

STRENGTHENING PROTECTIONS FOR ALASKA'S CHILDREN

2026 Update by the Alaska Children's Justice Act Task Force



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Key Points



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- Who we are & what we do
- Current bills (or portions of bills) we support
- Our proposed legislative changes
- System snapshot
- A survivor's journey
- Importance of CAC's and their ongoing support

Introduction to the Alaska CJATF



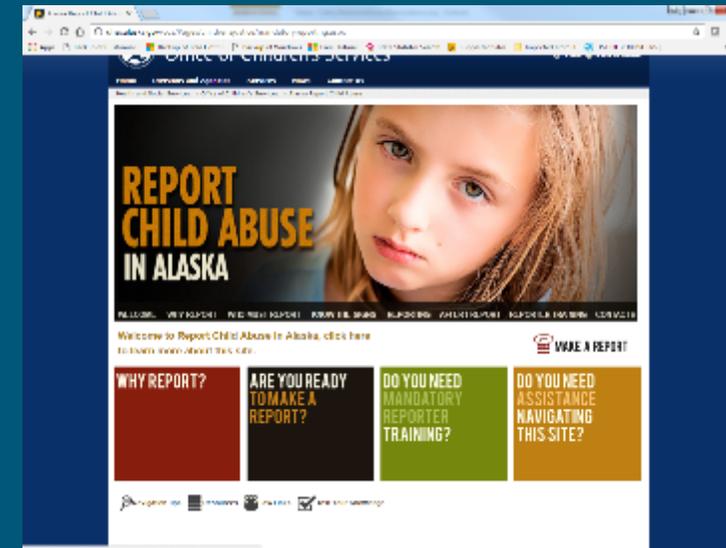
Federally mandated and funded

Mission: Identify areas where improvement is needed in the statewide response to child maltreatment, make recommendations and take action to improve the system.

Statewide: multidisciplinary membership

Focus on education: child abuse in Alaska, mandatory reporting, & best practices for the multidisciplinary response to child abuse

Legislation: to improve protection & justice for children (starvation, serious physical abuse, privacy)



CJATF Current Committees



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Mandatory reporter training overhaul committee

Public/private child maltreatment response project proposals committee

Using technology to improve child maltreatment response committee

Legislative committee

Training and development committee



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CJATF Current Bills We Support

CJATF Proposals



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1. Defining reasonable force in “special relationships”
2. Update mandatory reporting law
3. Update harassment law
4. Add a grooming law
5. Add a torture law

What is “reasonable discipline”?



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Sec. 11.81.430. Justification: Use of force, Special Relationships

Affects both children and vulnerable adults

Problem:

Law currently allows “reasonably necessary and appropriate nondeadly force on that child or incompetent person”

Lack of consistency in interpretation throughout the system response

Purpose of statutory change is to define what is not reasonable

See handout



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Photos of abused children

Case Example



Preschool age child hit with hand –
“spanking”

Unreasonable- Under CJATF
proposed Section (A)(vii) “is likely to
cause and which does cause bodily
harm greater than transient pain,
erythema, or minor temporary
marks.”

Case Example

Young battered infant

Unreasonable: Under CJATF proposed Section (A)(i) – “Striking, squeezing, or causing a child under the age of one year to forcefully strike an object resulting in a bruise or other injury”



Case Example



Elementary school age child struck by parent figure with wooden dowel over food

Unreasonable: Under CJATF proposed Section (A)(iii) – “Striking a child or incompetent person with a closed fist or dangerous instrument”

Case Example

Kindergarten age child beaten for an hour with charging cord for behavior – injuries all over body

Unreasonable: Under CJATF proposed Section (A)(vi) – “any other act that causes physical injury and would cause a reasonable caregiver to seek medical attention...”



(Upper thigh)

Case Example

Toddler burned with cigarette lighter for not saying her ABCs correctly

Unreasonable: Under proposed CJATF Section (A)(ii) – “Throwing, kicking, biting, stepping upon, burning, shaking, or cutting a child or incompetent person”



Mandatory reporting



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Gaps to address in 47.17.020 & 47.17.290:

Need to add additional categories of mandated reporters

Prevent interference with reporting to appropriate agencies

Example: Principal of school doing own investigation such as questioning child and/or perpetrator about allegation (i.e. current ASD policy)

Need to have early notification of law enforcement for other forms of child abuse (similar to child sexual abuse)

See handout

Suggested changes



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Early notification to law enforcement (LE) for physical abuse (similar to child sexual abuse reporting)

Barrier at health care facilities: hospital staff unsure of reporting requirements, worried about liability, notify OCS with delay in LE involvement

Examples:

Head injury, broken femur, 3-day delay in LE investigation

Infant Fentanyl OD – delay in report to LE meant crime scene completely cleaned up

Change would increase efficiency, coordination & effectiveness of LE investigations as well as improve child safety and care

Current Gaps in Regard to Mandated Reporter Statute

Expand list of employees of public, private and religious schools, school board members, and contract vendors

Clergy and laity*

Veterinarians and animal shelter staff

All school staff and vendors with direct contact with children

All OCS staff and vendors who have contact with children

First responders

Guardian Ad Litem

Adult camp counselors and staff

Veterinarians & veterinary technicians

***Exception for private statements, made to a member of the clergy, acting as a clergy member, no persons other than the penitent are present, church doctrine requires confidentiality**

Suggested changes



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Clergy with exception for priest-penitent privilege

Forgiveness does not equate with safety or healing

Some specific church organizations are already implementing policies regarding reporting sexual abuse

Harassment



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Problem with current 11.61.118 & 11.61.120 :

Requires proof the perpetrator acted with the intent to harass or annoy
Bus driver case that involved oral-nipple contact with boys
Clearly sexual in nature however law stipulates “female breast”

Purpose:

Expand Protection to boys
More effectively hold offenders accountable

Recommendation:

Remove female qualifier
Change mental state for theory of offensive physical conduct from intentionally to knowingly

See handout

Grooming



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Problem: no grooming statute

Example: Coach

Sexual abuse of children is most often a process that progresses over time, less often a one-time violent act

Also often includes grooming of parents/caregivers to gain access to children

Purpose: Stop something worse from happening to child

Recommendations:

Add new statute Grooming section under AS 11.51 with definitions

Other states have laws that cover this topic

See handout

CURRENT STATISTICS



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Felony Level Sex Offenses

51.1% of all reported victims were juveniles.

Victims under the age of 11 reported being assaulted by a family member in over **62.6%** of offenses for this age group. A family member includes siblings, parents, grandparents, and other family relationships.

In relationships involving victims aged 0-10, victims reported being assaulted by a stranger in **4.91%** of reported incidents.

In relationships involving victims aged 11-17, victims reported being assaulted by a in **6.32%** of reported incidents.

<https://www.dps.alaska.gov/getmedia/87fda8c9-3bcc-40ff-91c3-65114e52fb57/Felony-Level-Sex-Offenses-2024>

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CAC Children Interview and/or Forensic Medical Exam

Location of CAC	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	Avg.
Anchorage (first in AK- opened in 1996)	690	681	736	659	609	675
Bethel (opened in 2001)	178	243	247	189	158	203
Copper River Basin (opened in 2009)	34	46	53	44	27	41
Dillingham (opened in 2003)	74	46	45	49	75	58
Fairbanks (opened in 2003)	404	390	420	333	255	360
Kenai & Homer (opened 2008)	126	190	147	144	159	153
Ketchikan (opened in 2023)	0	0	12	32	36	16
Kodiak (opened in 2011)	70	79	56	55	65	65
Kotzebue (opened in 2004)	126	131	110	69	39	95
Mat-Su (opened in 1999)	309	288	299	231	201	266
Nome (opened in 2002)	124	108	115	109	72	106
Sitka (opened in 2022)	13	40	33	53	26	33
Total	2148	2242	2273	1967	1696	2072.15

CURRENT STATISTICS



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CAC Children Interview and/or Forensic Medical Exam

CAC Alleged Victims by Abuse Type in FY24

Physical Abuse	552	24.31%
Sexual Abuse	1313	57.82%
Neglect	171	7.53%
Witness to Violence	123	5.42%
Other	112	4.93%
	2271	100.00%

Introduction to Patricia and William

Patricia is a 10-year-old who lives with her mother Alicia, step-father Jason, and 6-year-old brother William

Alicia is a nurse who works nights

Jason is a fire fighter



Child Abuse Doesn't Discriminate

Socio-economic status

Ethnicity

Religion

Education

Birth

Patricia was born 5 weeks early because her biological father Patrick strangled her mother then kicked her in the abdomen

Patrick was arrested

Alicia filed for a domestic violence restraining order & divorced Patrick while Patricia was still an infant



Family Changes



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Alicia met Jason through work

He swept her off her feet and was eager to adopt Patricia

They moved in together into Jason's house when Patricia was 4

Alicia had William shortly after they moved in together

Disclosure

When she was in 4th grade Patricia heard a presentation at school about personal body safety

After the presentation Patricia went up to her teacher and said “Something like that has been happening to me”

Disclosures of abuse are very common after body safety presentations



Mandated reporting

Patricia's teacher made a report to both OCS & law enforcement as required by Alaska law

The OCS social worker talked to Patricia briefly at school and determined her mother was not aware of the abuse

OCS & law enforcement worked with their local Child Advocacy Center (CAC) for Patricia to be interviewed and evaluated



Child Advocacy Center Process



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Patricia and her mom were greeted by a CAC family advocate who took them on a tour of the CAC and explained the process

Their multidisciplinary (MDT) team Included:

- *CAC family advocate*
- *OCS worker*
- *Law enforcement*
- *Medical provider*



The MDT team met with Alicia and explained their concerns for Patricia
Alicia was shocked and tearful

The “Talking Room”

Patricia talked with someone specially trained to talk with kids about difficult things in non-leading ways

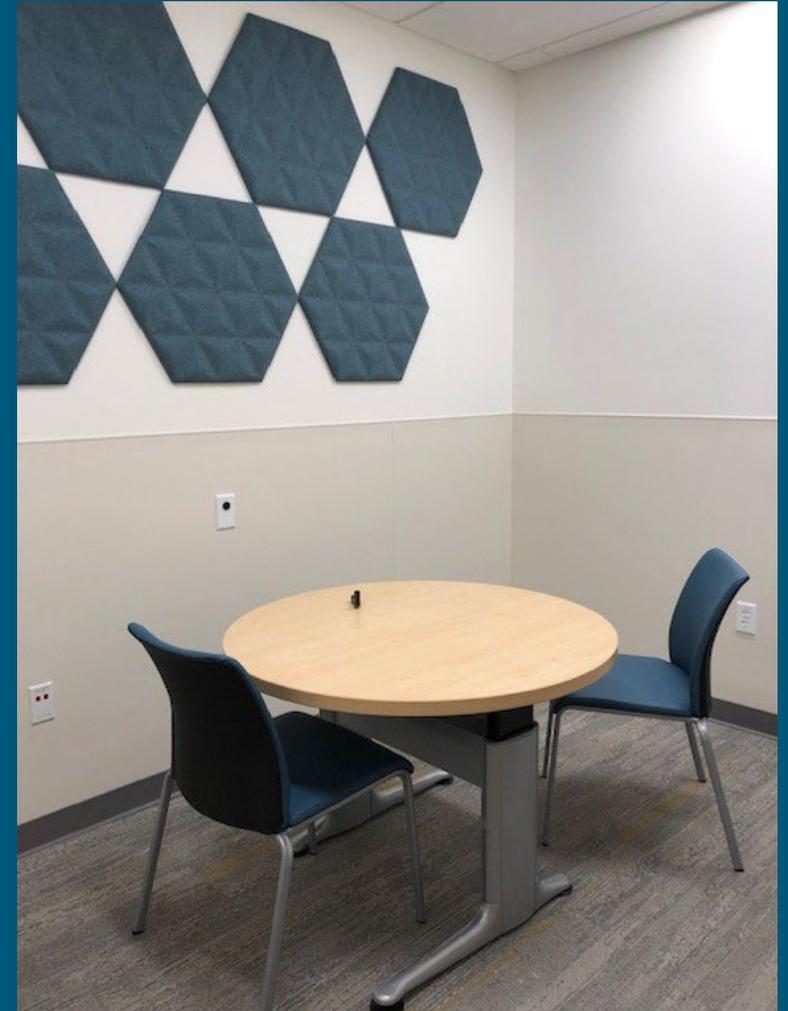
Patricia said that since she was 6 her daddy (Jason) would come into her room at night when mommy was working at the hospital and do “bad things” to her*

Daddy also showed her videos of naked people on his phone

Porn is often used to normalize the abuse to the child

Patricia also described daddy drinking, then yelling and hitting mommy

**Patricia detailed sexual abuse*



Listening room

The CAC also has a separate “listening room” where members of the MDT, including an OCS worker, law enforcement officer, and medical care provider, when available, observe the interview, thus reducing the need for duplicate interviews.



Medical exam

After interview Patricia had a head-to-toe exam by a medical provider with specialized training and experience.

Patricia's exam did not reveal injuries, which is typical in child sexual abuse.

A urine sample was collected to test for STIs.

Patricia & her mom were relieved to know her body was ok



William



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Best practice calls for all children in the home be given the opportunity to be interviewed or in the case of non-verbal children, be seen by a medical provider

Six-year-old William was given the chance to be interviewed

During his interview, William described being whooped a “million times” with an extension cord on his back, buttocks, and legs by his father leaving permanent scars that were later observed by medical providers.

William described his sister coming into his room when he was getting dressed, asking if she could kiss his “peepee” like she does for daddy, providing corroboration to Patricia’s disclosure

Next steps: LE investigation

The assigned detective explained possible next steps needed to gather additional information such as:

- Scene investigation*
- Court authorized recordings*
- Additional witness interviews*
- Other corroborating evidence*

Thorough investigation by law enforcement finds corroborative evidence for Patricia's disclosures



Next steps: OCS

Their OCS worker discusses safety planning to protect Patricia and William from future harm

Alicia explains her parents play an active role in the lives of her family and are willing to let her and the children move in with them

Alicia will get a protective order on behalf of the children



Next steps: CAC advocacy



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Their CAC advocate works with Alicia to determine family strengths & needs

Strengths:

Alicia has a secure well-paying job with benefits as well as supportive friendships

Grandparents can provide a safe living situation & help with childcare

Patricia is doing well in school & has a good relationship with the teacher to whom she disclosed

Needs:

Alicia, Patricia & William are referred for counseling to therapists with specialized training in treating children and parents who have experienced trauma

Follow up: OCS



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OCS substantiates the sexual abuse allegation against Jason

OCS closes their case concerning Alicia because she has demonstrated protectiveness for her children

Not all cases involve OCS

Follow up: Court system

At Grand Jury Jason is indicted for multiple counts of Sexual Abuse of a minor of Patricia and Physical Abuse of William

Jason accepts a plea deal that reduces the number of counts but results in a lengthy prison sentence plus sex offender registration



Follow up: CAC advocacy

The CAC advocate stays in touch regularly with Alicia to ensure if Alicia and the children have any question or need any additional services.

The advocate continues their involvement with the family until the court case is settled, and Alicia feels that she and the children don't need further support from the CAC



“Ideal” outcome



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Made possible when all our agencies work well & together AND there are protective factors in place

HOWEVER many children in our state:

Don't feel safe talking about their abuse

Don't have a safe person to talk to about their abuse

Don't have supportive, protective caregivers

Have to wait months to be seen by a trained therapist

Don't have adequate services in their communities

And most of our agencies responsible for responding are understaffed

In Summary Child Advocacy Centers



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Reduce trauma to children and families

Cases are more likely to have successful case resolutions

Children and families receive services through a coordinated multidisciplinary response including law enforcement, children's services, ICWA specialists, clinicians and prosecutors

Proven to improve long term outcomes for child victims

In Summary Child Advocacy Centers



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Provide

Support and case management to help families better protect their children

Medical & mental health services

Forensic medical exams and interviews

Needed resources (for example related to food and transportation)

We need champions for Alaska's children and families



THANK YOU!