

Holly Handler, Esq.

January 24, 2025

Senate Judiciary Committee
State Capitol Room 205
Juneau AK, 99801
Email: Senate.Judiciary@akleg.gov

Subject: Support for SB 1, Civil Legal Services Fund

Dear Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

I am writing as an attorney Board Member for Alaska Legal Services to express support for SB 1. This bill would amend AS 37.05.590 (the statute creating the Civil Legal Services Fund) so that up to 25% of the filing fees paid annually to the Alaska Court System can be appropriated by the Legislature to the civil legal services fund each year to provide access to civil legal aid for low-income Alaskans with critical legal needs. Increasing the appropriation percentage from 10% to 25% will positively impact Alaska's most vulnerable populations and ensure that access to justice in Alaska does not depend on how much money you have.

Alaska Legal Services Corporation (ALSC) is a nonprofit civil legal aid agency who would benefit from this legislation. ALSC has provided no cost civil legal assistance to low-income Alaskans for over 55 years. Legal assistance is provided statewide to assure Alaskans, especially those at greatest social and economic risk, have access to the civil justice system. For low-income Alaskans, ALSC is often the only place to seek justice to protect their livelihood, their health, or their family. Without these vital legal services, low-income Alaskans are at increased risk of losing their home, healthcare, access to food, or even the ability to be protected from abuse. These unresolved issues have devastating consequences when left unresolved, and impact the overall health and safety of our communities.

Since the original passage of 37.05.590, the community need and demand for legal services has only increased. Demand for help continues to exceed supply, with many Alaskans turned away due to lack of resources with no other option for affordable legal help. Without sufficient funding to allow full access to necessary services, individuals could be subject to unfair treatment and would not be able to fully utilize the justice system. SB 1 will be a positive step towards meeting the current need for services.

Thank you for championing this important legislation to improve access to the civil justice system, and ensure that the Alaska justice system is fully accessible to all residents.

Sincerely,





January 25, 2025

Alaska State Legislature
Alaska State Capitol
120 4th Street
Juneau, AK 99801



RE: Support for Senate Bill 1 - Civil Legal Services Fund

Dear Senator Dunbar,

Alaska Children's Trust (ACT) offers our strong support for Senate Bill 1, which would update state statute to allocate up to 25% of court system filing fees to the civil legal services fund. As the statewide lead organization focused on the prevention of child abuse and neglect, ACT supports policies that contribute to the economic wellbeing of vulnerable Alaskan families. Senate Bill 1 does this by expanding Alaska Legal Services Corporation's (ALSC) capacity to address the needs of low-income Alaskans in search of legal aid.

Senate Bill 1 provides a much-needed update to the state funding allocated to ALSC. Currently, the legislature has the discretion to allot up to 10% of funds from court filing fees to ALSC. However, the need for legal services has increased beyond this current funding capacity, resulting in ALSC having to turn away hundreds of families a year. ALSC services focus heavily on areas of law that impact the economic wellbeing of families, such as children and child support, low-income workers and consumers, domestic violence victims, and homelessness prevention. Accessible legal aid is a critical part of ensuring families have the knowledge, skills, support, and resources they need to thrive.

Since 1984 the eligible client population for ALSC services has grown by over 57,000 Alaskans, while available state funding for these services has decreased. This means that every year hundreds of families in need of and eligible for these legal services must be turned away. According to KIDS COUNT Data, in 2022, 14% of children in Alaska lived in poverty, and a study by the American Bar Association showed that half of low-income households experience at least one legal problem each year. Access to affordable legal services matters for Alaska's most vulnerable children and families.

Senate Bill 1 would increase the ability of ALSC to provide access to professional legal services for Alaskans, regardless of financial means, thereby supporting the economic stability and wellbeing of Alaska's most vulnerable children and families. Thank you for bringing forward this important piece of legislation.

Sincerely,

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