



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
GOVERNOR BILL WALKER

Department of
Health and Social Services

ALASKA COMMISSION ON AGING

P.O. Box 110693
Juneau, Alaska 99811-0693
Main: 907.465.3250
Fax: 907.465.1398

February 14, 2017

Representative Zach Fansler
Alaska State Capitol, Room 416
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Subject: Support for HB 106, Civil Legal Services Fund

Dear Representative Fansler:

The Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA) is pleased to offer our support for HB 106, a bill authored by you co-sponsored by Representative Les Gara, to establish a mechanism that provides funding for organizations that provide civil legal services to low-income individuals, veterans and older Alaskans by allowing the Legislature to appropriate up to 25% of filing fees paid annually to the Alaska Court System.

Alaska Legal Services Corporation (ALSC), a nonprofit civil legal aid agency that has provided no-cost civil legal help to low-income Alaskans for over 45 years, is an example of an organization that would benefit from this legislation. ALSC is the sole statewide agency that provides free civil legal assistance to low-income seniors, veterans, and other eligible Alaskans.

Legal assistance for seniors is provided statewide by ALSC and assures that seniors, especially those at greatest social and economic risk, have access to the civil justice system. Last year, Alaska Legal Services provided direct legal aid to more than 1,500 seniors and 171 caregivers statewide. ALSC helps seniors establish Miller Trusts, power of attorney, advance directives and wills; prevents seniors from losing their housing due to predatory lending practices, illegal foreclosure or eviction, and renter-landlord disputes; and helps seniors obtain and maintain Social Security benefits. Alaska Legal Services employs approximately twenty attorneys statewide.

The Commission supports HB 106 and appreciates your leadership of this legislation. Access to legal information, advice, and assistance helps older Alaskans preserve their financial and personal independence, retain control of their financial and health care decisions, maintain appropriate family relationships, and protect their personal assets and well-being. Please feel free to include the Commission's letter in the bill packet for HB 106.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of David A. Blacketer in blue ink.

David A. Blacketer
Chair, Alaska Commission on Aging

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Denise Daniello in blue ink.

Denise Daniello
ACoA Executive Director

Cc: Representative Les Gara



3201 C Street, Ste 110
Anchorage AK 99503
P (907) 248-7676

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14 February 2017

Rep. Zach Fansler
Alaska State Legislature
Capitol Building, Room 416
Juneau, AK 99801

Re: HB 106 – Civil Legal Services Fund

Dear Representative Fansler,

Alaska Children's Trust (ACT) extends its support for HB 106 as the availability of civil legal help that Alaska Legal Services provides is critical to the prevention of child abuse and neglect. ACT is the statewide lead organization focused on the prevention of child abuse and neglect.

ALSC is the largest provider of legal services to families experiencing domestic violence. Each year ALSC serves over 500 families, impacting 1,500 persons statewide. Children are present in the majority of these households. Domestic violence can have a profound impact on the upbringing and livelihood of children -- it is the number one precursor to child abuse and neglect. Simply witnessing domestic violence harms children at every stage of their development. Providing legal services to non-offending parents and children is a critical factor in removing children from an abusive situation. Alaska Legal Services provides an essential service for children at risk of abuse by representing them or their non-offending parents in legal matters that help to provide protection from the offending parent and to stabilize families, including protective order proceedings and custody and divorce proceedings. By preventing domestic violence, ALSC is preventing child abuse and neglect and reducing the impacts of trauma. Furthermore, a recent study showed that ALSC achieves \$2.6 million in savings for state and local communities in costs related to domestic abuse.

ACT strongly supports HB 106 and the finances it would provide to assure that free civil legal services are available to low-income Alaskans, including victims of domestic violence with children in their households. There is an enormous gap between the available funding for these critical services and those who need them. HB 106 is a positive step towards bridging this gap in our judicial system. Thank you for sponsoring this important legislation and protecting Alaska's children. Together we can prevent child abuse and neglect.

Sincerely,

Trevor J. Storrs
Executive Director

cc – Representative Matt Claman