



26 April 2021

Representative Tiffany Zulkosky
Alaska State Legislature
Capital Building, Rm 416
Juneau, AK 99801

Re: HB 184: Require Tribal Child Welfare Compact

Alaska Children's Trust (ACT) extends its support for HB 184, an act requiring state participation in a tribal child welfare compact. As the statewide lead organization working to prevent child abuse and neglect, ACT is in strong support of the Alaska Tribal Child Welfare Compact, which codifies the government-to-government partnership between the State of Alaska and 18 federally recognized Alaska Native tribes and tribal organizations to transfer negotiated child welfare services and supports from the Office of Children's Services (OCS) to the Tribal Co-Signers.

Alaska Native children make up 15% of the state's general population; but represent approximately 65% of the kids in state custody. To truly improve the livelihoods and outcomes of Alaska's children and families, the child welfare services supporting children need to be culturally responsive and reflective of the population being served. The disproportionate number of Alaska Native children in the OCS system indicates systemic failures within the system, and the Tribal Child Welfare Compact seeks to address those by providing higher quality services and supports locally and as close to home as possible. In areas where OCS staff turnover are exceedingly high, it only makes sense to transfer responsibility to tribal entities that are locally based and know best how to serve their own community with the funding they need to do so.

When negotiations broke down in 2019, there was fear that this historic, unique compact would dissolve. This legislation reinforces the State of Alaska's long-term commitment to serving our Alaska Native children and families regardless of where the political winds blow. If we want to create long-term, sustainable systemic solutions, we need to provide Tribal entities with the certainty that the State of Alaska will continue to transfer funds to key programs and providers contributing to those solutions. The duties of finding relatives to care for children, helping at-risk families before they need OCS intervention, and identifying what other resources families may need should be left to tribes who understand their communities.

Coming together to combat child abuse and neglect across sectors works when local and state governments have strong trust and partnership. For our children's future, the Tribal Child Welfare Compact needs to remain strong for adequate progress to be made in addressing the disparities of representation of Alaska Native children in the OCS system. The time is now to return the power to the communities – to our tribes.

Together, we can prevent child abuse and neglect.

Sincerely,

Trevor J. Storrs
President & CEO
Alaska Children's Trust