ALASKA YOUTH & FAMILY NETWORK

The Alaska Chapter of the National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health

We Are Your Shelter From The Storm

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To whom it may concern:

I am writing in support of Senate Bill 180 and House Bill 201 – Parent – Guardian/Child Temporary Power of Attorney.

I am the Executive Director of Alaska Youth and Family Network (AYFN). AYFN is a family run, peer-delivered, community-based behavioral health and social services provider whose mission is "To strengthen, preserve, and unify families through advocacy, peer-to-peer support, education, and connections to community-based services that promote social, emotional, behavioral/mental health, and substance abuse recovery."

AYFN is based in Anchorage and the Matsu Valley and we have been serving families from across Alaska since 2003. AYFN assists children, youth, and families who are at-risk and struggling with the challenges of mental illness, substance use, intellectual and developmental disabilities, homelessness, and the lack of material resources. The families we serve are involved with, and struggling in, Alaska's complex and challenging to navigate family serving systems. AYFN's parents and their children are usually involved with more than one service provider and more than one family serving system. And they are struggling to meet the challenges and requirements of those systems. We serve families involved in mental health and substance use services, juvenile justice, corrections, special education, and child welfare, etc.

We support Alaska's families by connecting them to the community and natural resources and teaching them the skills to help them recover from whatever challenges they may be facing. We provide education, support, and advocacy for families working toward becoming healthy and self-sufficient. Alaska Youth and Family Network receives funding and support from the Division of Behavioral Health, The Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, the Matsu Health Foundation, The Alaska Children's Trust, and the National Institute of Mental Health. We use this funding to hire well-educated and skilled workers with professional backgrounds and lived experience in behavioral health, substance use, social work, special education, etc.

During FY15, our staff of 14 provided service and support to 742 Alaskan families, 400 of these families were involved with the Office of Children's Services (OCS). Referrals to our services came from approximately 80 sources from throughout Alaska. Many of the families that come to us with OCS involvement have that involvement for good reason. Many others have ended up there because no alternative for safe placement of their children while they work through the challenges facing them existed. Safe Families for Children Alaska changes that.

Safe Families for Children Alaska (SFFCA) is an alternative to the child welfare system that will strengthen Alaska's fragile safety net for vulnerable and at-risk families. SFFCA will provide meaningful, concrete support, to Alaskan families who without such support would have to continue to live in situations that are unhealthy for their children and place their families at risk for legal intervention by OCS. Early intervention and support, meaningful connection to members of our faith-based community, and the opportunity to seek help without fear of losing custody, while providing children with a safe place to live in their home communities is good for families and good for Alaska. It is an opportunity to reduce potential trauma to Alaska's children and families by possibly preventing permanent separation (Only 45 of every 100 children currently in state custody will return home). It will reduce Alaska's fiscal burden and it will reduce the vast and the unmanageable workload of OCS.

By supporting SB180 and HB201, you will significantly improve the chances that such a valuable, mostly volunteer effort, that has had such an immense role in improving the lives of over 22,000 children across our country will take root in Alaska without the burden of unnecessary and costly government support and intervention.

Thank you for your consideration. We appreciate all that you do for Alaska, it's children, and it's families. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Paul Cornils

Paul Cornils, Executive Director

Alaska Youth and Family Network

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