

April 12, 2016

Dear House Judiciary Members:
Representative LeDoux, Chair
Representative Keller, Vice-Chair
Representative Foster
Representative Lynn
Representative Millett
Representative Claman
Representative Kreiss-Tomkins
Representative Olson

This letter is to articulate my strong support of House Bill 200. I believe this bill will create significant cost and time saving efficiencies for the various legal entities and courts that are now hearing cases involving dependent foster children. Currently, proceedings for child in need of aid, adoption, guardianship and civil custody matters can be heard in different courts, with different judges, without the full scope of available information. Creating the efficiencies gained by this bill will save time and money as will the changes to expedite custody cases so that children are leaving foster care through reunification, adoption or guardianship.

The Office of Children's Service, Public Defender's Agency, Department of Law, Alaska Court System, Office of Public Advocacy and Tribal Representatives – such as myself (whom all participate in a number of legal proceedings that involve children when they are subject to foster care through a Child in Need of Aid (CINA) court case) often have to go to different courts at different times for different purposes, but all related to the same child. This bill creates a model of a **“one judge, one family”** concept that will allow for more timely and just judicial determination overall which is good for all Alaskans. With this bill adoption, guardianship, and civil proceedings involving a foster child will be heard under one roof.

This bill also reduces barriers for family members and extended family members to a child covered under ICWA who want to adopt or become legal guardians of the child, by making the process more realistic and understandable. Well over 40% of Alaska Native children who are adopted annually are adopted by non-Native, non-family members. It is my hope that this bill will increase the number of Alaska Native children reach permanency with their family, culture and traditions. The “proxy in lieu of a petition” procedure provides a less formal mechanism for individuals entitled to placement preference under ICWA that preserves and applies the request for placement preference. A proxy is not necessary for children not subject to ICWA because there is no similar formal requirement in state law that an individual entitled to preference must take in order to preserve their preference.

Thank you for your time and efforts toward keeping all of Alaska's children with their families and in their communities whenever possible.

Sincerely,



Melanie Fredericks