

Thursday, April 12, 2018

Senators Hoffman, MacKinnon, Bishop, von Ihmhof, Micciche, Olson, and Stevens
Alaska State Legislature
Capital Building, Rm 511
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Senators:

R.O.C.K. Mat-Su (Raising Our Children With Kindness) is a place-based collective consisting of individuals and organizations that joined together to promote family resilience and reduce child maltreatment in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough. The partners of R.O.C.K. Mat-Su strongly support HB 151 as increasing the training OCS caseworkers receive and reducing the caseloads they carry will better support OCS staff and make them more able to care for Alaska's most vulnerable children. Additionally, the newly added language that will help to create a pathway for families with a screened out report of harm to access voluntary community support services will help to prevent families from entering the OCS system.

In the Mat-Su Borough, just as in all of Alaska, the State's Office of Children's Services (OCS) is struggling with an increase in child abuse and neglect cases. In the past five years, the number of OCS cases statewide has increased by 50 percent. The cumulative incidence of a report of maltreatment among children aged 0-7 in the State of Alaska is 31% (longitudinal study, ALCANLink). The Palmer Court has seen the number of Child in Need of Aid (CINA) cases, where children have been removed from their parents, increase dramatically from 216 cases in 2014 to 242 cases in 2015 and 271 cases in 2016.

R.O.C.K. Mat-Su works closely with staff from our local OCS office, and together we have been able to achieve great things for families engaged in the child welfare system in Mat-Su, such as launching the first therapeutic court in Alaska for families with young children in the child welfare system. During our work together we have also seen firsthand how committed to providing meaningful services to families in need OCS staff are. The partners of R.O.C.K. Mat-Su see our support of HB151 as a way to give back to OCS staff who give so much to their work. By reducing caseloads and increasing training for OCS staff we are helping them to achieve the positive outcomes, such as increased contact with family members and decreased length of time in care, that Alaska's children deserve.

Thank you,



Desiré Shepler, MPH
Director
R.O.C.K. Mat-Su

Working collectively towards large-scale systems change, in our lifetime, we will: