

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES
DIVISION OF JUVENILE JUSTICE

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February 24, 2012

Representative Cathy Muñoz
Alaska State Capitol Room 403
Juneau AK, 99801

Dear Representative Muñoz:

Thank you for your sponsorship of House Bill 343. The Division of Juvenile Justice fully supports this bill.

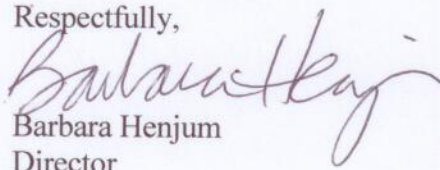
This bill makes several improvements to Alaska law regarding sharing and disclosure of juvenile information. Sections 1 and 2 clarify the authority of the Office of Children's Services (OCS) and the Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) to share records with each other to assist clients and to protect the public. Since 1999, when the Department of Health and Social Services split the Division of Family and Youth Services into two divisions (OCS and DJJ), there has been inconsistent understanding of the ability of these two agencies to share case information. The bill would amend AS 47.10.093 and AS 47.12.310 by stating clearly the legal authority for the sister divisions to provide necessary care and services without undue delay.

This bill will also provide clarification in AS 47.12.310 to allow individuals with a legitimate interest (e.g. former clients, parents, guardians) to receive information from the Division of Juvenile Justice to facilitate employment, health care, and other needs. The Division of Juvenile Justice routinely receives inquiries from former clients seeking information about their delinquency history, but statute has not been clear about our ability to provide this information to them. The change provided in the bill would allow the Division to develop regulations that provide this clarity. The changes proposed in Section 3 of the bill also will ensure that the state is in alignment with the federal HIPAA law. These changes are important to make because of the increasing frequency with which agencies and employers use barrier crimes and background checks to determine the fitness of candidates for employment and services, and the increased expectation that individuals have access to their own health care information.

Section 4 of the bill makes changes to AS 47.12.315, which allows public access to information regarding certain juvenile offenders. The original intention of this 1997 law was to increase the availability of some types of juvenile information to the general public. However, the practical application of this law has proved to be challenging. Division staff have found the law difficult to interpret and convey to juvenile offenders and the public. The changes proposed will expedite the ability of division staff to determine whether information on a particular juvenile or offense can be disclosed. The revision to the public disclosure law preserves the legislative intent of balancing public safety and confidentiality of juvenile records by disclosing appropriate information regarding more serious offenders while preserving confidentiality of offenders posing less risk to the community.

Thank you for your leadership on these issues. The Division of Juvenile Justice looks forward to providing research and testimony in support of House Bill 343.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Barbara Henjum", is written over the printed name and title.

Barbara Henjum
Director