

# 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



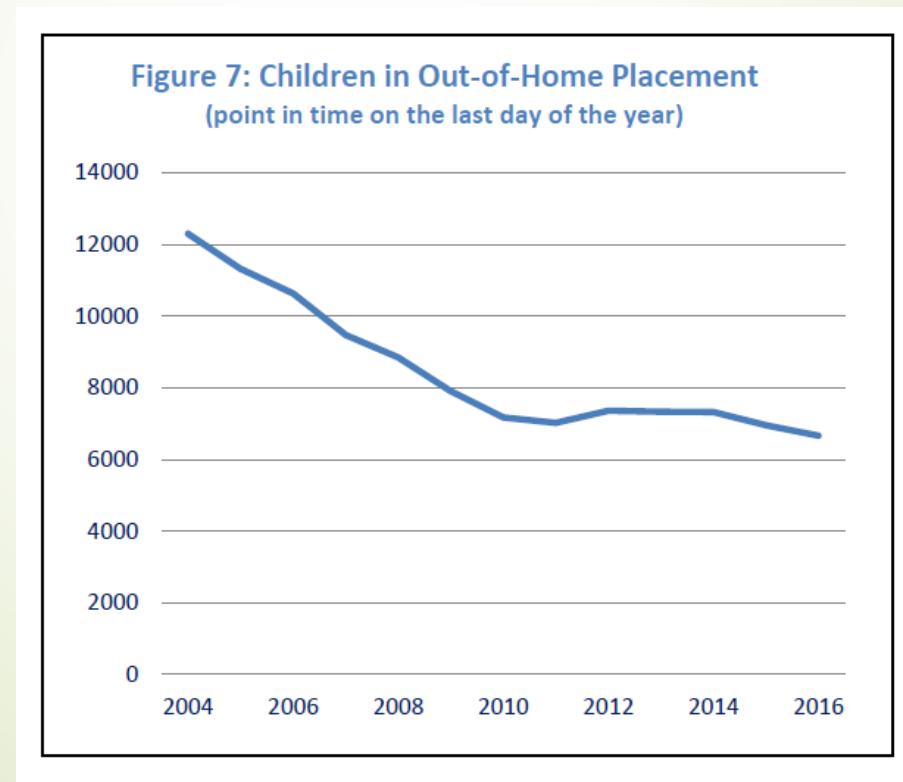
# Damaging Children, Costing Money

By age 21,

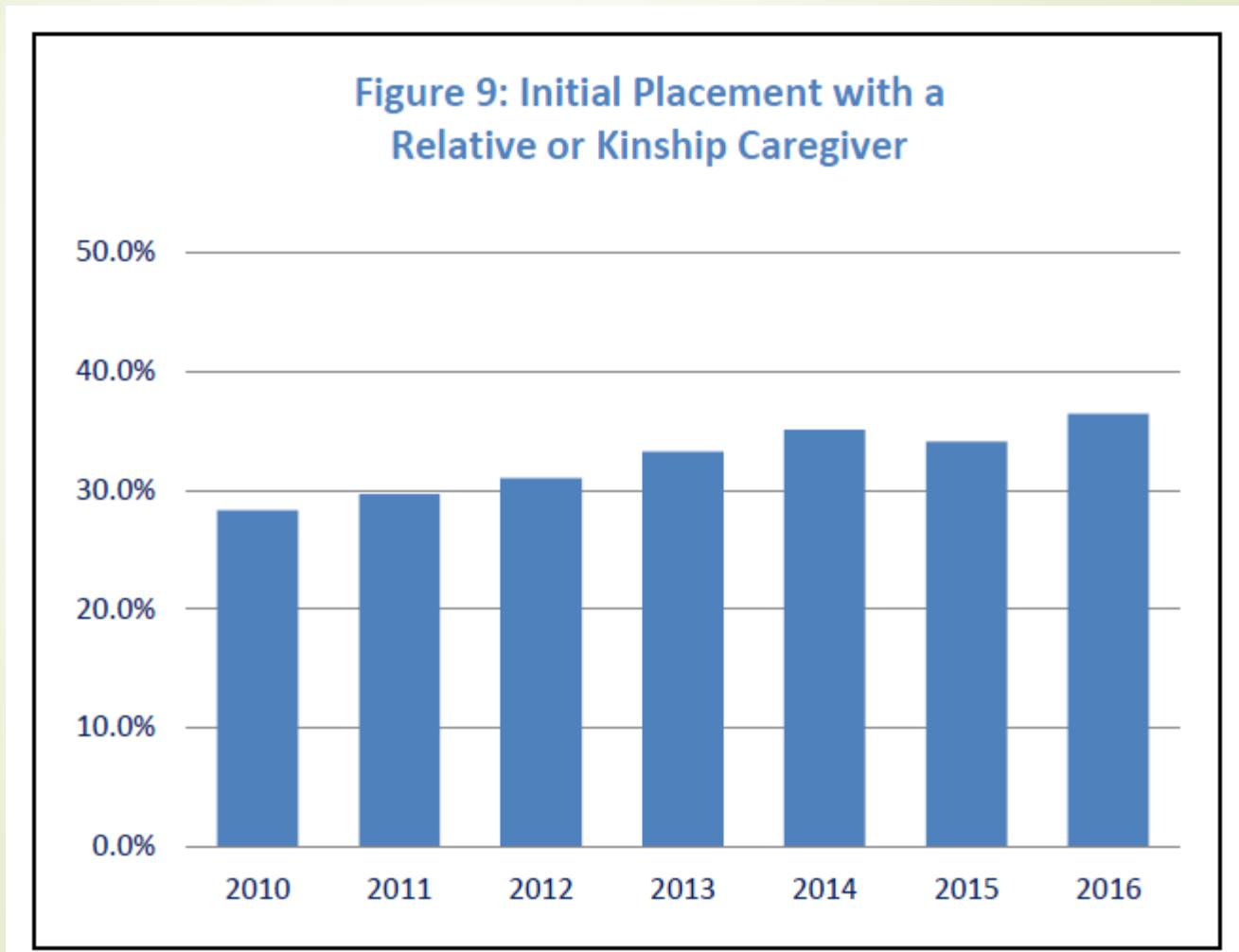
- ▶ 29% of Alaskan foster youth have been incarcerated
- ▶ 53% have been homeless (after leaving care)
- ▶ 37% have children of their own
- ▶ 40% are utilizing public assistance
- ▶ 34% were employed

# 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%



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



# 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

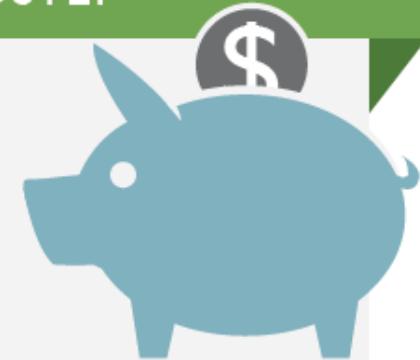
The child welfare workforce provides services and supports to keep vulnerable children, youth, and families safe, stable, and healthy.



## TURNOVER IS COSTLY

Cost for each worker leaving an agency:

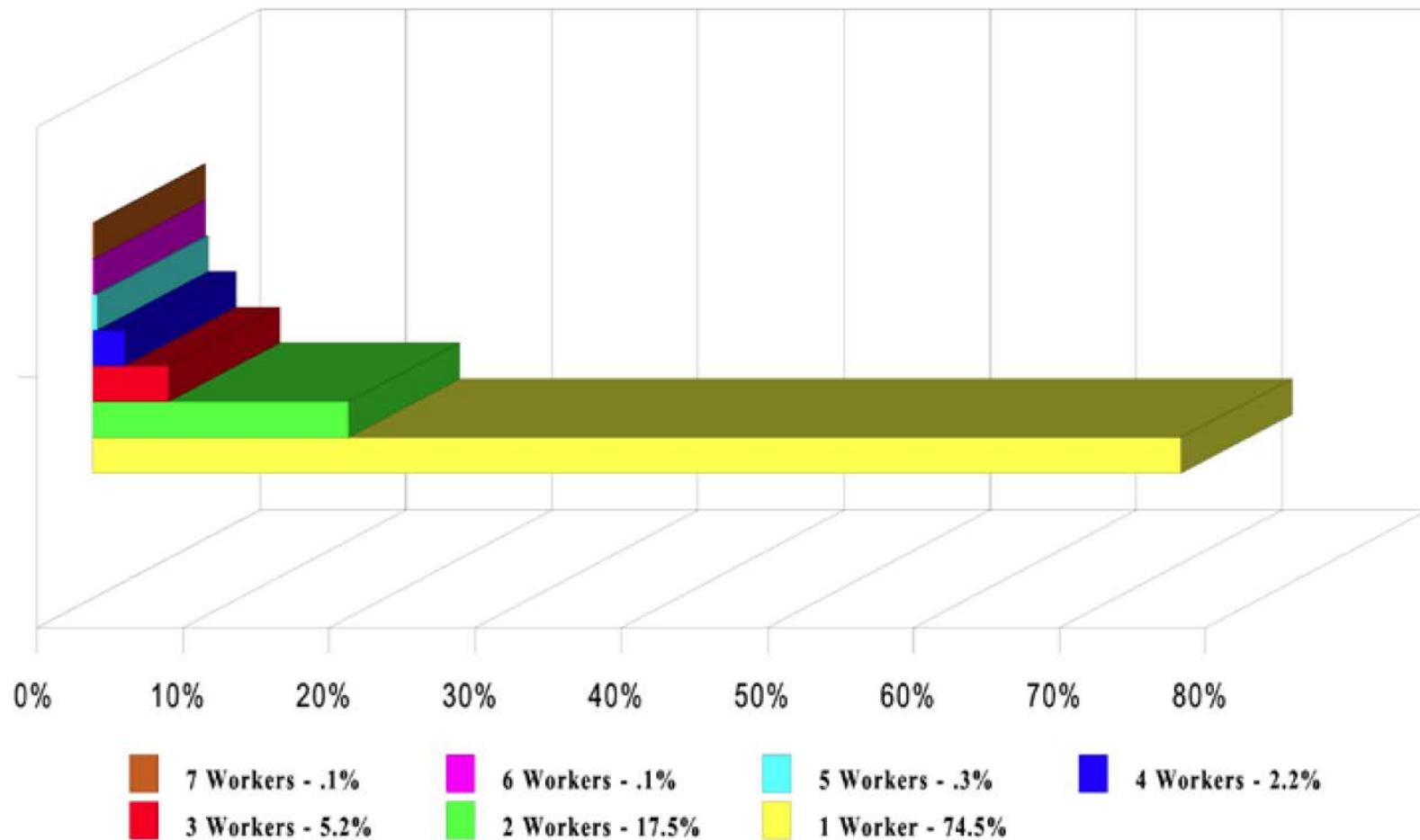
**\$54,000<sup>1</sup>**



## 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
<b>Anchorage Region</b>	30	28
<b>Anchorage</b>		
<b>Northern Region</b>		
Barrow	32	32
Delta	15	14
Fairbanks	23	21
Interior Rural	18	24
Kotzebue	21	28
McGrath	30	6
<b>South Central Region</b>		
*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
<b>Western Region</b>		
Aniak	16	10
St. Mary's	20	10
Bethel	30	18
<b>Southeast Region</b>		
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 Skelenger, MLI Adoptions