



2 March 2015

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Senator Lesil McGuire
Chair Senate Judiciary
Alaska State Legislature
Capitol Building, Room 121

Re: SB49: Civil Legal Services Fund

Dear Senator McGuire,

Alaska Children's Trust (ACT) would to extend its support for SB 49 as the availability of civil legal help that Alaska Legal Services provides is critical to the prevention of child abuse and neglect and ALSC's current resources are far below the amount needed to serve those in need. ACT is the statewide lead focused on the prevention of child abuse and neglect.

ALSC is the largest provider of legal services to families experiencing domestic violence -- each year serving over 500 families, impacting 1,500 persons statewide. Children are present most of these households. Domestic violence can have a profound effect on the upbringing and livelihood of children -- it is the number one precursor to child abuse and neglect. Simply witnessing domestic violence harms children at every stage of their development. All too often, children are present for domestic violence that takes place in the home. We also know that providing legal services to non-offending parents and children is a critical factor in removing children from a potentially abusive situation. Alaska Legal Services provides an essential service for children at risk of abuse by representing them or their non-offending parents in legal matters that help to provide protection from the offending parent and to stabilize families, including protective order proceedings and custody and divorce proceedings. By preventing domestic violence, ALSC is preventing child abuse and neglect.

Furthermore, a recent study found that **each year ALSC achieves \$2.6 million in savings for state and local communities in costs related to domestic abuse**, not only are these services critical to preventing child abuse, they also save the state money.

ACT strongly support SB 49 and the finances it would provide to assure that free civil legal services are available to low-income Alaskans, including victims of domestic violence with children in their households. There is an enormous gap between the available funding for these critical services and those who need them. SB 49 is a positive step towards bridging this justice gap. Thank you for sponsoring this important legislation and protecting Alaska's children.

Sincerely,

Trevor J Storrs
Executive Director

