

January 25, 2025

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



RE: Support for House Bill 48 - Civil Legal Services Fund

Dear Representative Hannan,

Alaska Children's Trust (ACT) offers our strong support for House Bill 48, 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. House Bill 48 does this by expanding Alaska Legal Services Corporation's (ALSC) capacity to address the needs of low-income Alaskans in search of legal aid.

House Bill 48 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.

House Bill 48 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