



AKCHILD & FAMILY

The Honorable Les Gara
Alaska House of Representatives
Alaska State Capitol, Room 400
Juneau, Alaska 99801

April 11, 2016

Dear Representative Gara,

Thank you for sponsoring House Bill 27, the Child Protection and Opportunity Act. AK Child & Family is in strong support of HB 27 and want to add our voice in support of the Act. Without exception, the children we treat on a daily basis have all experienced trauma in their young lives. Most often the trauma experienced requires an out of home placement that is exasperated by the well meaning, but often traumatic experience of the foster care system.

As one of the largest children's behavioral health organizations in the state of Alaska, our goal is to promote the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and youth whose lives we impact. We believe that HB 27 has the potential to significantly improve outcomes for Alaska's most vulnerable children.

A substantial body of research has demonstrated that children do best and are most able to cope with and overcome trauma when they have permanent connections to caring and supportive adults. Research has also shed light on the dismal outcomes facing youth who age out of foster care. These youth, who are often disconnected and unprepared for adult life, result in costing our state system even more than our earlier investments. Alaska's child welfare programs and services can be greatly strengthened by the provisions in HB 27.

On any given day, AK Child & Family works with dozens of youth to prepare them for adulthood. Our goal is to assure that children in the foster care system that we treat are ready for the transition to adulthood. Sadly, it is not uncommon that we work with "unresourced" youth who, for one reason or another, are no longer in the custody of Office of Children's Services, but still need our continued help. This unfortunate fact makes it even harder to secure the services needed for that help. Requiring OCS to demonstrate the best interest of the child will help to ensure these youth are actually prepared for a successful transition to adulthood.

In closing, please add AK Child & Family to the list of supporters who believe we can do more to assure that our greatest asset, our children, is recognized regardless of what cards were dealt to them at birth. Thank you very much for your pursuit of additional support to the system we Alaskans put in place to address these issues.

Sincerely,

Denis McCarville
President / CEO
AK Child & Family