



The Honorable Les Gara
Alaska House of Representatives
Alaska State Capitol, Room 400
Juneau, Alaska 99801

February 3, 2015

Dear Representative Gara,

On behalf of the First Focus Campaign for Children (FFCC), a bipartisan advocacy organization committed to making children and their families a priority in federal policy and budget decisions, I would like to share our support for House Bills No. 27 and No. 28 introduced on January 21, 2015. At FFCC, we believe that promoting the safety, permanency and well-being of children and youth whose lives are impacted by child welfare should be a top priority for all States. These two bills have the potential to significantly improve outcomes for Alaska's most vulnerable children in each of these areas.

A substantial body of research has demonstrated that children and youth do best and are most able to cope with and overcome trauma when they have permanent connections to caring and supportive adults. For most children, their parents, supported by extended family and communities, provide this stable care and support. Sadly, for children and youth in foster care, these critical family and community connections have often been disrupted. While these disruptions have devastating and lasting effects on a child or youth's cognitive, social, emotional and identity development, such effects can often be mitigated through effective child welfare programs and services that connect children and youth to families and support them in forging a successful transition to adulthood.

Research has also shed light on the dismal outcomes facing youth who age out of foster care, often disconnected and unprepared for adult life - outcomes that have been shown to have much higher long-range costs than earlier investments that can be made to prevent them. Alaska's child welfare programs and services can be greatly strengthened by the provisions in House Bills No. 27 and No. 28 and ensure that those in or leaving foster care are connected to family, to a community, and that they are being prepared to not only survive but to thrive in adulthood as healthy, productive Alaskan citizens.

First Focus stands prepared to work with you to ensure swift passage of both House Bills No. 27 and No. 28, which take critical steps to improve the lives of children and youth in the care of the State of Alaska. If you have any questions or comments, need additional information, or would like us to provide testimony please contact Dianna Walters at DiannaW@FirstFocus.net.

Sincerely,

Bruce Lesley
President