

To: Members, Senate HSS Committee
From: Mary Wilson, CEO
Date: 5/5/2025
Re: Trust FY26 MHTAAR grants for ILP

MEMO

During the May 1, 2025, hearing in the Senate Health and Social Services Committee for SB178, expanding early intervention services, we heard a question arise about Trust funding for infant learning programs (ILP). Susan Kessler with DOH did affirm that the Trust has 2 FY26 DOH MHTAAR increments related to ILP services. MHTAAR stands for Mental Health Trust Authority Authorized Receipts, which are Trust grants to state agencies.

Here is some detail on those Trust MHTAAR grants investing in early childhood and ILPs in the proposed FY26 budget.

- \$460.0 MHTAAR to the DOH/Senior & Disabilities Services for the Intensive At-Risk Early Intervention Services (Foster/Child Welfare Involved Families)

This innovative project focuses on high-risk families with young children (birth to three) who experience developmental delays, disabilities, and early mental health/social emotional concerns. Families are referred by OCS, community, or Tribal agencies. Funding is administered by the State of Alaska's Early Intervention/Infant Learning Program (EI/ILP) to four regional programs in Kodiak, Homer, Fairbanks, and Juneau to provide local services to at least 200 high-risk families.

High-risk families are often transient and reluctant due to experiencing many difficulties. These include navigating the child protection system, communication among providers, foster parents, and birth parents, OCS staffing shortages, homelessness, food insecurity, and frequent placement changes. This project supports and strengthens parents to support their child's development and increase access to the parenting resources they need.

Pre-enrollment engagement activities include increased outreach, screening, and evaluating high-risk children. Once enrolled, staff provide evidence-based and relationship-based services, which include developmental monitoring, parenting guidance, parenting classes such as Circle of Security, and resource/referral support. These services remove barriers, support development, promote success in their home communities, and ensure children are better prepared socially and developmentally for kindergarten, a key indicator of later success.

FY26 is the fourth year of this project's anticipated five-year funding. At a minimum, four years of MHTAAR funding (beginning in FY23) was confirmed to have a birth cohort engage in services from birth to three. This timeframe allows the project to gather consistent outcomes data and build policies for enhanced service delivery and financial sustainability.

- \$300.0 MHTAAR to DOH/Senior & Disabilities Services for the Infant Learning Program Statewide Equity Project

This project is administered through SDS to increase access to Infant Learning Program/Early Intervention (ILP/EI) services for infants, toddlers, and their families. The ILP/EI arena has been flat-funded for many years, resulting in the discontinuation of some of the specialized services, such as vision and hearing evaluations. The impact has been greater for Alaska's rural communities because they lack access to these specialists in general. Small rural communities often lack access to other aspects of ILP opportunities as well, due to a lack of infrastructure and workforce to implement the administrative aspects of running a sustainable ILP program.

This project will work towards increased equity in ILP service delivery across regions. It will allow for the exploration and development of new strategies toward more equity across regions for ILP providers. First, it will develop a hub of service specialists in vision and hearing that are available to rural ILP providers to conduct these specialized screenings and evaluations of infants and toddlers. Second, it will consider other equity strategies, such as a billing consortium to support Medicaid billing for smaller programs.

The projected length of Trust funding for this project is 5 years, pending trustee approval each year, to establish the hubs while addressing the gaps and challenges identified during the process.

Please let us know if you have any questions.