

HB 151: Children Deserve a Loving Home Act

(Shortened Version)



Representative Les Gara

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

Frederick Douglass



Damaging Children, Costing Money

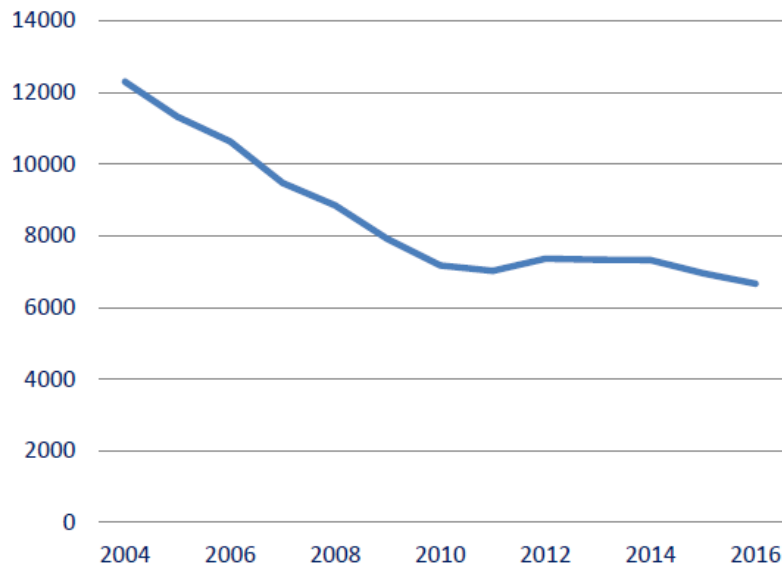
By age 21,

- 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

Vast Improvement Within Our Reach: N.J. Adopted Caseload Limits & Training similar to HB 151

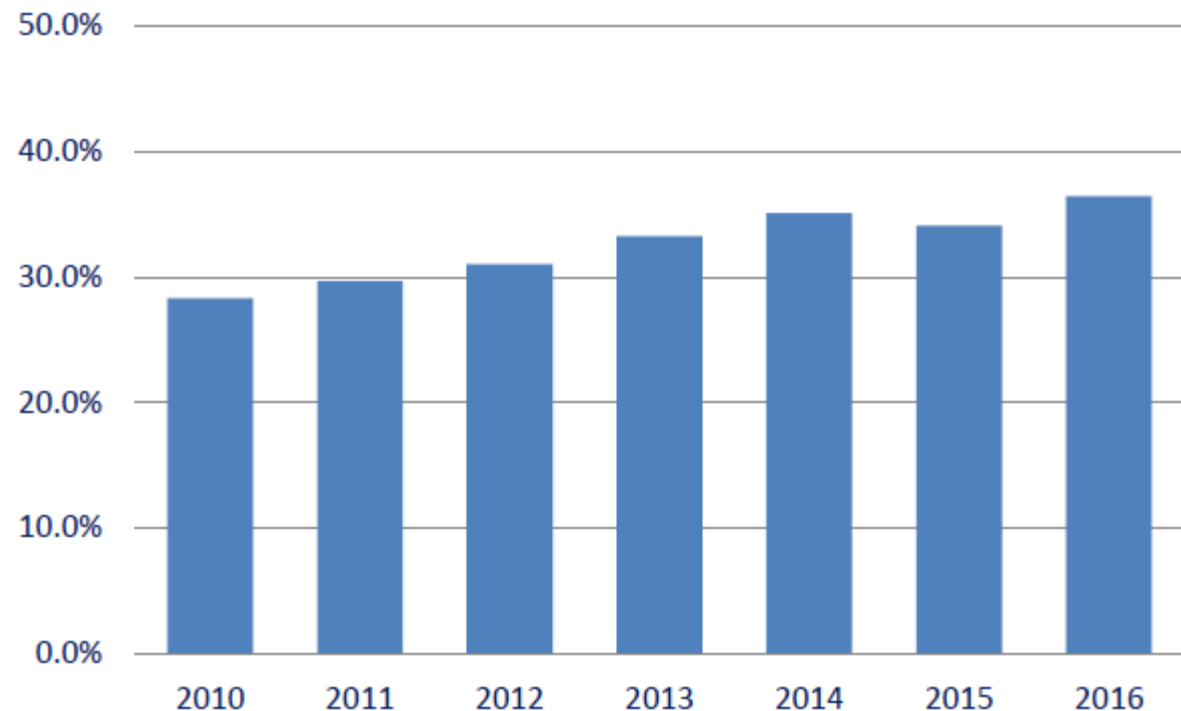
- Child Removals Down almost 50%
- Caseworker Turnover Down to 8% from 25%

Figure 7: Children in Out-of-Home Placement
(point in time on the last day of the year)



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

**Figure 9: Initial Placement with a
Relative or Kinship Caregiver**



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 front-line workers at OCS
- Majority of those who leave OCS cite excessive caseloads as #1 reason
- More turnover correlated with repeat maltreatment
- Inadequate time to investigate cases & work to keep families together.

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



Fewer changes in caseworkers ...

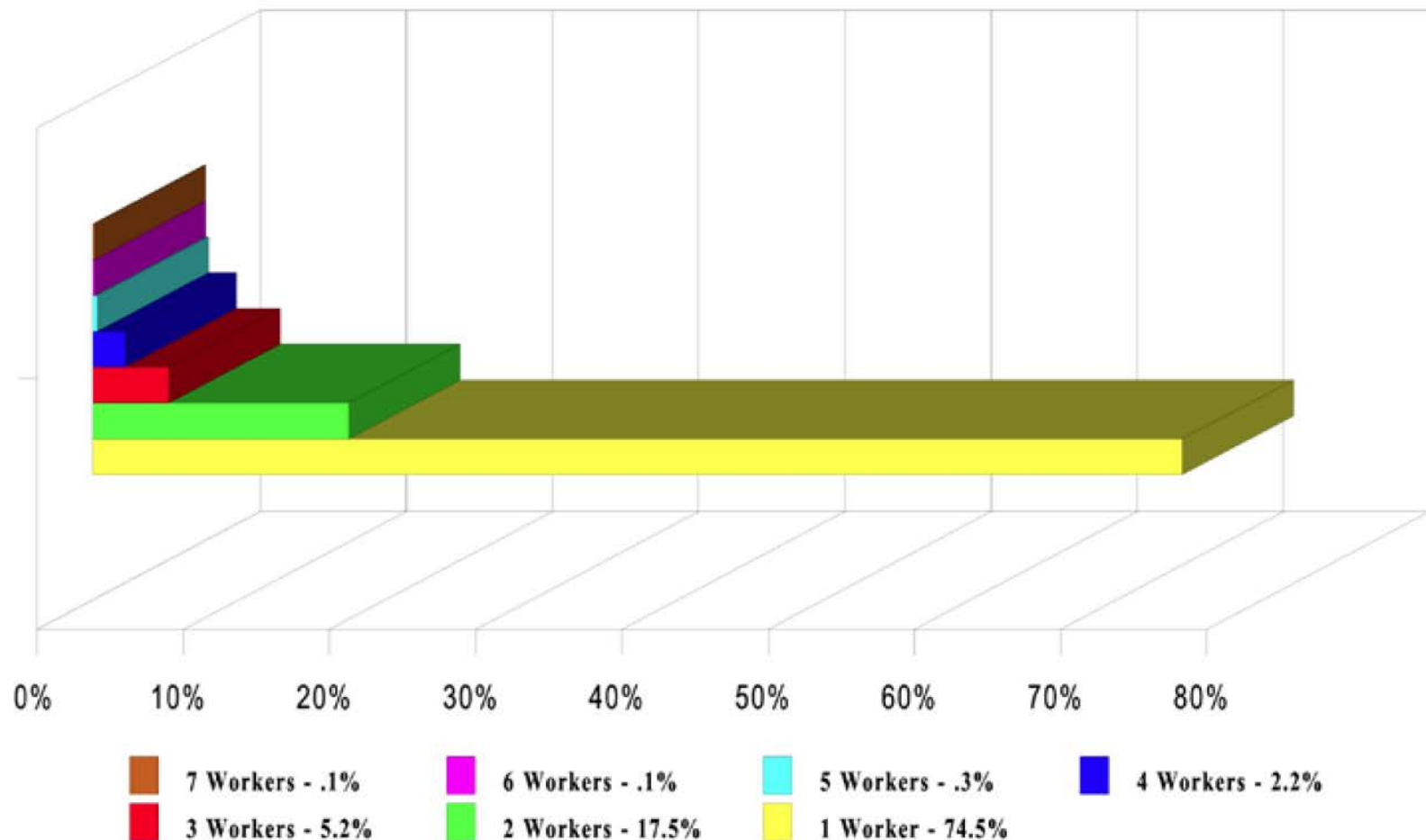
Increased chances of stability for families and permanency for children



REDUCED TURNOVER MEANS

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

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.

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 (Section 6)
 - 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

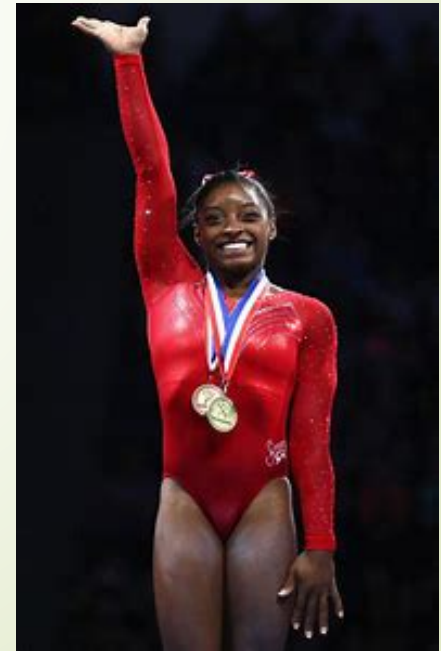
Caseloads: FY 17 &18

	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 (Section 13)
- Bill **strengthens search for family members**, frequently a casualty of excessive caseloads (Sections 7 & 12)
- ***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 (Section 16)
- 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

- **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 (Section 14)
- **Maintains connections & support** -- Enables the sharing of contact info to encourage needed contact with siblings and important former foster families (Sections 15 and 2).

Cuts Red Tape

- Makes it easier for foster parents to make day-to-day decisions about a child's activities, consistent with "Prudent Parent" standard used 10+ states (Section 8)
- Requires that decisions on foster care home license applications be made within 45 days (Section 20)
- Enables youth 14 and older to participate in their case plan & permanent home goals (Section 9)

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

If there's a cause
WORTH
FIGHTING
FOR

it's this:

children *belong* in families

#adoption

-Nicole Skellenger, MU Adoptions