

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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REPRESENTATIVE TIFFANY ZULKOSKY DISTRICT 38

HB 184

Sponsor Statement v.A

While Alaska Native children makeup 15% of Alaska's children, they represent roughly 60% of the children in state custody. Disparities of this nature generally indicate a system failure. Additionally, the Office of Children's Services (OCS) typically operates at a 50% vacancy rate, and frontline workers carry caseloads more than three times the national average. Despite increased support and funding for OCS through HB 151 (2018), workforce turnover rates have not decreased nor has the disparate number of Alaska Native children in state custody. Solving this complex problem must include leveraging the vast network of resources across the state and supporting creative partnerships. In an environment of decreased state spending, partnerships based on mutual responsibility will strengthen programs across the state, particularly in our most remote areas.

HB 184 protects the continued implementation of the Tribal Child Welfare Compact in Alaska by codifying it in Alaska Statute. Alaska's Compact is the first of its kind and has gained national recognition as a model for other states. Continued collaboration is a key opportunity to improved child welfare outcomes and addressing significant disparities experienced by Alaska Native children across Alaska.

In 2017, the State of Alaska entered the landmark Tribal Child Welfare Compact (Compact) with 18 Tribal Co-Signers, representing 161 federally recognized Alaska Native Tribes, in order to work collaboratively on improving child welfare outcomes for children and families. This historic agreement continues under the Dunleavy administration. The Compact supports OCS' mission that children and families are served as close to home as possible, the services are provided in the most cost-effective manner through several negotiated scopes of work. Tribes and Tribal organizations are able to leverage wrap-around preventative services while incorporating cultural values and traditions into services, ensuring a stronger and more relevant child welfare system in Alaska.