



April 11, 2016

To: Senate Health & Social Services Committee Members
Re: Tanana Chiefs Conference Support of House Bill 27 (HB27)

Dear Senate Health & Social Services Committee Members,

Tanana Chiefs Conference supports House Bill 27. According to Office of Children's Services (OCS) Progress Report for 2014, over 3200 children were in Out-of-Home Care. Those numbers are disproportionately Alaska Native children. We believe all aspects of this bill could significantly improve the lives of our children.

The requirement that OCS find a relative placement or a community placement when feasible, for emergency placements can help to avoid placing children with strangers in foster care or even outside of their home communities. We believe every child deserves to remain with family to avoid being re-traumatized and bounced between homes in a broken system. Relative placements provide for a child's need for safety, well-being and permanency, and can play a pivotal role in achieving reunification.

We all know too well, the repercussions of long term foster care. This bill requires that if a child has not been placed in a permanent home after 1 year, OCS must show to a Court that it is taking all feasible steps to secure permanency. After 2 years without permanency, there will be court hearings every 6 months to establish that all feasible steps are being taken. When reunification is not an option, we want to ensure OCS is working to find a forever family for all children lingering in the system.

Many of our beneficiaries have been released from foster care without stable housing, a high school diploma, and minimal skills to be self-sufficient. This bill requires OCS to establish in court that a release from custody before a youth turns 21 is in their best interests.

There is a massive shortage of Alaska Native/ICWA compliant foster homes in Alaska. House Bill 27 requires the Department of Health and Social Services to work with the Governor's Office to recruit foster/adoptive parents when needed. It also requires adequate staffing to ensure caseworkers have the time and resources to meet the needs of thousands of Alaskan families.

Sincerely,

Victor Joseph
President

SUBREGIONS:

Upper Kuskokwim

McGrath
Medfra
Nikolai
Takotna

Lower Yukon

Anvik
Grayling
Holy Cross
Shageluk

Upper Tanana

Dot Lake
Eagle
Healy Lake
Northway
Tanacross
Tetlin
Tok

Yukon Flats

Arctic Village
Beaver
Birch Creek
Canyon Village
Chalkyitsik
Circle
Fort Yukon
Venetie

Yukon Koyukuk

Galena
Huslia
Kaltag
Koyukuk
Nulato
Ruby

Yukon Tanana

Alatna
Allakaket
Evansville
Fairbanks
Hughes
Lake Minchumina
Manley Hot
Springs
Minto
Nenana
Rampart
Stevens Village
Tanana