



Alaska Children's Alliance

Alaska Children's Alliance & Child Advocacy Centers

Presentation to House Health & Social Services Committee

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Child Abuse: Why Should We Care?

Child abuse has serious and long term consequences for:

- Individuals
 - Medical, mental health, and socioeconomic outcomes
- Society
 - Burden on health care, child welfare, criminal justice, education, and lost workforce productivity

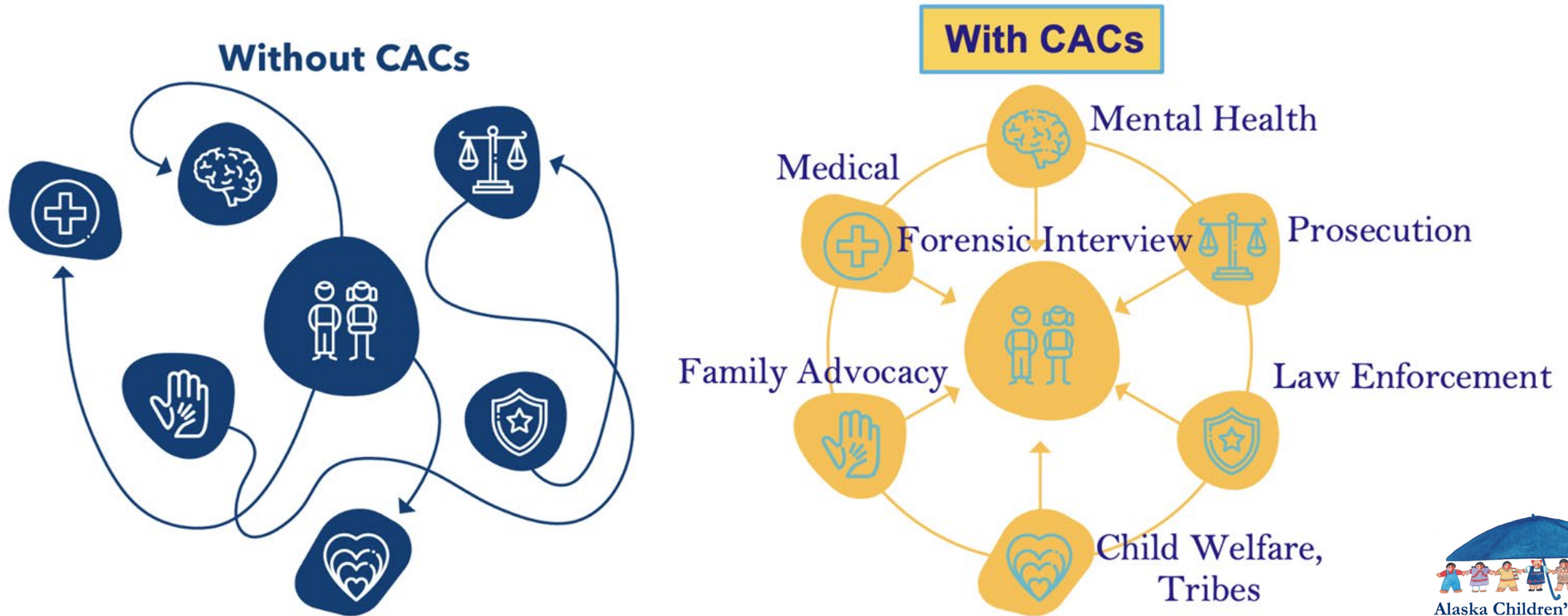
Alaska consistently faces some of the nation's highest rates of child abuse

- About 1 in 7 children born in Alaska will experience an allegation of sexual abuse before their 12th birthday



Child Advocacy Centers (CACs): Frontline Coordinated Response to Child Abuse

A CAC is a neutral, safe place where a child and non-offending caregiver can receive comprehensive services following a concern of abuse such as: sexual abuse (including commercial sexual exploitation, trafficking, and child sexual abuse materials), physical abuse, witnessing violence (such as domestic violence and homicide), and extreme neglect.



Child Advocacy Centers are Critical for...

Children & Families

- CACs are trauma informed & developmentally appropriate
- CACs are centered on the best interests of the child & family
- CAC Advocates provide 1:1 support throughout the duration of the case
- CACs help children have access to justice for crimes committed against them
- CACs result in higher satisfaction (based on surveys)
- CACs promote healing and healthier trajectories through evidence based mental health therapy

Professionals

- CACs coordinate the disciplines that respond to child abuse: Partners including child welfare, law enforcement, and prosecution say CACs make their jobs easier
- CACs support their partners in following minimal best practices based on 10 national accreditation standards
- CACs assist with specialized training and technical support
- CACs are in state statute: OCS is obligated to refer child sex abuse cases to a CAC if available per AS 47.17.033 - .300

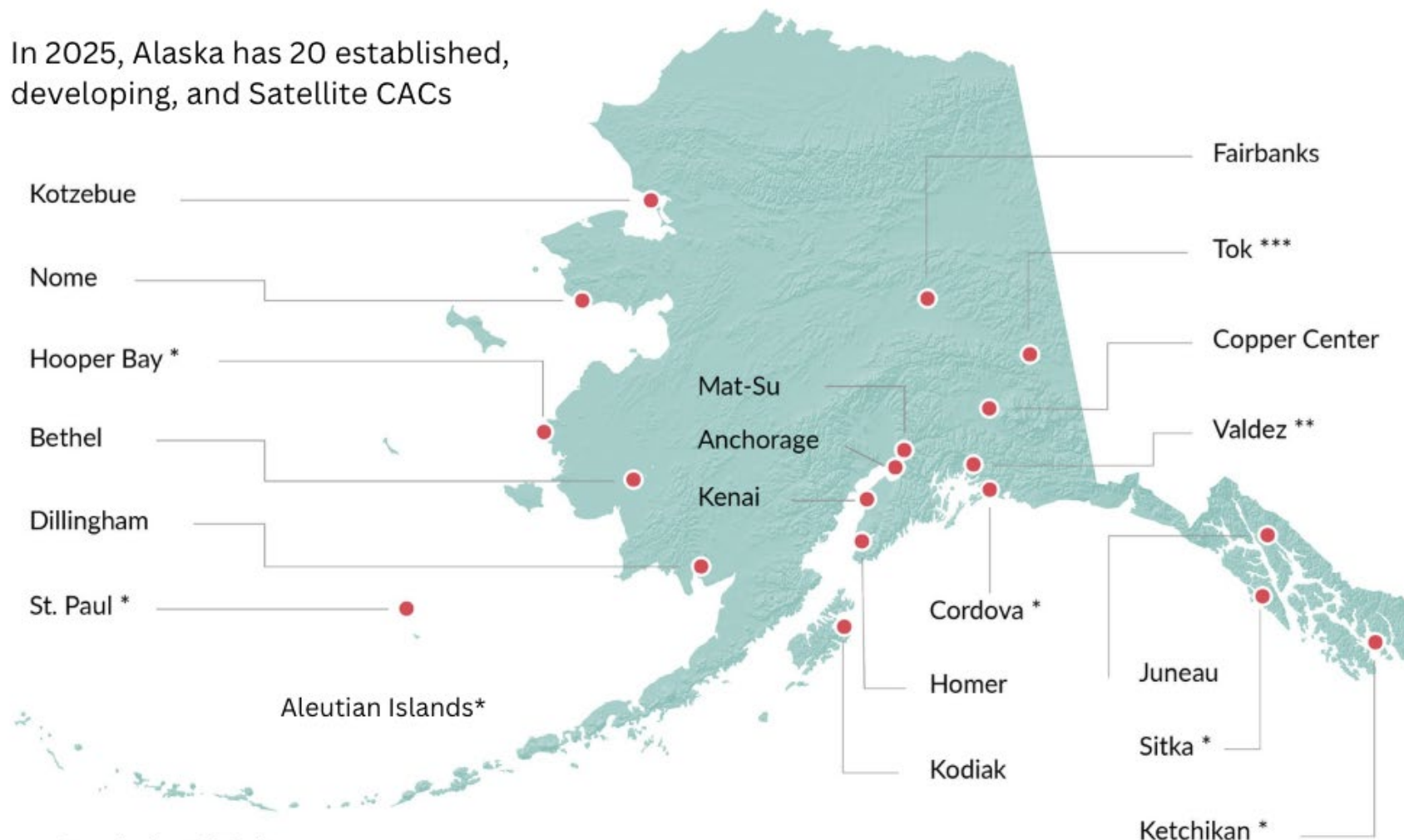
Alaska

- Strong system response is especially critical in Alaska, which consistently struggles with some of the nation's highest rates of child abuse
- CACs help us hold offenders accountable by supporting successful prosecutions, making our communities safer
- CACs are effective, efficient, and cost effective: For every \$1 spent on a Multi-Disciplinary Team, there is a \$663 return on investment



Child Advocacy Centers in Alaska

In 2025, Alaska has 20 established, developing, and Satellite CACs



- * Developing CAC site
- ** Satellite CAC site
- *** Developing CAC satellite site

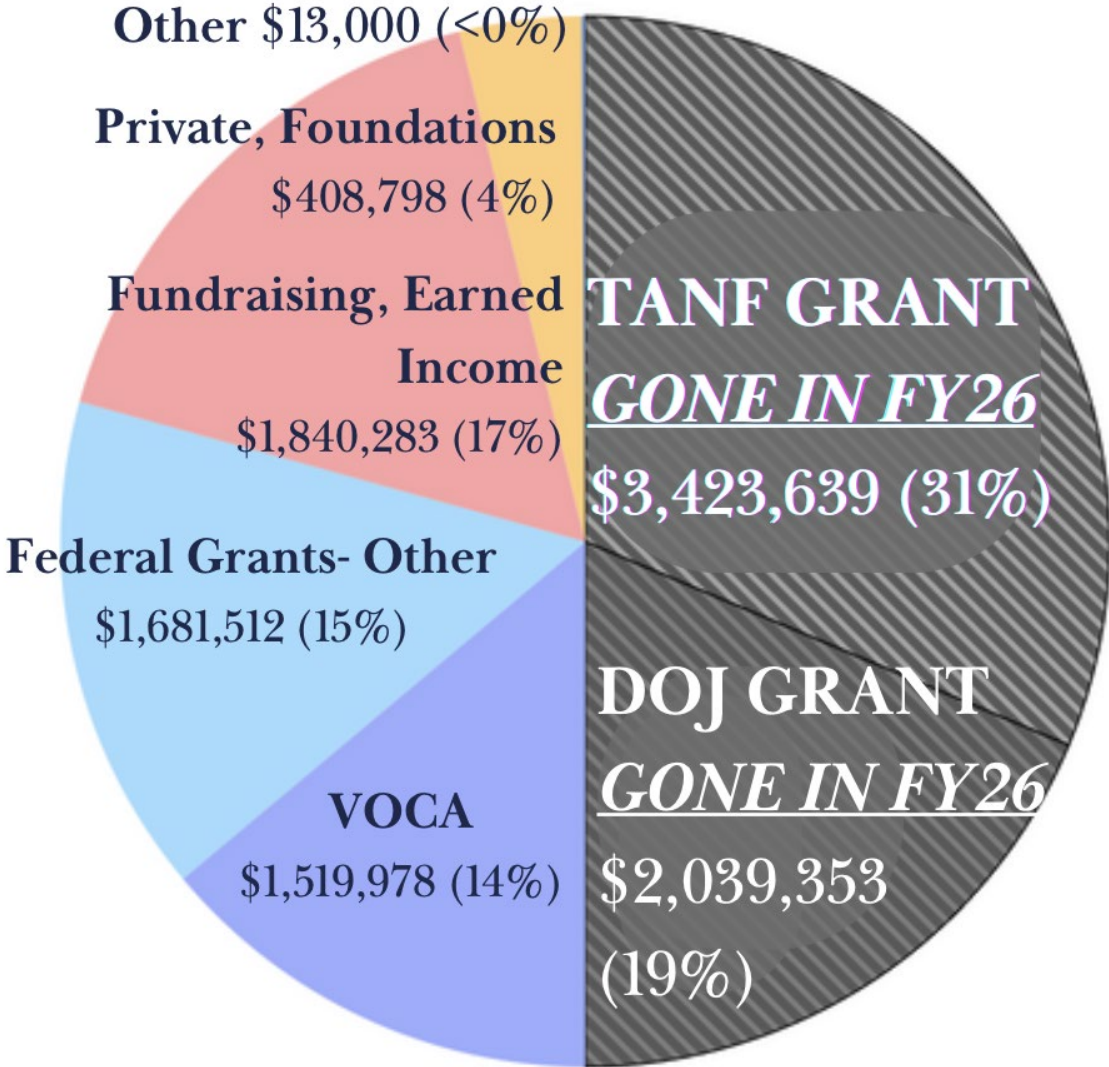
Every child victim of abuse deserves access to high quality support services... No matter where in Alaska they live.

In FY24, Alaska's CACs served 2,061 children.



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How Are CACs Funded?



FY25 ACA/CAC Overall Budget:
\$10,926,563

CACs are funded in a variety of ways, including federal, state, earned, private, and philanthropic funds



Imminent Funding Concern

ACA/CACs face a dramatic drop-off of federal funds in FY26:
 $\$3.4\text{M TANF} + \$2\text{M DOJ} = \$5.4\text{M}$

Alaska Children's Alliance sought and secured intent language in the FY25 budget that directs the State to "ensure CAC services are not interrupted due to the loss of federal funds in FY26." Nevertheless, despite legislative intent and Alaska Statute AS 47.17.033 that requires OCS to refer child abuse cases to CACs, they were not included in the proposed FY26 budget.



ACA/CAC FY26 Request

Requesting operating funds to DFCS in the
FY26 State budget: \$5.4M to the base

*To maintain current service levels



MDT Partner Perspective: Medical

Dr. Cathy Baldwin-Johnson, Medical Director,
The Children's Place & Alaska CARES



Child Abuse and Health

- Multiple studies link poor health and social outcomes for childhood adversity
- Landmark Adverse Childhood Experiences study
 - >17,000 middle aged adults, most with college education, most employed
 - 10 categories: Before age 18 experienced sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, physical neglect, emotional neglect, household member who abused substances or went to prison or was mentally ill, witnessed violence against mother, or lost a parent
 - “ACE Score” 0-10
 - Higher the score, higher the risk of all of the most common causes of adult illness and death in the US
- Additional studies indicate onset of health problems in childhood/adolescence



Child Abuse and Health, continued

- It is never just one bad thing
- Multiple studies demonstrate polyvictimization during childhood and extending into adulthood
- Resulting in higher and higher ACE accumulation
 - And higher and higher costs for healthcare and social ills
- CACs offer the opportunity to interrupt the cycle



The Medical Role in CACs

- It's never just one bad thing: research shows a significant percentage of children presenting to CACs for sexual abuse have multiple unmet health needs
- Medical providers at CACs work in partnership with the rest of the multidisciplinary team:
 - Gather pertinent health information from the forensic interview and medical history
 - Children may reveal more to a health professional during an exam
 - Provide medical evaluations as indicated
 - Gather forensic evidence as indicated
 - Diagnose and treat as indicated
 - Differentiate between abuse and medical problems or accidental injuries
 - Provide reassurance for children and their families
 - Testify in court as needed



MDT Partner Perspective: Law Enforcement

Sgt. Todd Kearns, Anchorage Police
Department Crimes Against Children



MDT Partner Perspective: Law Enforcement

Child Advocacy Centers: national best practice model provides a safe place for kids to talk

- Non-police facility
- Audio/Video recorded per Alaska Statute AS 47.17.033
- They receive a medical evaluation
- Mental health care available
- Advocacy from start to finish
 - Disclosure to trial

Build stronger cases with a “team concept”

- Trauma informed trained investigators
- Advocates for the family
- Trained interviewers
- Medical experts in the child maltreatment field
 - DNA evidence collection
 - Sexual related injuries
- Expert courtroom testimony
- Allows LE to focus on the criminal investigation while other team members focus on the other needs of the victim: Hold offenders accountable



Law Enforcement Continued

- CACs in Rural Alaska
 - The child and family are local
 - The family does not have to travel
 - Large delay in treatment due to logistics
 - Local follow up and mental health treatment
 - Cost savings of travel



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Thank you!

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