March 20, 2018

RE: Letter of Support - House Bill 151

Dear Senator Wilson and members of the Senate HSS Committee,

I am writing in support of HB 151. With record numbers of children and youth in foster care, high rates of caseworker turnover and the need for more relative foster homes, Alaska is in dire need of the improvements outlined in HB 151.

As a former foster parent who has adopted and is currently raising two children from care, and in my professional capacity of regularly interacting with OCS, with current foster families, with children in care, and with biological parents I have a very good understanding of the system and its shortfalls. HB 151 makes huge strides in addressing issues that are currently in place.

This bill offers solutions to insure training and workload standards for front line caseworkers, strengthens language and agency accountability for timely relative searches; requires the department encourage children connections to siblings and former foster parents, when appropriate; provides for supports for certain family members to obtain variances to provide foster care; mandates that child in custody and at least age 14 be included in their own case planning and provided with tools they need to successfully transition to adulthood.

The changes proposed in HB151 will help to stabilize the workforce to better serve the needs of families involved in the child welfare system, increase the timeliness of children exiting foster care, improve the care and wellbeing of children and youth in foster care and help youth successfully transition to adulthood.

I strongly support your efforts to improve the life of Alaska's children by passing this bill.

Sincerely,

Mark Lackey

Mark Lackey

1330 E Woodcrest Drive

Wasilla, AK 99654

District 7D