



ALASKA LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION
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Representative Jay Ramras
Alaska State Capitol, Room 118
Juneau AK 99801

Dear Representative Ramras,

I want to thank you again for having HB 149 introduced by the House Judiciary Committee. This bill if enacted into law can play a vital role in protecting the basic necessities of life for indigent Alaskans from jeopardy through civil legal proceedings.

Although I know that you understand this, it is not widely understood by the public at large that, although Alaskans who are charged with crimes are entitled to appointed attorneys, Alaskans who have civil legal problems are left on their own.

Thus, Alaskan families can face evictions or foreclosures forcing them out of their homes; garnishments or attachments raiding their bank accounts or paychecks; loss of health insurance coverage; victimization by domestic violence; and any number of other hazards, with none of the legal assistance or protections made available to an indigent Alaskan facing a criminal charge.

ALSC's mission is to provide meaningful access to justice in resolving legal problems for low-income clients through our civil justice system, thus promoting family stability and reducing the legal consequences of poverty.

ALSC provides this help with a cost-effectiveness that could not be equaled by any state agency. It recruits private attorneys to volunteer their time to represent indigent families for free, through its successful Volunteer Attorney Support program. Also, as a private charitable organization, ALSC salaries are considerably lower than either private practice or state employment. For example, a just-admitted law school graduate coming to work for ALSC would get about \$32,000; the same attorney going to work for a state governmental agency would start at about \$60,000.

In addition, providing indigent litigants with counsel helps our entire justice system. Pro se litigants require more judicial time, with attention to other cases postponed; pro se litigants are more apt to return to court repeatedly due to their lack of understanding; and presiding over pro se litigation frequently pushes the judge towards the role of educator, or advisor, to the pro se party, detracting from his/her role as neutral decision-maker.

It is for this reason that looking to civil case filing fees as a designated program receipt, to help provide the legal assistance that will yield more just results for indigent Alaskans, and will benefit our justice system as a whole, is an appropriate and salutary measure.

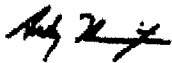
Last year, ALSC opened up slightly more than 1500 new cases, providing assistance to almost 4000 individuals through direct attorney-client relationships. Many more received help through attendance at ALSC classes and clinics, and through ALSC's self-help web site.

At the same time, though, ALSC has figures for those it has been unable to serve, or unable to serve completely. We turned down 900 applications, and of those, about 40% were turned down for inadequate staffing and resources within ALSC. We recorded another 680 inquiry calls that were not followed up with an application, and about 40% of those appeared to be in situations where the caller likely could have benefitted from ALSC assistance had ALSC been able to offer it. And of the 1500 cases where we did provide assistance, about 9% were situations in which the client wanted more than what ALSC was able to provide.

Thus, although ALSC stretches its resources to help as many as possible, there is a large amount of unmet need, and the above figures do not include persons who did not even contact ALSC, either because they did not know about the possibility of assistance or because they were too discouraged to do so. There is much work that still needs doing.

Again, thank you for your willingness to put HB 149 before the legislature; it is sorely needed, and we are greatly appreciative of your efforts.

Sincerely,



Andy Harrington
Executive Director