



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
GOVERNOR MIKE DUNLEAVY

Department of Health

SENIOR AND DISABILITY SERVICES
Governor's Council on Disabilities
and Special Education

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March 19, 2025

Honorable Members of the Alaska State Legislature
Alaska State Capitol
Juneau, AK 99801

**RE: SUPPORT FOR SB 1 AND HB 48 CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES FUND FOR
INDIVIDUALS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES**

Dear Members of the Alaska State Legislature,

I am writing on behalf of the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education (GCDSE or "the Council") to express strong support for SB 1 and HB 48 CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES FUND to help support individuals with developmental disabilities. The Civil Legal Services Fund has been a Council priority in previous years.

The Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education (GCDSE or the Council) fills a variety of federal and state roles, including serving as the State Council on Developmental Disabilities (SCDD) under the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act. As the state DD Council, The Governor's Council works to improve the lives of Alaskans with developmental disabilities, promoting a system where individuals can live meaningful lives in their communities.

SB 1 and HB 48 supports this vision by amending AS 37.05.590 so that up to 25% of Court System filing fees can be appropriated by the Legislature to the Civil Legal Services fund each year to provide legal assistance for low-income Alaskans, including those with disabilities that need it. Many Alaskans with disabilities do not have the financial means to afford legal representation or assistance in legal matters, leaving them at an unfair legal disadvantage to address basic human rights and needs. Alaskans with disabilities who are living on in poverty on a fixed income such as Medicaid Waivers or Social Security, typically do not have enough funds to save money for representation in civil legal matters. Alaska Legal Services turns away approximately half of the individuals seeking assistance for civil legal matters each year due to limited resources. The target population continues to grow; but the current funding has not kept up with 40 years' worth of inflation to serve this population.

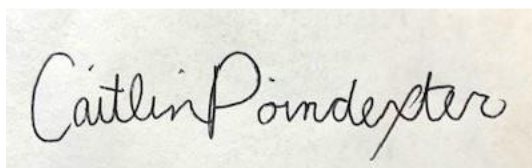
Civil Legal Services funds are critical for Alaskans with disabilities who do not have the financial means to receive legal assistance that would allow them to receive justice, or legal assistance leading to healthy, productive, independent, and dignified lives and to participate in education, the labor market, and civic life. The service is necessary for individuals with disabilities who may need legal assistance to help with:

- Completing required legal work to obtain a Supported Decision-making Agreement (SDMA)
- Landlord/tenant disputes and resolutions that would prevent homelessness or allow an individual to receive accommodations
- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) complaints
- Marriage and family needs such as adoptions, guardianship, divorce, child support and custody matters, and leaving a domestic violence situation
- Public benefits such as denial of Medicaid services or other services
- Wrongful termination of employment
- Financial abuse
- Alaska Native law
- Unfair sales practices and consumer fraud, debt collections, creditor harassment, loans and installment purchases, and various other legal matters.

SB 1 and HB 48 CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES FUND offer important legal services that help protect the rights and dignity of low-income Alaskans with developmental disabilities who are not able to afford legal help. I strongly encourage you to support the passage of these bills to ensure legal services are available to them.

Thank you for your support in this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature reads "Caitlin Poindexter" in a cursive script.

Caitlin Poindexter
GCDSE Legislative Committee Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature reads "Patrick Reinhart" in a cursive script.

Patrick Reinhart
GCDSE Executive Director