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To: House HSS

From: Ann Turner Olson

Re: Letter of support for HB 151: Children Deserve a Loving Home Act

I am a 42-year resident of Alaska with 40+ years of working in mental health with children and families. I am writing to add my voice and support to HB 151 to make sorely needed changes in the State foster care system. The Alaska foster care system, though well-intentioned, has been failing far too many children in placement for far too many years. With the extremely high number of cases each OCS worker carries, the attention a caseworker can give to a child placed in foster care is inadequate. Our State has an obligation to not just protect children but to help them thrive and have the same opportunities for success in life as those children fortunate to be living with their own parents in stable homes.

The changes proposed in HB 151 will make it easier for children to move out of the foster care system and into permanent homes more quickly as well as provide needed resources so the foster care system can function optimally. An environment where loving homes are the priority for all youth is the cornerstone of this bill. Thank you for your vote to support this important goal.

I appreciate the movement of resources into providing for more front line social workers to allow for smaller caseloads and better attention to children in foster care. Please vote to add the additional funds for Office of Children's Services for the improvement of Alaska's foster care system.

Respectfully submitted,

Ann Turner Olson

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Douglas, AK, 99824

Mary Rikken

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E-Mail: mary.rikken@gmail.com

March 11, 2017

Representative Les Gara
State Capitol Room 511
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Representative Gara:

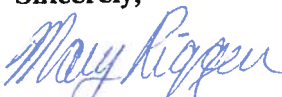
I am writing in support of HB 151: Children Deserve a Loving Home Act. I have been a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteer in Alaska for the past 6 years, working with children and youth in the foster care system to try to help ensure their needs are being addressed. From the insight I have gained as a CASA, and a Fostering Futures mentor, I appreciate and support the changes proposed in this bill: to help Alaska increase its effort to get neglected and abused youth out the foster care system, into a permanent, loving home, much more quickly than we do now.

Alaska's Office of Children's Services (OCS) caseworkers have impossibly high caseloads, which do not allow them to perform the necessary responsibilities to address the needs of the children under their care. I believe the provisions of HB 151 will help to improve this situation. Also greatly needed are the provisions to support the well being of youth in care, empower older youth and foster families, and support relatives who may want to care for a child.

I would love to provide examples of how these provisions would benefit the cases I have or am currently working on, but do not want to risk potentially violating confidentiality.

I commend you for your work and commitment to children and youth in Alaska's foster care system.

Sincerely,


Mary Rikken



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alaskachildrenstrust.org

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14 March 2017

Rep. Les Gara
Alaska State Legislature
Capital Building, Rm 515
Juneau, AK 99801

Re: HB 151 – Children Deserve a Loving Home Act

Dear Representative Les Gara,

Alaska Children’s Trust (ACT) extends its support for HB 151, Children Deserve a Loving Home Act. ACT is the statewide lead organization focused on the prevention of child abuse and neglect.

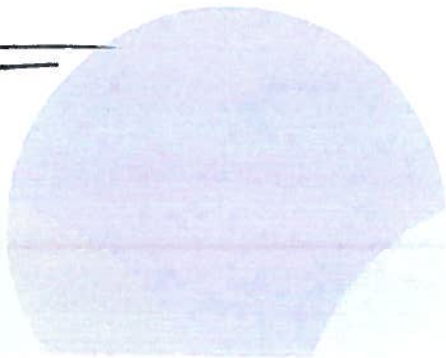
Each year, we have thousands of children and families go through the Alaska child welfare system (OCS). Nearly 50% of the children are under the age of 5 years. Abuse and neglect is occurring during the most critical time of a child’s life. Research shows that abuse and neglect affect children throughout their lives. In addition to immediate injuries, abuse and neglect can disrupt brain development, weaken children’s bodies, and cause long-term health problems. Children often adopt high-risk behaviors to cope with the pain of abuse and neglect, and those also can lead to chronic illness, disease, homelessness and other social ills.

It is important to ensure the safety net that is designed to protect children from the adversity of child abuse and neglect does not cause further trauma. When OCS case workers have high caseloads, it is difficult for them to provide the support and attention a child and the family needs to gain the resilience to overcome this experience. With high turnover of staff, children are unable to establish an important bond, which is one of the most important protective factors in building resilience.

HB 151 addresses these core challenges faced by OCS. By reducing high caseloads and high worker turnover, workers will be able to ensure the purpose of the safety net is achieved. When these challenges are addressed, it will help strengthen components across the entire system. Together we can prevent child abuse and neglect.

Sincerely,

Trevor J. Storrs
Executive Director



FRANK KELTY
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March 13, 2017

To: House Finance Committee Members

Subject: Letter of Support for HB 151: Children Deserve a Loving Home Act

Dear Co-Chair Rep. Seaton and Co-Chair Rep. Foster

I am writing to you today in support of HB 151: I'm a 47 year resident of Unalaska, Alaska and currently serve as the Mayor of the City Unalaska. During my time in Unalaska, I served the community as an elected official for 22 years served as Mayor, a City Council Member, and Unalaska School Board member. My work history has always been connected to the fisheries; I have managed two seafood plants for 30 years and also worked for the City of Unalaska as their fishery resource person for 15 years. I'm now retired except for my elected official duties.

I have known for a few years Rep. Gara, interest foster care situation in Alaska, my interest in this legislation; is based on my own personal history which I will relay some of it today in this letter. I grew up in the Seattle area in the 1950s and 1960's. I was the oldest of three children, both of my parents were alcoholics and my father was very abusive to my mother, he eventually deserted his family in the early 1960's. My mother was a Boeing Company secretary that was now trying to raise 3 children with limited income, a mortgage, food, child care and other costs that involved with raising a family and no support from her husband. The pressure of the situation broke her, and she turned to alcohol and prescription drug abuse.

The State of Washington eventually became aware of the situation probably because of me, as the oldest feeling the pressure, became a runaway and a truant at school. The State of Washington took the children away from my mother as she became more ill, and unable to care for the family. My younger brother and I were sent to various foster homes for a while some good, and some bad, but for whatever reason it didn't work out with these families. My sister the youngest was taken in with a foster family from a local church in our area which was the best situation for her as she was with this loving family 12 years until she went to college and has had a great life. The situation for myself and my younger brother since we were older we became wards of the juvenile court, and were sent to group homes in the Seattle area which had a mixture kids from trouble

homes, some kids had been abused or teenagers that were already into criminal activity. The situation for me worked out well in the end for me. The Griffin Home had a counselor on staff they allow us to participate in athletic activities, but they demanded that you we had to stay in school and get decent grades and participate in various group work projects and outings during the four years I spent at the home; during high school brought a sense of direction and discipline to my life that I never had and has lead me to the successful career I've had. My younger brother had a different situation he dropped out of high school and joined the Army and had a tough go of it his entire life.

I think this bill is very important it will reduce caseload levels and training for caseworkers. Most importantly this bill will make changes that will improve the care and wellbeing of the youth in Alaska. This legislation if passed will assist the youths and foster parents to move forward with a more normal life. It also will give the caseworkers with a reduced workload more time to search out for relatives that may want to be a part of the youth's life. We having a saying at the school board meetings: It's for the kids! If this bill it passed, the saying would be: It's for the wellbeing of Alaska's kid's. I give my full support for HB151 from a longtime Mayor, a seafood plant manager, a leader in his community, which went to college, and was a two sport letterman. But in the early years of his life, he carried the tag of being incorrigible, and ungovernable; from circumstances in life that weren't really his fault.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Frank V. Kelty". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Frank V Kelty

Jonathon Kreiss-Tomkins

rep.jonathan.kreiss-tomkins@akleg.gov

Cindy Mills

POB 178

Klawock, Alaska 99925

Dear Representative Tomkins,

Please share this where you think it will make the most impact. What I appreciate about you, you know our Island, and you know what I'm talking about as far as driving to a community to give service. You've taken the time to get to know me and my family. Thank you for that. I appreciate you.

The intent of this letter is to paint a picture of what serving Prince of Wales is like as a Case Worker for Offices of Children's Services.

There's already three investigations that need to be completed soon. You've called the local ICWA workers in three villages and try to schedule with them to go on the investigations. Sometimes they tell you they can go whenever you want. Sometimes they have appointments because not only do they assist with your cases, they provide direct services for their tribal members. Now you just got a report that is the highest priority; a P1, which means you have to re-schedule your three appointments with your tribal peers. The report is in Coffman Cove, a two and half hour drive one way, if the roads are clear. If it's snowing, you can easily add at least another half hour. You do what research that you can in the office, and head out the door. Once in Coffman Cove, there's locating the home and meeting with the family. Interviews with children and families can take a short time or a long time. You already have four hours into your eight hour day. Now the drive home. While you've been gone, you have urgent items sitting on your desk. There are numerous phone calls from families, schools, and tribal workers. Emails are piling up. Three hours later, you get back to your office. You haven't had lunch, so perhaps there's deli food in your hand, or you packed your lunch. Going through your emails and the flashing light on the phone will not stop blinking. You are back to square one; scheduling appointments with tribal workers to do the home visits that need to be completed. You are an hour and half from their time to quit working and scheduling is tough. How to prioritize which family has the most need, knowing they all need help? Which community has the most families that need to be seen? Coffman Cove, Craig, Hollis, Hydaburg, Kasaan, Klawock, Naukati Bay, Point Baker, Port Protection, Port St. Nicholas, Thorne Bay or Whale Pass? How long it will take to get to the community can vary from three hours to fifteen minutes. Which tribal worker has called three times and sent in the same amount of emails concerning her tribal family? Do I take care of the most urgent of the urgent, or perhaps it'll be easier to get the tribal worker's family seen because you know she isn't going to stop calling or emailing because the need is urgent, but there are bigger scarier cases that need to be

addressed? Am I going to call that tribal worker and tell her there are families that are more in need? She is doing her job advocating for her family, she is not going to like hearing her family isn't as urgent as someone else's. There's that trust factor coming in to play. This job is all about relationships. Relationships with the school secretaries, the principals and staff. Relationships with your Tribal workers. Relationships with your families. Your credibility hinges on how you navigate your time and your schedule. You are hungry and tired. It's time to staff this dilemma with your supervisor.

I am a tribal worker in Klawock. I believe this is the fourth or fifth OCS worker I've seen in the office here on POW. Of course, I am generalizing with what I guess our state worker deals with. I can tell you that with each new worker, there is an adjustment period for us. I pay attention to how she thinks of our families, looking for tendencies. What is the communication style, how well do they hear what I am trying to convey. What are their biases, and are they blatant or hidden? She is doing the same thing, but with three tribal workers. We start relationship building, because we are a team. We are trying to help them understand ICWA and what it means here on POW. What they learn out of a text book about the Indian Child Welfare Act in the month training before getting here doesn't give you much. You can learn about ICWA, but you don't understand it until you have a native family and an ICWA worker trying to guide you through a case. This goes for the brand spanking new, to the seasoned worker with a Master's Degree. Factor that there are other cases that are not ICWA, and you have one person trying to absorb as much information as possible. They have to document everything that they do; if it's not written down it didn't happen. There's the documentation in the data system and in the hard file.

The island is a little larger than the state of Delaware. There are 4,000 people in twelve communities spread over this island with 1,500 miles of road. Not all the roads are paved. There are no maps of these communities, you have to look for the home each time. Time management depends on which community you're going to and how long the interview will last. Meanwhile, things are piling up on your voice and emails. There isn't anyone in the office to help with that. You have no Administrative Assistant. You have itinerant workers coming in for a day and a half to if you're lucky a week. It's not that you'd be ungrateful, but that is someone else you have to share information with so they can be effective.

Larger communities have the luxury of having the ability to break down each case. They have someone to do the investigations, and decide who to send the case to. They have workers that work with families during the "open for Services" cases. Larger communities have mental health, substance facilities when all efforts aren't working, the case is sent to a worker for permanency. The clock is ticking. The state is supposed to have so many months to get these children in a safe home. If the services aren't helping them it's time to pass it along to a Permanency worker. For ICWA families there are two goals now; reunification with the family, or placement elsewhere. If it's an ICWA case you better have a plan that follows those guidelines in the law. You better be able to say you have done "Active Efforts" to reunify the family. You and the Tribal Worker are both researching for a safe place to for the children to live if their parents aren't moving and working the case plan to reunify. Here on Prince of Wales, the only OCS caseworker is in this case

worker from start to finish. She is IT. I am strongly advocating for two Caseworkers and one administrative assistant for the Prince of Wales Office. While I am watching worker after worker crash and burn and I empathize with them, this has an impact to our families here on our Island. My respectful request comes deep concern for our most vulnerable citizens. There is no harm intended to our peers in OCS. This letter is in support of the OCS Worker for POW.

When I enter a case, my thought process is that while I am helping this particular family today, what I am doing will have a much longer impact. How well and healthy this family gets, will probably set the stage for how these children will parent their own children. The healthier the family, the healthier the children. Healthy families equals healthy communities. Healthy communities means a healthier state.

Now, I am 58 years old. I still believe in fairy tales, and this is one that I have invested my heart in. I am respectfully challenging that you fund the Office of Children's Services to the point that we are not running workers out the revolving doors. They have a difficult job under the best of circumstances. Unfortunately POW Office is not the best of circumstances. I would suspect we are not the only area that needs more workers on the front line. Please don't make our Directors pick and choose which area of the state that needs the most help. Let them have enough money to employ enough workers to be able to do the job we all want done successfully. The workers in this field don't go into this for a pay check. Most of us are here because we care. I am here to make a difference. I am here to help families realize what a gift a child is.

This matters to me. I hope it matters to you too.

Sincerely,

Cindy Mills