From: Elizabeth Steven
To: Lawton, Christy (HSS)
Cc: Jenkins, Sarah L. (HSS Sponsored)
Subject: Letter of Support
Date: Tuesday, January 26, 2016 10:34:52 AM

To: Senate Health & Social Services Committee Members,

This letter is to support House Bill 200/Senate Bill 112. We believe this bill will have positive and lasting impacts for Alaska native children and families.

The bill removes barriers for Alaska Native families who want to adopt those connected to them by family or tribal membership by making the process more realistic and understandable.

Well over 40% of Alaska Native children who are adopted annually are adopted by non-Native, non-family members. It is our hope that this bill will increase the number of Alaska Native children to reach permanency with their family, culture and traditions.

Congress enacted the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) in 1978 due to the alarming numbers of Indian children being removed from their homes by state private welfare agencies and placed in non-Indian foster and adoptive homes never to be returned to their families, culture, or communities.

Alaska Native families who live in rural Alaska may not speak English fluently or they may have difficulties obtaining legal counsel. This bill seeks to eliminate complicated procedural barriers in the adoption process for children in custody so that Alaska Native families can be considered for adoption through the Child in Need of Aid (CINA) proceeding instead of through an entirely different proceeding held in Probate Court. Families will be able to assert their desire to adopt a child through the Child In Need of Aid proceeding and would be considered for adoption after the permanency goal changes to adoption.

Thank you for supporting keeping Alaskan's children with their families and in their own home communities.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth J. Steven, ICWA Worker, Napaskiak Tribal Council