

# ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



REPRESENTATIVE LES GARA

## House Bill 27

### Sponsor Statement

#### HB 27: Child Protection and Opportunity Act

House Bill 27 aims to improve the lives of foster youth in an effective, but cost-efficient manner.

#### Reducing the Amount of Time Children Linger in Foster Care Hoping for a Permanent Home

This bill aims to speed the process for placing a foster child in a permanent home to meet national standards. The bill provides that at existing court hearings, the court shall determine all reasonable steps are being taken to secure permanency. Bouncing children between foster homes is harmful, and the national standard is that a permanent home be found within 12-24 months. On a per capita basis Alaska has more children ready and waiting for permanent adoptive homes than 48 other states.

#### Ensuring Children Are Prepared to Leave Foster Care

This bill requires the Office of Children's Services to demonstrate in court that releasing a foster child from custody prior to age 21 is in the best interests of the child. This provision reflects the fact that many foster youth are not ready to leave care at age 18 or 19, and are being released before they are able to stand on their own.

#### Providing Foster Children with Quality Educations

This bill revises the requirement under AS 47.18.320(a)(2) requiring the state to provide "basic" education and training. Instead, the statute will say the state should provide "educational and vocational training."

#### Increasing the Number of Foster Parents

This bill also works to increase the number of foster and adoptive parents by requiring the Department of Health and Social Services to work to recruit foster/adoptive parents. Currently there is a great shortage of foster and adoptive parents while 700 youth are awaiting adoptive homes.

#### Ensuring that Relative Placements are sought when a child is moved to a new OCS placement

This bill also requires Office of Children's Services to continue to seek potential relative placements after the initial 30-day relative search period where appropriate. Often a relative placement is the healthiest placement for a child, and should be sought whenever a child is

moved to a new foster home. The bill requires a relative search when children are moved out of an existing placement.

#### Increasing Stability in Schools

This provision works to reduce the number of times a foster child moves from one school to another. Youth will be allowed to finish their school term in the same school when a family moves, and this is important to help youth avoid delay in their academic progress. This provision only applies if it is the “best interest” of the child.