



January 15, 2024

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

RE: Support for House Bill 100 – Paid Family Leave

Honorable Members of the Alaska State Legislature,

The Alaska Children's Trust (ACT) offers our support for House Bill 100, which establishes the Alaska Paid Family Leave Plan. As the statewide lead organization focused on the prevention of child abuse and neglect, ACT fully supports paid family leave. Ensuring new parents and caregivers have the time and financial safety-net to build a healthy foundation with their children is key to positive health and long-term societal outcomes.

As a state, we should be supporting new parents as they navigate this critical time. One way we can achieve this goal is by implementing supportive policies such as paid family leave.

The first three years of life are an essential time of development for babies and families. From birth to age three, a child's brain undergoes 80% of its development, making infancy a critical time for parental involvement and interaction. Because early relationships nurture early brain connections that form the foundation for all learning and relationships that follow, parents and caregivers are on the front line of preparing our future workers, innovators, and citizens.

The overall stress of a newborn in the family, compounded by lack of support systems, is a key trigger that can lead to lack of connection, financial strain, frustration, and ultimately the abuse and neglect of a child. Of children who experience child abuse and neglect in Alaska, 41% are under the age of four, with children aged 0-1 at highest risk. Shaken baby syndrome in the United States, a leading form of child abuse in children under age two, has been shown to reduce significantly with active paid family leave policies.

Given Alaska ranks 38th in the nation for child well-being by the national KIDS COUNT program, we should be looking at every possible solution to help children and families flourish. Paid leave allows new parents to develop into responsive caregivers for their infant, establishing healthy patterns that promote long-term cognitive and social development. It can also double the rate and duration of breast feeding, reducing risk of infection, asthma, obesity, and sudden infant death syndrome.

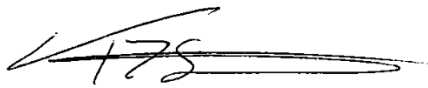
One of the core arguments against paid family leave is the potential cost to employers. It is true, there is an up-front cost, but the long-term benefit is far greater. Positive beginnings mean reduced long-term expenditures and more time in the workplace. When parents can tend to a child's early medical needs, infant mortality and the occurrence and length of childhood illnesses are reduced. This in turn lowers private and public health costs, as well as the need for working parents to take time away from their jobs.

Time to arrange care also results in greater productivity. Paid leave gives parents and caregivers time to search for quality child care that meets the unique needs of their families, thereby facilitating greater productivity when they return to work. Additionally, paid family leave reduces the demand for infant child care slots, which is both expensive and challenging to access. This reduced demand would decrease some of the stress on the current child care system.

With paid parental leave, our future workforce is well-nurtured and better equipped. Positive, consistent relationships during a child's early years yield confident individuals who are better prepared for success in school and in life, paving the way for a higher quality workforce, strong economic growth, and healthy Alaskan families.

Paid parental leave supports Governor Dunleavy's Healthy Family Initiative while simultaneously supporting his Open for Business Initiative. We urge support of House Bill 100, and in turn, establishing the State of Alaska as a leader in family-friendly workplace policies. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'TJ Storrs', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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