

**DEPT. OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES**  
*DIVISION OF HEALTH CARE SERVICES*

**SEAN PARNELL, GOVERNOR**

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November 19, 2010

The Honorable Les Gara  
Alaska House of Representatives  
716 W. 4th Ave. Suite 310  
Anchorage AK, 99501-2133

Dear Representative Gara,

In light of the postponement of our scheduled meeting regarding the status of 2010 foster care reform efforts I wanted to update you on the issues. I look forward to meeting with you in the near future, and to working with you to further improve the lives of Alaska's children and youth in foster care.

In advance of a meeting, I want to touch on some of the points you raised and inform you of some of the progress that has been achieved since your letter of October 12.

Regarding the implementation of the provisions of HB 126, a small number of youth in the past have been released from foster care when continued care would have been to their benefit. Changes in our IL procedures, effective October 1, 2010 have made Regional Independent Living Specialists (RILS) responsible for developing transition plans for all youth age 17 and older. In light of HB 126, transition plans will be revised to include a thorough review of continued support and future requirements if the youth chooses to re-enter custody at a later date.

Recent federal changes to the Fostering Connections Act, allows states to pursue federal reimbursements for foster care for youth to age 21. However, the federal requirements indicate that should states choose to accept reimbursement for youth to age 21, the states must also open this option to youth to age 21 for the adoption and guardianship subsidy programs as well. HB 126 is currently funded with general fund and anticipated federal reimbursement amounts. OCS will implement HB 126 extended foster care using only general funds until it can be determined whether or not existing general fund will adequately support the program or extended adoption and guardianship subsidies will be pursued.

It has been, and continues to be the policy of OCS to utilize transportation funds to allow foster youth who move between placements to stay in their original school for the remainder of the school term. The additional \$80,000 for FY 11 will assist us in implementing this policy further.

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Since we received your letter an RFP, *Mentoring for Independent Living* was posted on November 4, 2010. Although the service area is statewide, the proposal evaluation committee will favor those proposing to serve two or more population centers. The deadline for proposals has been extended to December 10, 2010.

In the Fall, 2010 40 youth received funding to attend the University of Alaska, AVTEC and other colleges out of state. Through coordination with the University of Alaska, nine supplemental tuition waivers were issued to youth attending the University of Alaska. This was in addition to the 10 Presidential Tuition Waivers, for a grand total of 19 tuition waivers.

Additional waivers will be issued for the Spring, 2011 semester. Regional Independent Living Specialists contacted all youth who received a waiver and are providing case management services. The RILS are utilizing the additional funds to provide occupational and post secondary training opportunities to youth both in and out of custody. We currently have youth utilizing these funds at UAF Community & Technical College and in UAF's Nurse Aide Program. Meetings have taken place with the Department of Labor and Workforce Development to create coordination of services to utilize funds for Career Exploration and to provide for Apprenticeship and On-the-Job training opportunities for foster care youth.

I understand your concern with the case load of the four RILS and share your belief that two additional staff will positively impact the outcomes of youth coming out of care. Posting of these jobs is anticipated to take place in the near future.

Regarding the housing assistance funds, to date a total seven youth have utilized these funds for a total of 28 months of housing assistance. We are continuing to make efforts to promote this assistance and are contacting all youth out of care, in each region of the state.

With respect to the formal *FosterWear* cards, they have been printed and sent out to all licensed providers. Cards for unlicensed providers have been sent to the field offices as well. We regularly print *FosterWear* information in the *Alaska Center For Resource Families (ACRF)* newsletter and Izabel Bower's is currently working on a "print mailer" that will be sent out after the holidays.

I am also looking forward to working with you on the new initiatives you outlined in your letter. Dee Pearson and Mike Sobosinski of UAA have discuss peer mentorship in general and will be meeting again to discuss this service delivery more in depth. Dee is exploring a pilot project for peer mentorships for youth attending the University Fall, 2011.

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The above is a brief update on the status of some of the initiatives and programs that OCS is working on. I greatly look forward to exploring in more depth at our next meeting these subjects and any others you would like to talk about in our efforts to improve the lives and futures of Alaska's children and young people.

Sincerely,



Christy Lawton  
Acting Director

Cc: Tracy Spartz Campbell, Deputy Director  
Dee Pearson, Independent Living Coordinator