



March 16, 2023

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This letter is submitted by the Alaska Children's Justice Act Task Force (CJA). We are federally mandated under Section 107(d) of Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act requiring us "to undertake a comprehensive review and evaluation of law, policy and the investigative, administrative and judicial handling of cases of child abuse and neglect and to make training and policy recommendations."

Established in 1999, the Alaska CJA is a 17-member group of public, government and non-profit sector subject matter experts in child abuse, neglect and child exploitation. Our vision statement is to work to improve safety and healing for Alaskan children by evaluating and promoting:

- Early and effective interventions for abused children and their families,
- The integration of agencies and systems involved to reduce the risk of further trauma to children, and
- The continuum of services that abused children may need to become strong, productive, and stable adults.

With the exception of Judge Haas, who must abstain from expressing an participating in any way, it is our individual and collective professional opinion that sections of HB67/SB65 protect children in three important ways:

Protection from Re-traumatization and Duplication

First, it protects children from having to describe the bad things they experienced or witnessed in a grand jury proceeding. Grand juries often convene before a child and family have begun the therapeutic process. Children who are victims or witnesses to traumatic events such as domestic violence, sexual offenses committed against them or loved ones can be re-traumatized by being forced to discuss such events in non-therapeutic settings.

Child advocacy centers (CACs) provide a safe place for children to share information about traumatic events. One of the core principles upon which CACs are based is a forensic interview conducted in a neutral, nonduplicative manner that is developmentally and culturally responsive. Trained professionals interview the child in a child-friendly room where the entire interaction is video-recorded. This bill provides for the CAC video recording to be summarized or played at a grand jury proceeding, thus eliminating the need for children to testify before 12-18 adult strangers.

Multidisciplinary Team's Expanded Scope Promotes Healing

Second, HB67/SB65 protects children and helps them to heal by authorizing CACs to conduct interviews of children under the age of 13 who have engaged in sexualized behavior with other children under the age of 13. An interview at a CAC allows the multi-disciplinary team to determine what services may be needed for the children and families when the conduct is developmentally



inappropriate. Therapeutic intervention, family support and advocacy, and medical evaluation and treatment are all hallmarks of the services provided by CACs. Without this statutory change, parents, who are often overwhelmed, scared, and confused, seldom receive the clear and unbiased support, information, and referrals they need to protect, support and ensure positive outcomes for their children.

In-State Registration for Out-of-State Sex Offenses

Finally, HB67/SB65 protects children by requiring out-of-state sex offenders to register as sex offenders in Alaska if they are required to register as such in the state of their conviction. This both ensures Alaska does not serve as a haven for sex offenders seeking to avoid registration requirements by relocating to another state, and it helps parents evaluate preventive and safety measures they can take to protect their children from known risks.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Josh Louwerse".

Josh Louwerse
Chair, Alaska Children's Justice Act Task Force
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Covenant House Alaska
Director Statewide Initiatives



PO Box 91054
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907-688-0163

March 21, 2023

Dear Senator Claman,

I am writing on behalf of the Alaska Children's Alliance, an accredited state chapter of the National Children's Alliance and the statewide membership organization of Child Advocacy Centers (CACs). Our mission is to promote the multi-disciplinary response to child maltreatment throughout Alaska.

In the interests of protecting children, we support the following sections of SB65:

Protection from Re-traumatization and Duplication

A CAC is a safe facility where a child can visit following an allegation of serious maltreatment such as sexual abuse, physical abuse, commercial sexual exploitation, and/or witnessing violence. At the CAC, the child talk about their experience in a neutral, structured, and developmentally appropriate interview with a trained forensic interviewer. The forensic interview is conducted in a child friendly space and is entirely video recorded.

Being forced by the Alaskan legal process to re-tell about traumatizing events, in front of a large group of strangers at grand jury, adds unnecessary trauma to already traumatized children—especially when they have already participated in a CAC forensic interview. This is supported by experiences of CACs throughout Alaska. For example, one of our CACs reported having to prepare a child as young as three years old to testify at Grand Jury.

This bill allows for the CAC video recorded interview to be summarized or played at a grand jury proceeding, eliminating the need for children to testify.

Multidisciplinary Team's Expanded Scope Promotes Healing

Many cases of child sexual abuse involve a child acting out inappropriately against another child. These cases are critically important to address and yet, they are largely falling through the cracks in Alaska because no single agency is currently responsible for serving them.

CACs are well positioned to intervene and to serve this population.

The statutory change outlined in HB67/SB65 would authorize CACs to conduct forensic interviews of children under the age of 13 who have engaged in sexualized behavior with other children under the age of 13. This would allow the multi-disciplinary team to assess what happened and what services are needed to promote healthier trajectories for the children involved- such as therapeutic intervention, medical evaluation, and family support and advocacy.

In-State Registration for Out-of-State Sex Offenses

Finally, Alaska consistently suffers from some of the highest rates of child sexual abuse in the nation. HB67/SB65 will not allow sex offenders to migrate to Alaska as a safe harbor from a sex

offender registry. This statutory change will require out-of-state sex offenders to register as sex offenders in Alaska, protecting our children from known risks.

Thank you for your consideration and for your work to make Alaska a safer place for children.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Mari Mukai", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mari Mukai
Executive Director
Alaska Children's Alliance

03/21/2023

To Whom it may Concern:

I am the Director of the Innamta Ikayurviat (Children's Advocacy Center) in Bethel, Alaska. The Bethel Children's Advocacy Center Serves Bethel and 56 surrounding villages in a region the size of Oregon. As such, I work to assist children and their non-offending caregivers who are going through an investigation of child abuse. We provide support and advocacy throughout, link the child and non-offending family to needed services, and assist them through criminal and civil processes as part of our many services.

I see first-hand the impacts of child abuse. I support the following sections of HB67/SB65 and I believe that it helps to support children who may have already been abused and it will help to prevent future abuse from occurring at all.

Protection from Re-traumatization and Duplication

Child Advocacy Centers (CACs) provide a safe and structured place for children to tell what happened to them. Trained interviewers provide a neutral, structured, and non-duplicative interview that is developmentally and culturally appropriate for each child. The room of the interview is child friendly and the entire communication is video recorded.

Children having to re-tell what happened at grand jury proceedings regarding abuse to themselves or others can be re-traumatizing. Being forced by the Alaskan legal process to tell about traumatizing events, in front of a large group of strangers at grand jury, is unnecessary trauma to our already traumatized children. Especially when there is already a video recorded interview. For the children and families in the Yukon Kuskokwim delta, it is especially burdensome when the families have to come to Bethel to testify at Grand Jury. It can be financially burdensome, and time-consuming. Families have to take the time to travel, which can be a day's worth of plane travel, then testifying, and trying to take the next scheduled flight out back home.

There have been a handful of children in our region who have expressed that they felt "dirty" after telling a group full of strangers what happened to them and ask why they have to tell their story again, and especially to people who they are related to, or know of because the region is so small.. The children have expressed that they felt embarrassed and are sometimes brought to the hospital because they felt like harming themselves after talking about their abuse in front of a group of people, after already talking to the CAC interviewer.

This bill allows for the CAC video recorded interview to be summarized or played at a grand jury proceeding, eliminating the need for children to testify before a room full of strangers. This is the least traumatic, right thing to do for children in Alaska.

Multidisciplinary Team's Expanded Scope Promotes Healing

Currently, there is no agency that has responsibility for screening reports of harm consisting of children under the age of 13 engaged in sexualized behavior with other children under the age of 13. This is a concern because there may be a child in this previous scenario that is being sexually abused by an adult and acting out what was done to them on the other child. It may be there are other problems for the child and family that need intervention. A child sexually abused by another child is still sexually abused.

An interview at the CAC allows for a team to determine what happened and what services are needed when a child's sexual knowledge and conduct are beyond the scope of their developmental age. CAC's are consistently providing the services of therapeutic intervention, family support and advocacy, medical evaluation and follow up for children and families who have experienced child abuse and or have sexual behavior problems.

With this statutory change of HB67/SB65, overwhelmed parents who are often scared and confused will get the support they need by professionals that can help them. Without this statutory change, thousands of these reports of harm will go unaddressed leaving the state of Alaska with many more victims of sexual abuse both from adult predators who have escaped detection and from other children who have gone without help and intervention.

In-State Registration for Out-of-State Sex Offenses

Lastly, Alaska has the highest rates of child sexual abuse and sexual assault in the nation. HB67/SB65 will not allow sex offenders to migrate to Alaska as a safe harbor from a sex offender registry. This statutory change will require out-of-state sex offenders to register as sex offenders in Alaska, keeping our Alaska children from known risks.

If you have any questions about child abuse in Bethel I would be happy to talk to you. I would like to invite you to come to our CAC to see where the children of Bethel come for help when there is an allegation of abuse.

Respectfully,



Krystal Henry

CAC Program Director in Bethel Alaska

Date March 22, 2023

Dear Members of the Judiciary Committee,

I am the Medical provider for the Kodiak Child Advocacy Center in Kodiak. I work to assist children and their non-offending caregivers who are going through an investigation of child abuse. We provide support, medical care and advocacy throughout, link the child and non-offending family to needed services, assist them through criminal and civil processes as part of our many services.

I see first-hand the impacts of child abuse. I support HB67/SB65 and I believe that it helps to support and children who may have already been abused and it will help to prevent future abuse from occurring at all.

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Children having to re-tell what happened at grand jury proceedings regarding abuse to themselves or others can be re-traumatizing. Being forced by the Alaskan legal process to tell about traumatizing events, in front of a large group of strangers at grand jury, is unnecessary trauma to our already traumatized children. Especially when there is already a video recorded interview.

In the last month I have testified twice before Grand Jury once with a 3 and 5 year old and once with an 8 year old. As I spent hours with the children waiting to testify I see first hand the stress and trauma this causes these young children.

This bill allows for the CAC video recorded interview to be summarized or played at a grand jury proceeding, eliminating the need for children to testify.

Expanding the Multidisciplinary Team's Scope to include children with problematic sexual behaviors.

Children under 12 who initiate behaviors involving sexual body parts that are developmentally inappropriate or potentially harmful to themselves or others are often screened out by OCS and dismissed by Law Enforcement as non-criminal. There is currently no agency that has responsibility for screening reports of harm between children less than 13 years.

Current research shows that when these behaviors are addressed with therapy and advocacy, approximately 70% will not continue the behavior into adolescence and adulthood. This would significantly cut down the number of adult offenders. Child Advocacy Centers are the ideal place to address this issue.

An interview at the CAC allows for a team to determine what happened and what services are needed when a child's sexual knowledge and conduct are beyond the scope of their developmental age. CAC's are consistently providing the services of therapeutic intervention, family support and advocacy, medical evaluation and follow up for children and families who have experienced child abuse and or have sexual behavior problems.

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Respectfully,

Karen Millstein PA-C

Kodiak Child Advocacy Center Medical Supervisor

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