



BEST BEGINNINGS

Alaska's Early Childhood Investment

March 31, 2013

Dear Rep Tarr,

I'm writing in support of HCR 21, urging Governor Walker and the Legislature to establish statewide policies and provide programs to address the public and behavioral health epidemic of adverse childhood experiences.

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month and is a perfect time to take up this resolution and actions.

In the first few years of life, a baby's brain makes 700 synapses or neural connections every second, a phenomenal exuberance of activity. Neural connections are formed through the interaction of genes and a baby's environment and experiences, especially "serve and return" interaction with adults. These are the connections that build brain architecture – the foundation upon which all later learning, behavior, and health depend.

Significant adversity impairs development in the first three years of life – and the more adversity a child faces, the greater the odds of a developmental delay. There is a 90-100% chance of developmental delays when children experience six to seven risk factors. We learned recently that young children in Alaska have acquired half of their accumulated adverse childhood experiences by the age of 3.

Clearly, it is more effective and less costly to positively influence the architecture of a young child's developing brain than to try to make up for inadequate learning opportunities, poor health, and negative behaviors later in life.

As is stated in the resolution, we strongly promote early investment and intervention in early childhood years as important strategies to achieve a lasting foundation for a more prosperous and sustainable state.

Best Beginnings supports HCR 21 as one component of a statewide prevention system needed to help reduce traumatic experiences among our children.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Abbe Hensley".

Abbe Hensley, Executive Director

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Best Beginnings is a public-private partnership that mobilizes people and resources to ensure all Alaska children begin school ready to succeed.