



THE STATE  
of **ALASKA**  
GOVERNOR BILL WALKER

Department of  
Health and Social Services

Senior and Disabilities Services  
Governor's Council on Disabilities & Special Education  
Patrick J. Reinhart, Executive Director

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February 24, 2015

Senator Lesil McGuire  
Alaska State Legislature  
Capitol Building, Room 121  
Juneau, Alaska 99801

RE: SB 49: Civil Legal Services Fund

Dear Senator McGuire,

The Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education (the Council) would like to extend its support for SB 49. Your sponsorship of this bill is greatly appreciated as we feel that it will positively impact Alaska's most vulnerable populations, including individuals with disabilities.

For low-income Alaskans with disabilities, legal services are primarily received through non-profit public interest firms. Without these vital legal services, low-income Alaskans with disabilities could be at risk of losing their home, healthcare, access to food, or even the ability to be protected from abuse. Such consequences have an obviously disastrous human impact, truly highlighting the imperative need for quality legal services to be available for all those who are in need of them. Without sufficient funding to allow full access to necessary services, individuals could be subject to unfair treatment and would certainly not be able to fully utilize the justice system.

The Council strongly supports SB 49 and the finances it would provide to enhance the provision of civil legal services to low-income Alaskans, including those who experience a disability. A clear disparity exists between the available funding for legal services for low-income individuals and the number of individuals in need of said services. In the past 30 years the number of Alaskans below the poverty level has increased, while the total appropriations for such services have decreased. SB 49 will be a positive step towards meeting the current need. Thank you for working to ensure that the Alaska justice system is fully accessible to all of the residents of this great state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ric Nelson".

Ric Nelson,  
Council Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dean Gates".

Dean Gates,  
Legislative Committee Chair