

HB 151: Children Deserve A Loving Home Act



Representative Les Gara

It is easier to build strong children
than to repair broken men.

Frederick Douglass



Children Deserve Better

By age 21,

- ▶ 29% of Alaskan foster youth have been incarcerated
- ▶ 53% have been homeless (after leaving care)
- ▶ 37% have children of their own
- ▶ 40% are utilizing public assistance
- ▶ 34% were employed

Sobering Facts

- ▶ Alaska's child maltreatment rate is 70% higher than the national average.*
- ▶ According to the Child Welfare League of America, we consistently have one of top 5 rates of child abuse in the U.S.
- ▶ Results in more youth being physically or emotionally damaged in their own homes.
- ▶ 49% caseworker turnover harms families, wastes money. Can be fixed.

*http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/HealthPlanning/Documents/scorecard/2016%20Trust%20Scorecard_final_2-16-2017.pdf

We Are Not Alone

- ▶ Highest number of foster youth ever nationally

News » Arkansas Reporter

High caseloads hinder face-to-face visits with foster kids

by Benjamin Hardy

Arkansas Nonprofit News Network

December 06, 2017

*Indiana foster care system
is in crisis*

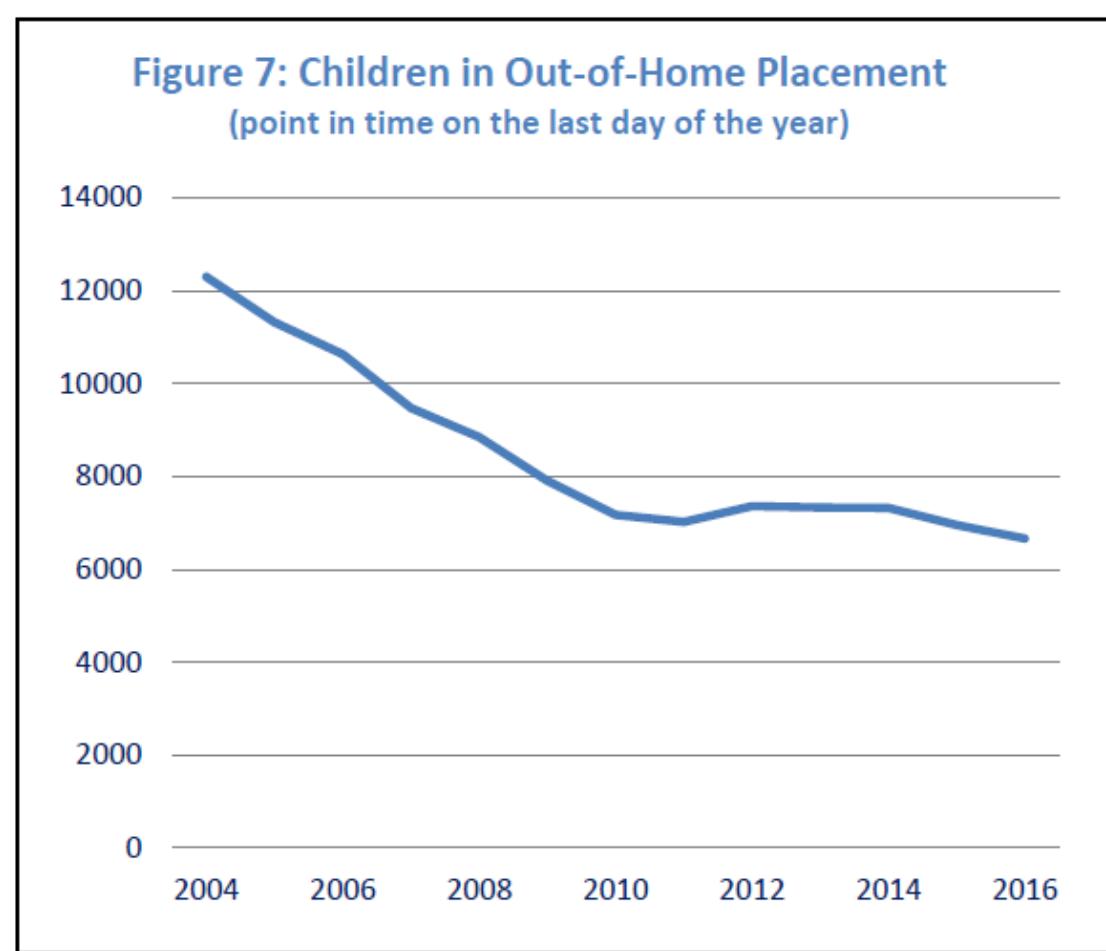
THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM IN INDIANA IS IN CRISIS.

- ▶ It's time to adopt comprehensive, recommended reforms.
- ▶ New Jersey has. It's working.

Vast Improvement Is Within Our Reach

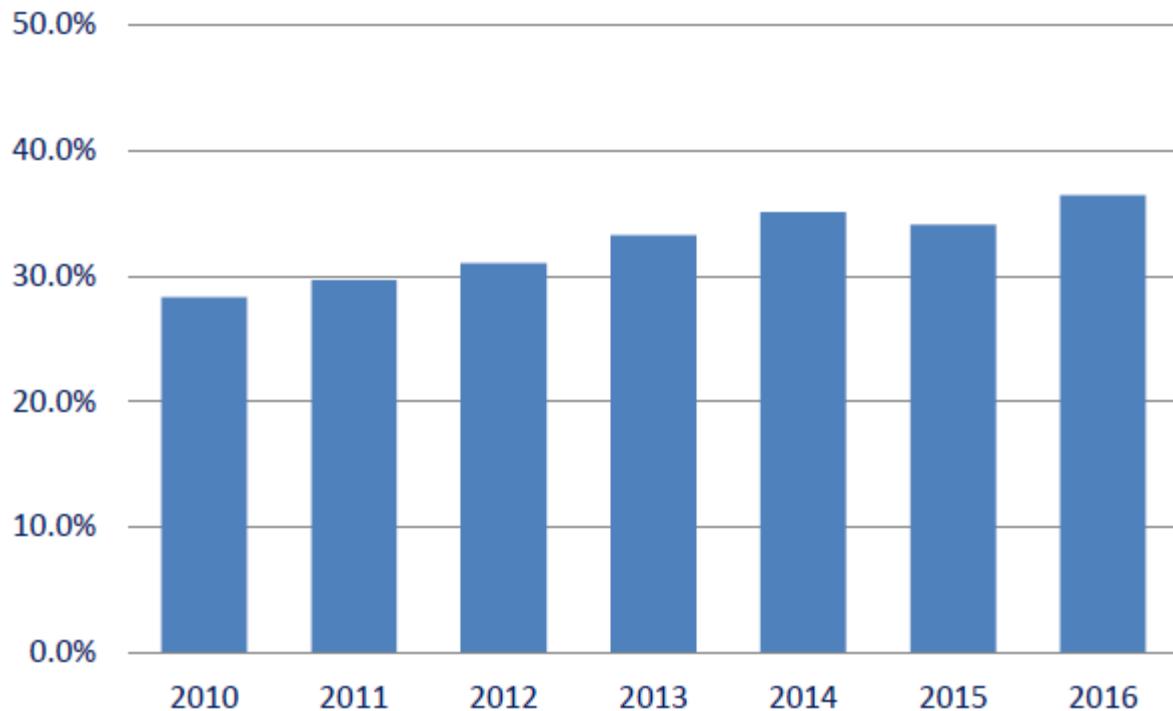
- ▶ New Jersey faced a class-action lawsuit over its damaging foster care system.
- ▶ A 2005 settlement required **reductions in caseloads** and **increases in training**, among other provisions.
- ▶ Their outcomes have been encouraging.
 - 84% of children experience 2 or fewer placements within first year.

Keeping Families Together: N.J. Placements Down 12,000 to 6,700



Placing Youth With Relatives: A 30% Increase in N.J.

Figure 9: Initial Placement with a
Relative or Kinship Caregiver



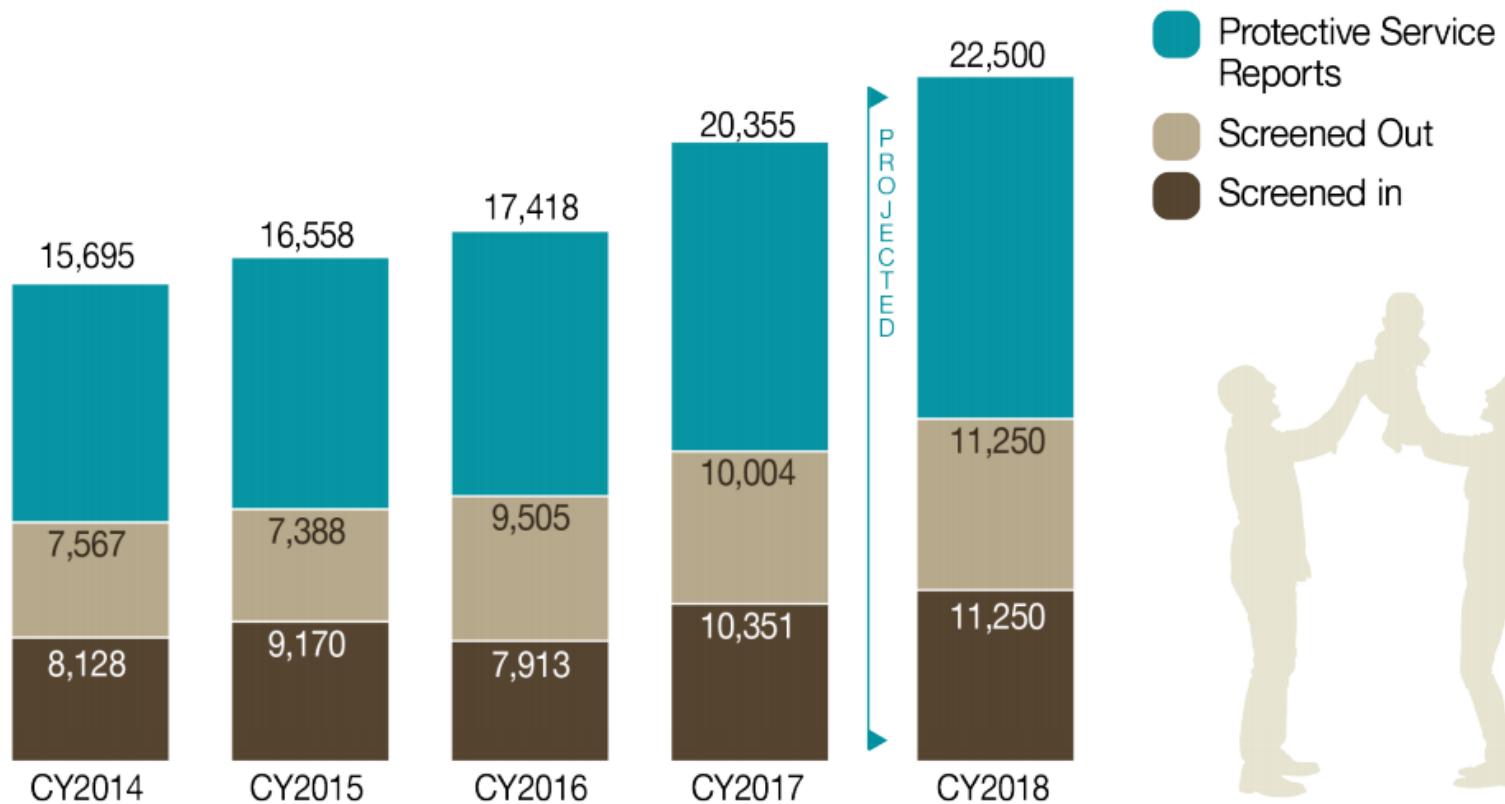
NJ Turnover = 7% Annually

The current NJ DCF workforce is...

<i>Descriptor</i>	<i>Indicator</i>
Attracted to Child Welfare	NJ DCF has a 1.27% vacancy rate
Educated & Prepared for the Work	Position requirements include bachelor's degrees, plus relevant child welfare or social work experience
Stable & Consistent	NJ DCF has a 7.24% turnover rate, much lower than the national average (30%)
Diverse & Reflective of the Children Served	Staff race/ethnicity (44% Black, 35% White, 19% Hispanic) mirrors the demographic trends of children receiving services
Committed	74.2% of staff have been employed by the State for 6+ years
Adequately Compensated	Starting salaries range from \$49,000-\$70,000, on par with other human and protective service professions in the State
Well-supported	89-99% of caseloads meet national standards and MSA benchmarks
Well-supervised	Average supervisory ratio is low, with 1 supervisor to 4.7 workers
Well-trained	Caseload-carrying staff and supervisors are provided with 229,767 hours of training (71.5 hours on average), with 100% receiving at least 40 hours per year

In AK, Reports of Potential Harm On the Rise

71% from mandatory reporters, not meddling neighbors



Vision: Safe Children, Strong Families

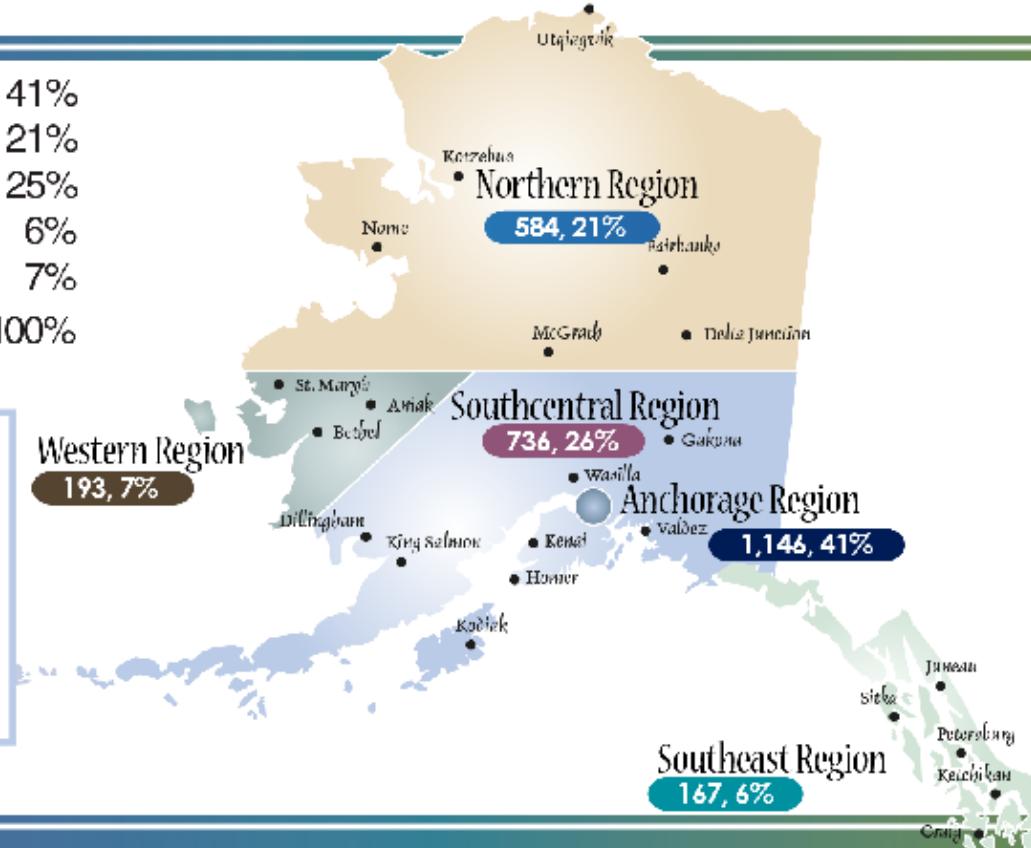
As of Dec 31 of Each Year

Count of Out of Home Children

■ Anchorage	1,146	41%
■ Northern	584	21%
■ Southcentral	736	25%
■ Southeast	167	6%
■ Western	193	7%
Statewide	2,826	100%

Total	
2012	1,884
2013	1,988
2014	2,287
2015	2,779
2016	2,968
2017	2,826

December 31st 2017



Vision: Safe Children, Strong Families



Alaska's Staggering Caseloads

- ▶ 43% increase in reports of harm since 2014
- ▶ 51% increase in children in out of home care since 2012
- ▶ Only a 14% increase in front-line social workers, including the 31 added last year, from FY 11 – FY 19

Caseworkers: Essential to Success

“A well-trained, highly skilled, well-resourced and appropriately deployed workforce is foundational to a child welfare agency’s ability to achieve best outcomes for the vulnerable children, youth and families it serves.”

How Excessive Caseloads Harm Children & Families

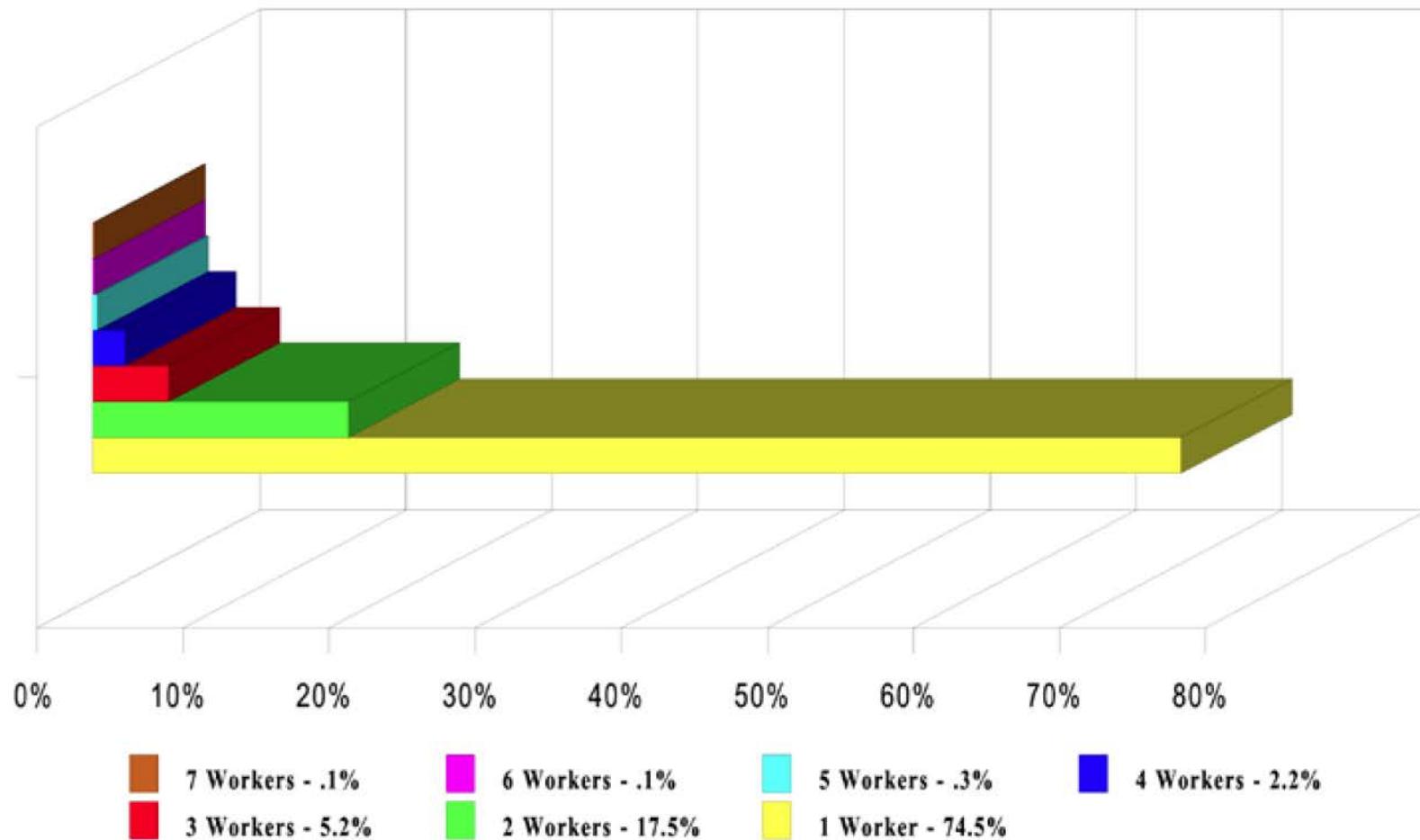
- ▶ Can't work with families to arrange **frequent visitation**, which **increases reunification**
- ▶ **High caseloads** lead to **more turnover** – 49% for new workers at OCS
- ▶ More turnover leads to damaging placement changes
- ▶ Inadequate time to investigate cases & work with families & youth.

Excessive Workloads: #1 Factor in Decision to Quit

- ▶ OCS frontline staff say that **excessive workload is the number one factor affecting high turnover rates.**
 - Employees were asked to rank the top strategies they believed would best retain staff. Among the frontline workers, more than 50% ranked “overall reduction in workloads” as their most preferred strategy. Another 15% chose “increased pay and benefits” and a little over 10% chose “improved quality of supervision.”

(Alaska Citizen Review Panel, Alaska Office of Children’s Services, 2016)

Fewer changes in caseworkers increases the chances of permanency for children



Flower, C. McDonald, J. & Sumski, M. (2005). *Review of turnover in Milwaukee county private agency child welfare ongoing case management staff*. Milwaukee, WI: Milwaukee County Department of Social Services.

WHY THE WORKFORCE MATTERS

CHILD WELFARE WORK ISN'T EASY

- ✓ Demanding caseloads
- ✓ A high degree of uncertainty
- ✓ Life and death decisions
- ✓ Trauma for children and families
- ✓ Traumatic stress
- ✓ Bureaucratic system
- ✓ External oversight and scrutiny

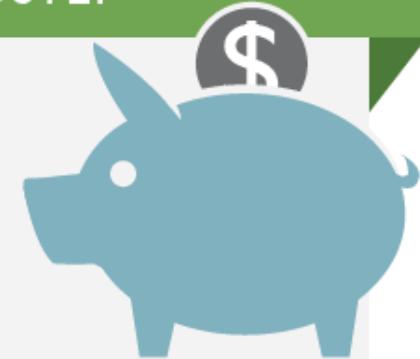
The child welfare workforce provides services and supports to keep vulnerable children, youth, and families safe, stable, and healthy.



TURNOVER IS COSTLY

Cost for each worker leaving an agency:

\$54,000¹



REDUCED TURNOVER MEANS

- ✓ Timely investigations
- ✓ More contacts/visits with children, families, and resource families
- ✓ Better service delivery
- ✓ Improved safety, permanency, and well-being

Protecting Youth

- ▶ Research shows repeated **maltreatment of children in Alaska could be reduced by reducing workload and turnover.**
 - A 2013 NY report found counties in which workers had **higher caseloads also had higher rates of repeated maltreatment.**
<http://www.osc.state.ny.us/localgov/audits/swr/2014/CPS/global.pdf>
 - A 2006 report by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency found “the **correlation between turnover rate and maltreatment recurrence at every time point was strong and statistically significant.**”
http://www.cpshr.us/workforceplanning/documents/06.02_Relation_Staff.pdf

HB 151 will cost-effectively and comprehensively fix problems, improve child and family outcomes, and reduce waste and red tape.



HB 151: What It Will Do

- ▶ Sets **manageable caseload limits**, so caseworkers can reduce removal rates, get youth out of foster care faster, make fewer mistakes, and respond to the needs of youth and original parents.
 - For new caseworkers, 6 families in the first three months and 12 in the first six months
 - A statewide average caseload limit of not more than 13 families per worker
 - These levels are consistent with national recommendations, taking Alaska travel times into account

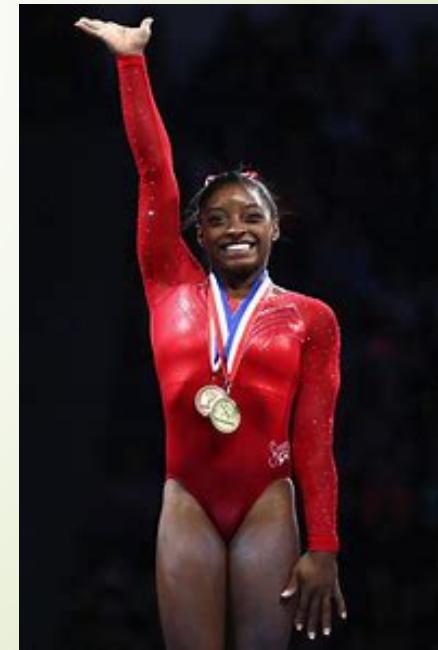
Caseloads: FY 17 &18

	Average Caseload Per Worker	Average Caseload Per Worker
	FY2017	FY2018
Anchorage Region	30 ✓	28 ✓
Anchorage		
Northern Region		
Barrow	32 ✓	32 ✓
Delta	15	14
Fairbanks	23 ✓	21 ✓
Interior Rural	18	24 ✓
Kotzebue	21	28 ✓
McGrath	30 ✓	6
South Central Region		
*Wasilla	43 ✓	17
Dillingham	22	12
Kodiak	22	23 ✓
Homer	36 ✓	20
Seward	16	0 (cases covered by Kenai)
Gakona	7	7
*Kenai	16	19
Valdez	5	4
King Salmon	22 ✓	27 ✓
Western Region		
Aniak	16	10
St. Mary's	20	10
Bethel	30 ✓	18
Southeast Region		
Craig	17	0 (cases covered by Ketchikan workers)
Ketchikan	17	16
Sitka	10	17
Juneau	16	23 ✓
Petersburg	26 ✓	20 ✓

*Note: Wasilla reports come March with new staffing on board their average caseload will drop to 14 in Wasilla and 11 in Kenai.

Finding & Keeping Loving Foster Homes

- ▶ Often **placement with a family member** or friend is healthier for a child & leads to reunification
- ▶ Bill **strengthens search for family members**, frequently a casualty of excessive caseloads
- ▶ **Can make Olympians**
- ▶ Simon Biles and Torie Bowie adopted by loving grandparents within 1 year



Provides Caseworkers with Necessary Training

- ▶ Increases training for new workers to 6 weeks
- ▶ Pre-2017 budget amendment was 3 weeks
- ▶ Directs DHSS to assign mentors to train and help new staff
- ▶ Quality training at UA Child Welfare Academy

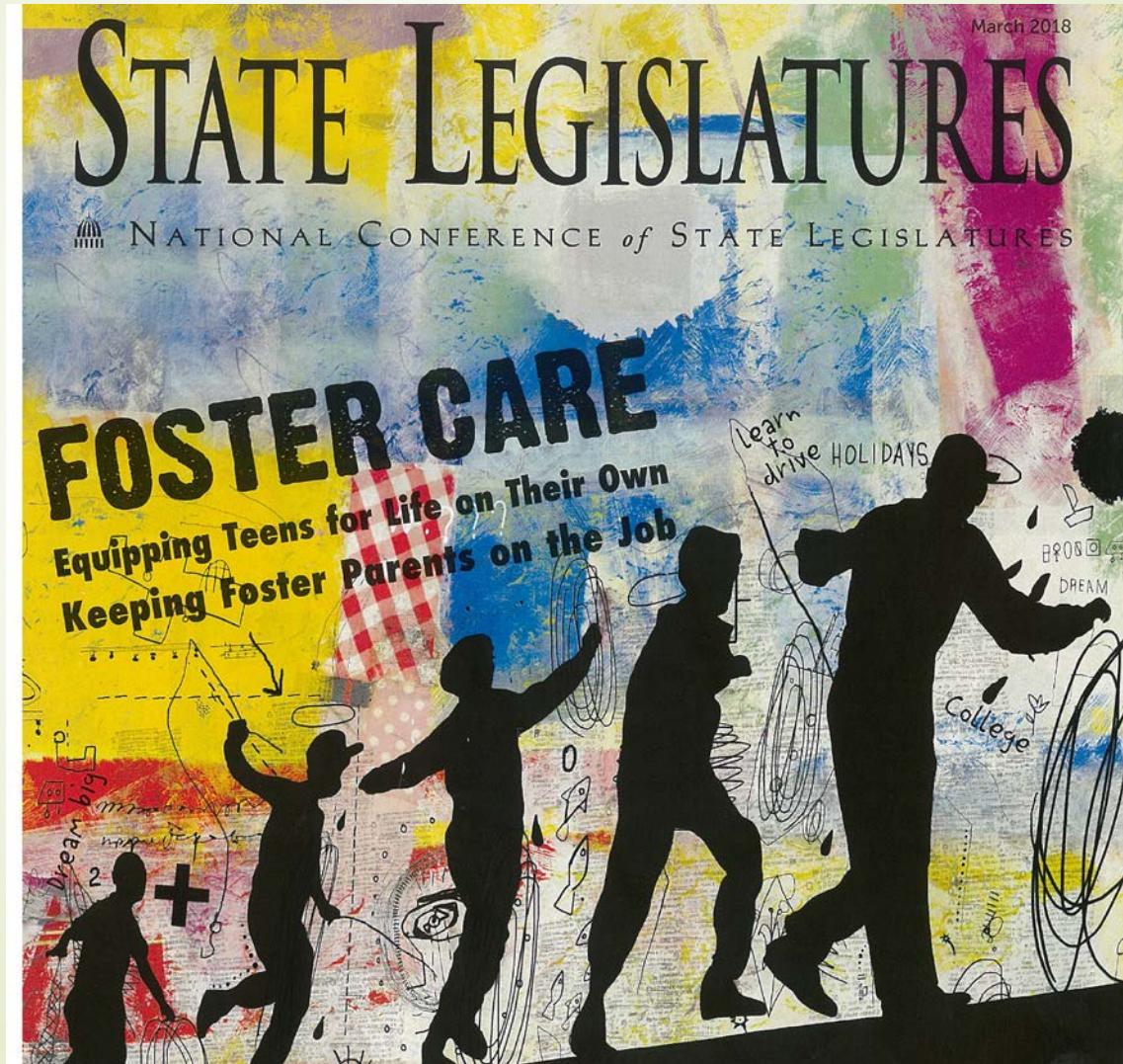
Keeping Families Together

- ▶ **Relative placements** -- Requires supervisors to certify in writing that a search for relatives has been carried out
- ▶ **Cuts red tape** -- Helps relatives to obtain timely foster home licenses, keeps family members as guardians
- ▶ **Reduces removals** -- Prohibits DHSS from placing a child with an out-of-home provider if it determines the child can remain safely at home with an adult family member
- ▶ **Maintains connections & support** -- Enables the sharing of contact info to encourage needed contact with siblings and important former foster families

Cuts Red Tape

- ▶ Makes it easier for foster parents to make day-to-day decisions about a child's activities ("Prudent Parent" standard followed in more than 10 other states)
- ▶ Requires that decisions on foster care home license applications be made within 45 days
- ▶ Enables youth 14 and older to participate in their case plan & permanent home goals

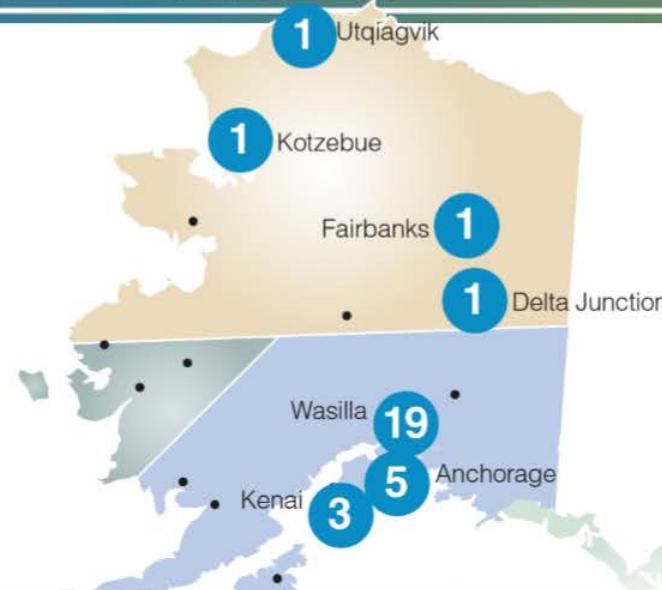
Not All Bad News: Alaska Has Made Some Important Strides



FY2018 AMENDMENT /2019 INCREMENT 31 Positions — 29 Hired

Recruitment Method

- Advanced Preparation
- Continuous recruitment
- Interviews every week
- Same day submission of requests for hire
- Support from DHSS HR staff
- Social Media Ad Buys
- Networking



Location	Protective Services Specialist I/II	Protective Services Specialist III	Protective Services Specialist IV	Social Services Associate II	Office Assistant II	Total
Anchorage	4	1				5
Utqiagvik	1					1
Delta Junction	1					1
Fairbanks	1					1
Kenai	3					3
Kotzebue	1					1
Wasilla	11	2	2	2	2	19
Total	22	3	2	2	2	31

Progress at Alaska OCS

Removals and discharges during each calendar year:

2017: Removals = 1,303; Discharges = **1,422**

2016: Removals = 1,356; Discharges = 1,038

2015: Removals = 1,610; Discharges = 1,080

Children in Out of Home Care:

12/31/2017 = 2,854

12/31/2016 = 2,967

12/31/2015 = 2,778

If there's a cause

**WORTH
FIGHTING
FOR**

it's this:

children *belong* in families

#adoption

-Nicole Skelenger, MLI Adoptions