

Facing Foster Care in Alaska
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Representative Les Gara
Alaska State Capitol, Room 400
Juneau, Alaska 99801

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Representative Les Gara:

As current and former foster youth of Alaska's child welfare system, we would like to express our support for House Bill 27. This bill offers improvements to the child welfare system for the more than 2,400 children and youth in foster care in Alaska. We believe all aspects of this bill could significantly improve the lives of vulnerable children in Alaska.

Relative and Community Placements

The requirement that the Office of Children's Services (OCS) find a relative placement or a community placement when feasible, for emergency placements can help avoid placing children with strangers in foster care or even outside of their home communities. We believe that every child deserves to remain with family to avoid being re-traumatized and bounced between homes in a broken system. Relative placements provide for a child's need for safety, well-being and permanency, and can play a pivotal role in achieving reunification.

Timely Permanency

We know all too well, the repercussions of long term foster care. This bill requires that if a child has not been placed in a permanent home after 1 year, OCS must show to a Court that it is taking all feasible steps to secure permanency. After 2 years without permanency, there will be court hearings every 6 months to establish that all feasible steps are being taken. When reunification is not an option, we want to ensure OCS is working to find a forever family for all children lingering in the system.

Aging out of Foster Care

Many of our members have been released from foster care without stable housing, a high school diploma, and minimal skills to be self-sufficient. This bill requires OCS to establish in court that a release from custody before a youth turns 21 is in their best interests.

Education and Training

Many foster youth have a desire to complete their education and start a career. This bill requires AS 47.18.320(a)(2) to go from providing "basic" education and training to "education and training, including education and training that are consistent with the

individual's work and educational potential." This section also requires OCS to make a report to the legislature if it does not have adequate resources to meet this requirement.

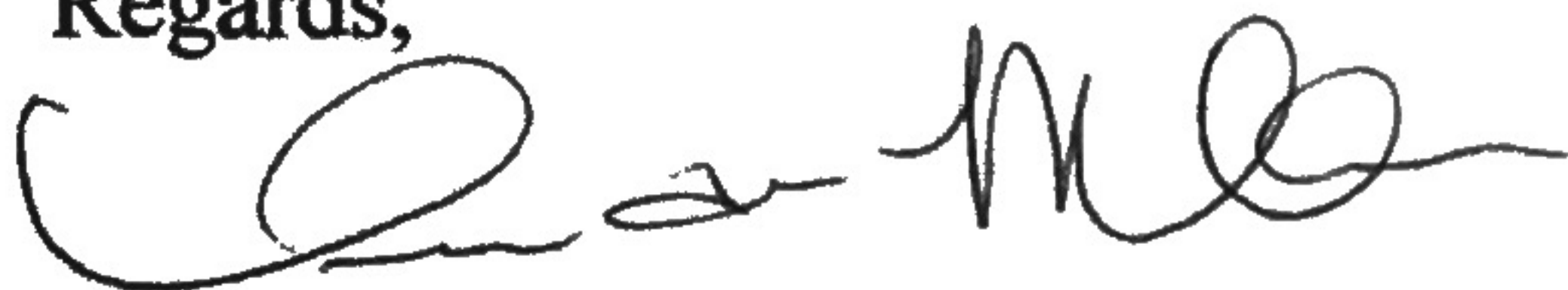
Foster/Adoptive Parent Recruitment

There are more than 2,400 children in foster care. That's more than 1% of our overall child population. HB 27 requires the Department of Health and Social Services to work with the Governor's Office to recruit foster/adoptive parents when needed. It also requires adequate staffing to ensure caseworker have the time and resources to meet the needs of thousands of Alaskan families.

Information Sharing Between OCS and Tribes

OCS often receives multiple reports of abuse and neglect before they need to take action and intervene with a family. Tribes have a variety of resources to offer families, to prevent further intervention from the state. Allowing the release of cases that OCS does not pick up to tribal leaders, as a sort of early-warning system could prevent the removal of and placement of children in foster care. It's important that we catch families early and work to build healthier communities.

Regards,



Amanda Metivier

Executive Director

Facing Foster Care in Alaska

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