



3201 C Street, Ste 110  
Anchorage AK 99503  
P (907) 248-7676

[alaskachildrenstrust.org](http://alaskachildrenstrust.org)

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18 August 2015

Dear Representatives and Senators

I am writing to urge your support for House Bill 27, the Child Protection and Opportunity Act. Alaska Children's Trust (ACT) is the lead statewide organization focused on the prevention of child abuse and neglect.

One of our greatest assets is our children. We know that children who experience abuse, neglect, and other traumas (Adverse Child Experiences, or ACES) are more likely to have poor school performance, use mental health resources at a higher rate, end up incarcerated, and experience health issues. We also know that the best way to help children deal with trauma are resilience factors including good relationships with competent care givers, social and emotional health, and social connections.

House Bill 27 will help reduce the impact of trauma by taking steps to get youth out of foster care, into loving homes, reduce new incidences of ACEs and build resilience among Alaska's Children.

Specifically, the bill helps connect children with their relatives by directing the Office of Children's Services to prioritize family placements. The bill also works to reduce the length of time children wait for a permanent home and number of times a child moves between schools.

House Bill 27 works to ensure children are prepared to leave state care by requiring the Office of Children's Services to demonstrate that it is in the best interest of the child to leave foster care prior to age 21 and before that child is sent out on their own. Currently roughly 40% of foster youth leaving care end up homeless or couch-surfing at some point.

Finally, the bill aims to remedy the current shortage of qualified foster parents by requiring the Department of Health and Social Services to coordinate with the Governor's Office to recruit foster/adoptive parents.

I encourage the legislature to support this bill and reduce the burden of child abuse and neglect on Alaska's children and communities.

Sincerely,

Trevor J Storrs  
Executive Director

