

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



REPRESENTATIVE LES GARA
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House Bill 54 Sponsor Statement

HB 54: Ensuring Extended Family Members Are Contacted As Potential Foster Parents

Under Alaska law a youth who faces the unfortunate circumstance of being placed in foster care is entitled to a placement that is in his or her “best interests”. Federal law and rules internal to the Office of Children’s Services (OCS) note that a search of family members and friends who are akin to family members should be completed in a timely manner, within 30 days.

The main provision of HB 54 makes sure a supervisor signs off that the requirement of a diligent search for family members has occurred. If it has not, the social worker is directed to complete that search to the supervisor’s satisfaction in as timely a manner as possible.

HB 54 puts into statute this additional protection, which is not currently addressed by OCS statutes or policy, but is warranted due to the continuous high social worker turnover rate. Some social workers are very new, and many don’t make it as social workers beyond one year or two years. Having a supervisor sign off that a family search has been thoroughly conducted will ensure children are protected, and in the best foster home possible.

This provision is expected to be cost-neutral. It is recognized in the area of foster care that, where a good family placement is available, keeping a child in their family is often the placement that is the child’s best interests.