



## ***Alaska Mandated Reporter Survey: Key Findings & Recommended Next Steps***

### **Executive Summary**

#### **Background**

In common with all fifty states in the nation, Alaska has mandatory reporting laws, designed to ensure that the most vulnerable of our citizens - our children - are safe and protected from abuse and neglect.

While these laws are intended to protect children, evidence shows that mandatory reporting systems often produce large volumes of reports with relatively low substantiation rates. This dynamic strains OCS resources, complicates accurate detection of abuse and neglect, and creates barriers for families seeking support.

The Alaska Children's Trust (ACT) is leading efforts to reimagine the system, replacing the narrow framework of mandatory reporting with a continuum of interventions that better respond to diverse family needs and situations, rather than relying on a *one-size-fits-all* approach. This shift emphasizes accurate, unbiased reporting while ensuring families receive community-based supports when OCS involvement is at best inappropriate, and at worst harmful.

#### **Survey Findings**

Recently, ACT conducted a statewide survey of mandated reporters, yielding responses from **766** affirmed active mandated reporters in the fields of education, healthcare, social services, and law enforcement. Key findings include:

- **Experience & Reporting Practices:** Respondents averaged 12 years of experience. 80% had made at least one report, but respondents estimated reporting only 71% of concerns. Notably, 36% acknowledged not reporting when they suspected maltreatment. ***Additionally, 35% of respondents indicated they submitted a report even when they did not suspect abuse or neglect.***
- **Motivations & Barriers:** While 91% of respondents cited "*wanting to protect a child from future harm*" as a motivating factor in reporting, decisions to report or not were influenced by uncertainty about legal responsibilities, lack of alternative supports or options, and fear of liability. Many reports were made to purportedly "*protect themselves or their organization,*" not to protect the child, or to ensure the family received services to divert them from having to enter the OCS system.
- **Training Gaps:** 84% had received training, yet many found it ineffective. Large gaps exist between the perceived importance of topics (e.g., distinguishing poverty from neglect, implicit bias, available community supports) and respondents' self-reported knowledge. Newer reporters were significantly less confident and less likely to have received training.

- **Community Supports:** Many reporters lacked familiarity with local resources. Even those who rated themselves “*very knowledgeable*” about community-based services showed only moderate agreement that such services were *sufficient* or *accessible*.

These results underscore that while mandated reporters in Alaska understand their duty, they often lack the tools, training, and alternatives needed to make accurate, appropriate, and supportive decisions.

## Recommended Next Steps

Drawing on the survey findings and national best practices, ACT proposes the following priorities:

### 1. Strengthen Data & Analysis

- Conduct deeper analysis of OCS data on referrals by reporter type, maltreatment type, screening outcomes, and substantiations.
- Use survey data to pinpoint training and support gaps across professions and regions.

### 2. Revamp Training

- Host a statewide convening of stakeholders, including representation from key sectors such as OCS, Children’s Justice Act Task Force, Citizen’s Review Panel, Tribal partners, mandated reporters, and individuals with lived experience.
- Develop a single standardized Alaska training, utilized by all sectors and made open source to allow trainers to adapt and deliver it to meet the needs of diverse communities. Core content should include legal responsibilities, disproportionality & bias awareness, distinguishing neglect from poverty, and, connecting families to community supports.

### 3. Provide Decision-Making Support

- Explore development of an online decision-support tool to guide mandated reporters through the reporting process and offer alternatives when OCS involvement is not the best response.

### 4. Grow Well-Guided Community Pathways

- Strengthen both availability *and* visibility of community-based supports.
- Ensure mandated reporters can confidently refer families to appropriate services without defaulting to OCS.

### 5. Build Narrative Change

- Continue to develop an Alaska-specific “*Lean On Me*” or similar campaign to shift public perception of child wellbeing as a **shared community responsibility** rather than solely the work of mandated reporters and OCS.

## Conclusion

Alaska’s mandated reporter survey highlights significant challenges: inconsistent training, knowledge gaps, over- *and* under-reporting, and limited awareness of community-based resources. By advancing a

comprehensive improvement strategy - grounded in data, standardized training, decision-making support, and narrative change, Alaska has the opportunity to build a community-based support system that both strengthens families and ensures OCS resources are focused on children at greatest risk.