Alaska Senate
State Capitol
Juneau, Alaska 99801

RE: SB 82: Stability and Opportunity for Foster Youth

Dear Senator Davis,

Alaska Association of Homes for Children (AAHC) thanks you for introducing legislation to improve the service delivery of foster care. Several agencies within our association provide foster care and many of the youth we serve benefit from this critical service.

Unfortunately, we all have witnessed children on long waiting lists for a viable foster care placement for various reasons. The intent of SB 82 provides concrete solutions to streamline the process for foster parents, develop resources for children, and reinforce the goals related to permanency planning.

Placing children in rural areas poses additional challenges related to numerous licensing issues. It can be extremely difficult finding foster homes that meet state licensing requirements. Licensing variances for homes failing to meet specific codes when indicated would provide opportunities for families to open up their homes to provide care for foster children.

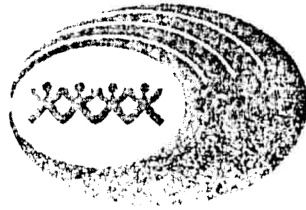
Foster care provides for a very cost effective way of helping children. Allowing more families to commit to the many Alaskan children waiting for a quality home creates a win win opportunity for all. AAHC truly appreciates your continued efforts to assist with the foster care system in Alaska.

The provisions within your bill would provide a wise investment in the health and wellbeing of Alaska's children.

Thank you,

Brad Ohs
AAHC President

cc: Representative Les Gara



Alaska Children's Services

The Honorable Les Gara
Alaska House of Representatives
State Capitol
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

RE: HB 33: Stability and Opportunity for Foster Youth

Dear Representative Gara:

This letter is to inform you of the strong support the Administration and Board of Directors have for the above-mentioned bill. It's intent is consistent with the goals and values of the Treatment Foster Care Program operated by Alaska Children's Services and provides opportunities to expand a system that is currently incapable of meeting the needs of youth.

We are particularly appreciative of the section regarding permanency placement. As you have stated the ultimate goal in foster care is to place a child in a good, stable, permanent home through adoption, guardianship, or reunification. Frequently, however, in our haste to find a child a bed or a roof over their head, we lose sight of this goal. By adding additional oversight to the permanency planning process, this goal can be reached.

Alaska Children's Services has experienced tremendous difficulties in placing children and youth back in their home communities when a foster home is required due to the home situation of the biological parents. Frequently, homes may be available but don't meet the more rigid codes and standards that govern construction in metropolitan areas. While no one would ever want to place a child in an unsafe environment, we are aware that minor code violations can be prohibitively expensive to repair and a foster home can be lost.

Alaska Children's Services has three full-time professional staff who comprise the treatment foster care licensing department. They report that it frequently takes up to six months or more from the time a family begins the application process and they are finally able to accept a child in their home. We appreciate the careful attention to ensure that a child is placed in a safe environment; however, redundancy and over-attention can become a barrier rather than a safeguard.

Overall, thank you very much for your continued commitment to one of our most vulnerable populations, our foster children, and please advise if there is more we can do to support this legislation.

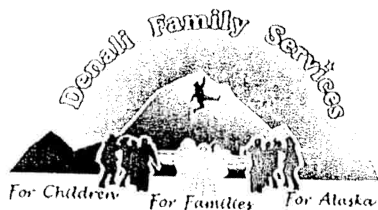
Regards,

Jim Maley,
President & CEO

1600 Abbott Road, Anchorage, Alaska 99507-1314 • (907) 246-2101 • Fax: (907) 248-3220

email: achild@ak.net • www.acs.ak.org

Alaska Children's Services is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. It is not affiliated with any religious organization. It is not affiliated with any political organization. It is not affiliated with any labor union. It is not affiliated with any other organization.



4600 DeBarr Rd., Suite 301 • Anchorage, Alaska 99508
Phone: (907) 274-8281 • Fax (907) 274-4055
www.denalifs.org



February 8, 2011

Representative Les Gara
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Dear Representative Gara:

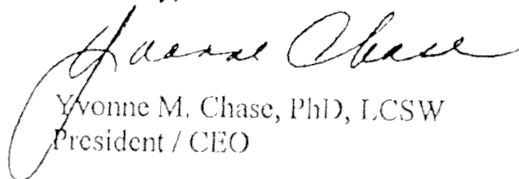
I am writing in support of HB33, the legislation you have proposed relating to foster care in Alaska. Denali Family Services (DFS) is a community mental health agency that provides therapeutic foster care to many children in the custody of the State / Office of Children's Services. DFS is also a child placement agency and in that role, processes foster home applications and licenses foster home in cooperation with OCS (i.e., the license is still a State foster care license). As an agency licensing foster homes, we support using the variance for homes in rural communities as long as the home is a safe environment and there are adequate ways to exit the home in case of a fire.

Denali Family Services serves many adolescents who are moving from care to independence and I am especially pleased to see the language changes that will make extending foster care to age 21 easily accessible for youth who want to take advantage of that opportunity. For youth who do not have a support system in place, those additional three years can make a huge difference in their maturity and readiness to survive on their own.

With regard to the application process for foster parents, DFS has significantly reduced our paperwork requirements in the last two years. In addition, effective this fiscal year, DFS will be utilizing a new foster parent training curricula (Presley Ridge). This curricula offers foster care providers in-depth, specialized training and OCS has agreed that DFS' foster parents who complete the Presley Ridge training will not have to take the OCS CORE training. This change will provide foster parents with more specialized training while maintaining the total hours at a number (per year) that is manageable.

On behalf of Denali Family Services, I am writing in support of HB33. Should you need additional information, please feel free to contact me at 907-222-2322.

Sincerely,


Yvonne M. Chase, PhD, LCSW
President / CEO



**Covenant
House
Alaska**

Crisis Center • Community Services Center • Transitional Living

March 30, 2011

Senator Bettye Davis
State Capital Room 30
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Senator Davis,

Thank you for introducing SB 82, a bill focused on improving Alaska's foster care program and protecting children to the best of our ability. Covenant House Alaska (CHA) serves Alaska's homeless and at-risk youth through our Crisis Center, Transitional Living Programs, Healthcare and Educational/Employment Support. CHA appreciates your commitment to keeping Alaska's youth as safe and healthy as possible.

SB 82 enacts the following changes to protect foster care youth:

- (1) SB 82 requires the department to seek permanency for all youth and, if positive permanency plans are unsuccessful, imposes substantive and procedural protections around planning for youth to be placed in another planned permanent living arrangement;
- (2) SB 82 simplifies the application process to become a foster home and allows the department to waive strict compliance with building code requirements for foster and relative placements if the placement is in the child's best interest and is otherwise preferable and safe; and
- (3) SB 82 requires the department to make all reasonable efforts to place siblings together.

All of the changes listed above evince strong policy underpinnings. Specific to CHA's population of homeless and runaway youth, the provisions regarding waiving strict building code compliance for relatives' homes and placing siblings together are particularly noteworthy. Research indicates that foster care youth who are placed with siblings in the home of a relative or family friend, usually in a familiar community, tend to run away less frequently.

These statutory changes may be viewed as measures targeted to prevent youth homelessness. And, just as important, if a youth comes to Covenant House from the foster care system who qualifies for extended court supervision, it appears that this legislation would allow CHA to work with the department to continue to provide services for the youth.

Thank you for your efforts at protecting Alaska's vulnerable children. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can answer any questions or provide further feedback on SB 82.

Sincerely,

Deirdre A. Cronin
Executive Director