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14 March 2017

Rep. Les Gara
Alaska State Legislature
Capital Building, Rm 515
Juneau, AK 99801

Re: HB 151 – Children Deserve a Loving Home Act

Dear Representative Les Gara,

Alaska Children's Trust (ACT) extends its support for HB 151, Children Deserve a Loving Home Act. ACT is the statewide lead organization focused on the prevention of child abuse and neglect.

Each year, we have thousands of children and families go through the Alaska child welfare system (OCS). Nearly 50% of the children are under the age of 5 years. Abuse and neglect is occurring during the most critical time of a child's life. Research shows that abuse and neglect affect children throughout their lives. In addition to immediate injuries, abuse and neglect can disrupt brain development, weaken children's bodies, and cause long-term health problems. Children often adopt high-risk behaviors to cope with the pain of abuse and neglect, and those also can lead to chronic illness, disease, homelessness and other social ills.

It is important to ensure the safety net that is designed to protect children from the adversity of child abuse and neglect does not cause further trauma. When OCS case workers have high caseloads, it is difficult for them to provide the support and attention a child and the family needs to gain the resilience to overcome this experience. With high turnover of staff, children are unable to establish an important bond, which is one of the most important protective factors in building resilience.

HB 151 addresses these core challenges faced by OCS. By reducing high caseloads and high worker turnover, workers will be able to ensure the purpose of the safety net is achieved. When these challenges are addressed, it will help strengthen components across the entire system. Together we can prevent child abuse and neglect.

Sincerely,

Trevor J. Storrs
Executive Director





Alaska CASA Program

900 West 5th Ave., #525
Anchorage, AK 99501
Phone: 907/334-2678
Fax: 907/269-3535
www.alaskacasa.org

March 20, 2017

The Honorable Les Gara
Room 511, State Capitol
Juneau, AK 99501

RE: HB 151

Dear Representative Gara and Representative Spohnholz,

My name is LeeAnn Reicks and I am the State Director for the Alaska Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program. CASAs are court appointed volunteers who advocate for children who are in the custody of the Department of Health and Social Services due to abuse and neglect.

We would all like to believe that all children in the child protection system are treated like any other child in Alaska but this is far from the truth. When the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) files a petition on a child in court, the result in most the cases, is DHHS is given legal custody of the child. Once a child is committed to the legal custody of the Department, this relationship imposes certain duties and responsibilities to the child which are carried out by its Child Protection Specialists. Child Protection Specialists in Alaska carry caseloads of up to 30 or more cases when the Child Welfare League of America's nationally recognized standards are between 12 and 17 cases. With the current level of cases, Child Protection Specialists work long hours attempting to take care of both the children and families they serve.

I have witnessed many very capable, experienced and dedicated Child Protection Specialists who have given their all to provide for the basic needs of all the children on their caseload. This is exceedingly challenging considering the size of their caseloads. Workers spend much of their time just making sure children are housed and safe without any extra time to provide guidance and support for each unique child. In addition, despite working hard to make sure that children are reunified as quickly as possible or placed with relatives, the workers often have no choice but to place children in foster homes. Even with giving as much attention as possible to each individual child,

the sheer number of cases make it impossible to give the attention each worker would like to give and the child is viewed by the community as a "foster kid".

After a few months of working themselves to the point of exhaustion and experiencing supreme discouragement, often, a worker concludes that no matter how hard they work and how many hours they put in they will never be able to meet the many needs of the youth and his family. They leave the agency and another enthusiastic worker is hired who basically must start all over developing relationships with the children, families, and other parties to the case, which can result in delaying permanency for the child.

Because of high worker caseloads, new workers are often thrown into the fray immediately and are repeatedly called to make important decisions regarding children when they have little history on the family or facts of the case. I have listened to CASA volunteers vent their frustrations about workers they worked closely with and have created a plan to support the child only to have the worker leave after a few months.

With the high caseloads workers have right now, this ugly cycle will continue and our children and families will continue to suffer. When they have lower caseloads, they will be able to afford the time and attention all children need and deserve. Children in custody frequently come into the system traumatized and with special needs. They need workers who have the time to get to know them, evaluate them, and meet their unique needs. In the current system, children get the opposite, an overworked and overburdened worker who sees the youth monthly but is not able to give them the time and attention the worker would like to give to the child and her family.

Sincerely,



LeeAnn Reicks
Alaska CASA Director

10225 Main Tree Drive
Anchorage, AK 99507

March 14, 2017

Letter of Support - HB 151

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing in wholehearted support of HB 151, the “Children Deserve a Loving Home Act.” This bill contains much needed reforms to the child protection system, and it builds on some of the gains made with the passage of last session’s HB 27. I have highlighted several provisions of HB 151 that I believe will be particularly beneficial to children and youth involved in the system.

Just so you know where I’m coming from... I spent 25 years as a guardian ad litem, advocating on behalf of abused and neglected children in Alaska. After my “retirement” seven years ago, I have continued as a volunteer guardian litem through the Alaska Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) program. In addition, I serve on the executive board of directors of the non-profit corporation Facing Foster Care in Alaska (FFCA), whose mission it is to improve the foster care system. I am also nearing completion of a comprehensive training curriculum for all the judges, lawyers, children’s advocates, tribal representatives, and OCS staff who handle Child in Need of Aid cases. I feel that my experience has given me a good sense of the strengths and weaknesses of Alaska’s child protection system, as well as a recognition of how the law can benefit the children and families who come before the courts.

One important theme throughout HB 151 is the focus on maintaining family connections:

- Two provisions address what is often the most important relationship for children and youth in state custody - their connection to their sisters and brothers. While the law already requires OCS to place siblings together when possible, HB 151 addresses the devastating situation of siblings being separated. All too often, on-going contact between separated siblings is not a priority of caseworkers and caregivers, and it is the children who suffer. Under HB 151, OCS will have the authority and responsibility to give siblings contact information for each other, even if a sibling has been adopted by an unrelated person, and to encourage caregivers to provide opportunities for sibling contact.
- Several provisions of HB 151 focus on making relative placements a reality for those children and youth who cannot remain in the home with their parents. While existing law requires OCS to search for relatives at all stages of a case, from the initial removal to placement changes to permanent placement, HB 151 requires that an OCS supervisor certify that a relative search was in fact conducted at each stage; and, if the search was not conducted, that the supervisor ensure it occurs quickly. In addition, OCS is required to assist

relatives who wish to be licensed as foster care providers to fill out an application - a daunting task for most people - so they can receive the financial support they need to care for the children. Also, OCS is directed to make a timely decision on the foster care license application (within 45 days, if feasible), so the children do not have to remain in limbo indefinitely. These provisions will help ensure that children and youth are placed in a timely manner with their relatives.

Other important provisions of HB 151 relate to older foster youth:

- One section of HB 151 requires OCS caseworkers to engage youth 14 and over in the development of their case plans and their permanent plans. Youth are permitted to choose up to two adults to support and advocate for them at planning meetings so their voice can be heard. This provision is important to ensure the youth's wishes are articulated, which in turn will result in greater buy-in and cooperation for achieving a successful permanent plan.
- Another section of HB 151 requires OCS to provide youth 16 and over who are being released from state custody with important documents (or with assistance in obtaining the documents), such as birth certificates, social security cards, medical records and drivers licenses/ID cards, to assist them in making the transition to adulthood. Too often, youth exit state custody without the most basic documents required to obtain housing, employment, and medical care.

The provisions I've highlighted are just some of the provisions contained in HB 151 that will benefit children and their families as they navigate the child protection system. I hope the Alaska legislature will continue its efforts to make life better for Alaska's children by passing this bill.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Barbara L. Malchick
barbmalch@gmail.com
907-229-9496

Ann Turner Olson, LCSW, Counseling Services
9000 Glacier Hwy, Suite 304
Juneau, AK, 99801
907.790.1090
907.723.5219

To: House HSS

From: Ann Turner Olson

Re: Letter of support for HB 151: Children Deserve a Loving Home Act

I am a 42-year resident of Alaska with 40+ years of working in mental health with children and families. I am writing to add my voice and support to HB 151 to make sorely needed changes in the State foster care system. The Alaska foster care system, though well-intentioned, has been failing far too many children in placement for far too many years. With the extremely high number of cases each OCS worker carries, the attention a caseworker can give to a child placed in foster care is inadequate. Our State has an obligation to not just protect children but to help them thrive and have the same opportunities for success in life as those children fortunate to be living with their own parents in stable homes.

The changes proposed in HB 151 will make it easier for children to move out of the foster care system and into permanent homes more quickly as well as provide needed resources so the foster care system can function optimally. An environment where loving homes are the priority for all youth is the cornerstone of this bill. Thank you for your vote to support this important goal.

I appreciate the movement of resources into providing for more front line social workers to allow for smaller caseloads and better attention to children in foster care. Please vote to add the additional funds for Office of Children's Services for the improvement of Alaska's foster care system.

Respectfully submitted,

Ann Turner Olson

Box 240081

Douglas, AK, 99824

Mary Riggen

3306 Park Place, Juneau, AK 99801 • Phone: (907) 209-0807
E-Mail: mary.riggen@gmail.com

March 11, 2017

Representative Les Gara
State Capitol Room 511
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Representative Gara:

I am writing in support of HB 151: Children Deserve a Loving Home Act. I have been a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteer in Alaska for the past 6 years, working with children and youth in the foster care system to try to help ensure their needs are being addressed. From the insight I have gained as a CASA, and a Fostering Futures mentor, I appreciate and support the changes proposed in this bill: to help Alaska increase its effort to get neglected and abused youth out the foster care system, into a permanent, loving home, much more quickly than we do now.

Alaska's Office of Children's Services (OCS) caseworkers have impossibly high caseloads, which do not allow them to perform the necessary responsibilities to address the needs of the children under their care. I believe the provisions of HB 151 will help to improve this situation. Also greatly needed are the provisions to support the well being of youth in care, empower older youth and foster families, and support relatives who may want to care for a child.

I would love to provide examples of how these provisions would benefit the cases I have or am currently working on, but do not want to risk potentially violating confidentiality.

I commend you for your work and commitment to children and youth in Alaska's foster care system.

Sincerely,


Mary Riggen

FRANK KELTY
PO BOX162
UNALASKA, ALASKA 99685
Phone 907-268-8718
E-Mail fvkelly@gmail.com

March 13, 2017

To: House Finance Committee Members

Subject: Letter of Support for HB 151: Children Deserve a Loving Home Act

Dear Co-Chair Rep. Seaton and Co-Chair Rep. Foster

I am writing to you today in support of HB 151: I'm a 47 year resident of Unalaska, Alaska and currently serve as the Mayor of the City Unalaska. During my time in Unalaska, I served the community as an elected official for 22 years served as Mayor, a City Council Member, and Unalaska School Board member. My work history has always been connected to the fisheries; I have managed two seafood plants for 30 years and also worked for the City of Unalaska as their fishery resource person for 15 years. I'm now retired except for my elected official duties.

I have known for a few years Rep. Gara, interest foster care situation in Alaska, my interest in this legislation; is based on my own personal history which I will relay some of it today in this letter. I grew up in the Seattle area in the 1950s and 1960's. I was the oldest of three children, both of my parents were alcoholics and my father was very abusive to my mother, he eventually deserted his family in the early 1960's. My mother was a Boeing Company secretary that was now trying to raise 3 children with limited income, a mortgage, food, child care and other costs that involved with raising a family and no support from her husband. The pressure of the situation broke her, and she turned to alcohol and prescription drug abuse.

The State of Washington eventually became aware of the situation probably because of me, as the oldest feeling the pressure, became a runaway and a truant at school. The State of Washington took the children away from my mother as she became more ill, and unable to care for the family. My younger brother and I were sent to various foster homes for a while some good, and some bad, but for whatever reason it didn't work out with these families. My sister the youngest was taken in with a foster family from a local church in our area which was the best situation for her as she was with this loving family 12 years until she went to college and has had a great life. The situation for myself and my younger brother since we were older we became wards of the juvenile court, and were sent to group homes in the Seattle area which had a mixture kids from trouble

homes, some kids had been abused or teenagers that were already into criminal activity. The situation for me worked out well in the end for me. The Griffin Home had a counselor on staff they allow us to participate in athletic activities, but they demanded that you we had to stay in school and get decent grades and participate in various group work projects and outings during the four years I spent at the home; during high school brought a sense of direction and discipline to my life that I never had and has lead me to the successful career I've had. My younger brother had a different situation he dropped out of high school and joined the Army and had a tough go of it his entire life.

I think this bill is very important it will reduce caseload levels and training for caseworkers. Most importantly this bill will make changes that will improve the care and wellbeing of the youth in Alaska. This legislation if passed will assist the youths and foster parents to move forward with a more normal life. It also will give the caseworkers with a reduced workload more time to search out for relatives that may want to be a part of the youth's life. We having a saying at the school board meetings: It's for the kids! If this bill it passed, the saying would be: It's for the wellbeing of Alaska's kid's. I give my full support for HB151 from a longtime Mayor, a seafood plant manager, a leader in his community, which went to college, and was a two sport letterman. But in the early years of his life, he carried the tag of being incorrigible, and ungovernable; from circumstances in life that weren't really his fault.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Frank V. Kelty", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Frank V Kelty

Jonathon Kreiss-Tomkins

rep.jonathan.kreiss-tomkins@akleg.gov

Cindy Mills

POB 178

Klawock, Alaska 99925

Dear Representative Tomkins,

Please share this where you think it will make the most impact. What I appreciate about you, you know our Island, and you know what I'm talking about as far as driving to a community to give service. You've taken the time to get to know me and my family. Thank you for that. I appreciate you.

The intent of this letter is to paint a picture of what serving Prince of Wales is like as a Case Worker for Offices of Children's Services.

There's already three investigations that need to be completed soon. You've called the local ICWA workers in three villages and try to schedule with them to go on the investigations. Sometimes they tell you they can go whenever you want. Sometimes they have appointments because not only do they assist with your cases, they provide direct services for their tribal members. Now you just got a report that is the highest priority; a P1, which means you have to re-schedule your three appointments with your tribal peers. The report is in Coffman Cove, a two and half hour drive one way, if the roads are clear. If it's snowing, you can easily add at least another half hour. You do what research that you can in the office, and head out the door. Once in Coffman Cove, there's locating the home and meeting with the family. Interviews with children and families can take a short time or a long time. You already have four hours into your eight hour day. Now the drive home. While you've been gone, you have urgent items sitting on your desk. There are numerous phone calls from families, schools, and tribal workers. Emails are piling up. Three hours later, you get back to your office. You haven't had lunch, so perhaps there's deli food in your hand, or you packed your lunch. Going through your emails and the flashing light on the phone will not stop blinking. You are back to square one; scheduling appointments with tribal workers to do the home visits that need to be completed. You are an hour and half from their time to quit working and scheduling is tough. How to prioritize which family has the most need, knowing they all need help? Which community has the most families that need to be seen? Coffman Cove, Craig, Hollis, Hydaburg, Kasaan, Klawock, Naukati Bay, Point Baker, Port Protection, Port St. Nicholas, Thorne Bay or Whale Pass? How long it will take to get to the community can vary from three hours to fifteen minutes. Which tribal worker has called three times and sent in the same amount of emails concerning her tribal family? Do I take care of the most urgent of the urgent, or perhaps it'll be easier to get the tribal worker's family seen because you know she isn't going to stop calling or emailing because the need is urgent, but there are bigger scarier cases that need to be

addressed? Am I going to call that tribal worker and tell her there are families that are more in need? She is doing her job advocating for her family, she is not going to like hearing her family isn't as urgent as someone else's. There's that trust factor coming in to play. This job is all about relationships. Relationships with the school secretaries, the principals and staff. Relationships with your Tribal workers. Relationships with your families. Your credibility hinges on how you navigate your time and your schedule. You are hungry and tired. It's time to staff this dilemma with your supervisor.

I am a tribal worker in Klawock. I believe this is the fourth or fifth OCS worker I've seen in the office here on POW. Of course, I am generalizing with what I guess our state worker deals with. I can tell you that with each new worker, there is an adjustment period for us. I pay attention to how she thinks of our families, looking for tendencies. What is the communication style, how well do they hear what I am trying to convey. What are their biases, and are they blatant or hidden? She is doing the same thing, but with three tribal workers. We start relationship building, because we are a team. We are trying to help them understand ICWA and what it means here on POW. What they learn out of a text book about the Indian Child Welfare Act in the month training before getting here doesn't give you much. You can learn about ICWA, but you don't understand it until you have a native family and an ICWA worker trying to guide you through a case. This goes for the brand spanking new, to the seasoned worker with a Master's Degree. Factor that there are other cases that are not ICWA, and you have one person trying to absorb as much information as possible. They have to document everything that they do; if it's not written down it didn't happen. There's the documentation in the data system and in the hard file.

The island is a little larger than the state of Delaware. There are 4,000 people in twelve communities spread over this island with 1, 500 miles of road. Not all the roads are paved. There are no maps of these communities, you have look for the home each time. Time management depends on which community you're going to and how long the interview will last. Meanwhile, things are piling up on your voice and emails. There isn't anyone in the office to help with that. You have no Administrative Assistant. You have itinerant workers coming in for a day and half to if you're lucky a week. It's not that you'd be ungrateful, but that is someone else you have to share information with so they can be effective.

Larger communities have the luxury of having the ability to break down each case. They have someone to do the investigations, and decide who to send the case to. They have workers that work with families during the "open for Services" cases. Larger communities have mental health, substance facilities when all efforts aren't working, the case is sent to a worker for permanency. The clock is ticking. The state is supposed to have so many months to get these children in a safe home. If the services aren't helping them it's time to pass it along to a Permanency worker. For ICWA families there are two goals now; reunification with the family, or placement elsewhere. If it's an ICWA case you better have a plan that follows those guidelines in the law. You better be able to say you have done "Active Efforts" to reunify the family. You and the Tribal Worker are both researching for a safe place to for the children to live if their parents aren't moving and working the case plan to reunify. Here on Prince of Wales, the only OCS caseworker is in this case

worker from start to finish. She is IT. I am strongly advocating for two Caseworkers and one administrative assistant for the Prince of Wales Office. While I am watching worker after worker crash and burn and I empathize with them, this has an impact to our families here on our Island. My respectful request comes deep concern for our most vulnerable citizens. There is no harm intended to our peers in OCS. This letter is in support of the OCS Worker for POW.

When I enter a case, my thought process is that while I am helping this particular family today, what I am doing will have a much longer impact. How well and healthy this family gets, will probably set the stage for how these children will parent their own children. The healthier the family, the healthier the children. Healthy families equals healthy communities. Healthy communities means a healthier state.

Now, I am 58 years old. I still believe in fairy tales, and this is one that I have invested my heart in. I am respectfully challenging that you fund the Office of Children's Services to the point that we are not running workers out the revolving doors. They have a difficult job under the best of circumstances. Unfortunately POW Office is not the best of circumstances. I would suspect we are not the only area that needs more workers on the front line. Please don't make our Directors pick and choose which area of the state that needs the most help. Let them have enough money to employ enough workers to be able to do the job we all want done successfully. The workers in this field don't go into this for a pay check. Most of us are here because we care. I am here to make a difference. I am here to help families realize what a gift a child is.

This matters to me. I hope it matters to you too.

Sincerely,

Cindy Mills

From: Alves, Anita L (DOA) [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, March 17, 2017 12:18 PM
To: Rep. Les Gara
Subject: Child in Need of Aid Cases

Dear Representative Gara,

I am responding to your request for input on the type of cases filed in court by OCS in which they are petitioning for legal custody or supervision of the children involved. If OCS removes the children from the home prior to court they will file an emergency petition. If there is no removal, OCS will file a non-emergency petition with the court and request legal custody or supervision at the court hearing. They may or may not request removal at that time.

In order to give you an idea of the facts involved in the petitions OCS files, I reviewed petitions that came into our Anchorage office from January 1, 2017 through March 10, 2017. I supervise the Anchorage Child Advocacy Office which covers all of Anchorage, Dillingham, Naknek, King Salmon, Valdez, and Cordova. I try and review all petitions filed so that I have an idea of the cases assigned to staff guardians ad litem (GAL) and can see any patterns that emerge. There are cases in which we have a conflict that are assigned to contractors. Our office does receive the majority of the cases. From the cases I review and from feedback from my staff, nearly 100% of the cases involve issues that affect child safety, through either imminent harm or a high risk of harm to the child, and set forth valid reasons for OCS to file with the court.

Here is a snapshot of the petitions filed by OCS from January 1, 2017 through March 10, 2017. The information I gathered is based on my review of the petitions and looking at the facts as stated in the petitions. It does not address whether a child has been removed or whether the court has found reasonable/active efforts on the part of OCS. The snapshot does reflect the serious issues facing Alaskan families and their needs for assistance.

During this time period our office was assigned as the GAL in 71 cases. These cases involved 116 children. Of the petitions, 33 were non-emergency petitions and 36 were emergency petitions. The following is a list of the issues (more than one is often seen in a single petition) set forth:

- 27 alleged domestic violence and mental injury
- 18 alleged alcohol issues
- 36 alleged methamphetamine/heroin/cocaine abuse
- 10 alleged physical abuse
- 11 alleged sexual abuse
- 33 alleged neglect
- 6 alleged abandonment by the parents
- 3 alleged medical neglect

In all the petitions, the court found probable cause for the state's involvement. This results in continued involvement of OCS and continued court oversight.

In reviewing the petitions, I noted 9 newborns that tested positive for numerous substances at birth, including meth and heroin. It has also become a standard practice of OCS to request hair follicle testing of children who have lived in their parents' home in which the parents used meth or heroin. Many of the hair follicle tests done on children come back positive for exposure to drugs, meth in particular since it can be absorbed through the skin.

While it is rare for a petition filed by OCS to be seen as frivolous, it does not mean that there is not argument and litigation over other issues such as placement, family contact, active/reasonable efforts. If those issues cannot be worked out, the parties will go before the judge in a contested hearing. There are checks and balances to the system. However, large caseloads of all participants, OCS, parents' attorneys, GALs, ICWA workers as well as lack of resources take a toll on the families that we want to serve and effect reunification. That said, in my 27 years as a GAL in the Child Advocacy Section of OPA, it is clear that the professionals in this field do their jobs because of their beliefs that children are better off with their parents or extended family members, that people can change, and that good outcomes for families and their children are possible.

Sincerely,

Anita L. Alves

Supervising Attorney/guardian ad litem

Laura Chartier

From: Ruth Rosewarne Kimerer [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, March 21, 2017 2:20 PM
To: Laura Chartier
Subject: Letter in support of HB 151

To whom it may concern,

Please accept this email as a letter of support for the proposed changes to HB 151, as presented by the Honorable Les Gara. As a participant in the Big Brothers Big Sister Sync Program, I have been a 'Big' to a young adult. In the very short time she has been in my life (since June of 2016) I have witnessed the following.

She was placed in a foster home with anywhere from 3 - 6 children in foster care. Her foster parent, at one point, decided to expel all the foster kids in her care from her home, sending these children's OCS case workers in a flurry of chaos as they scrambled to find new homes for the kids. This left my 'Little' in despair, feeling immensely unloved and insecure as she didn't understand why she was being punished. The new foster placement was a bad fit and she was subsequently put back into 'emergency' placement with the former foster parent - again with 4 - 6 other children in "emergency" placement. This environment started to spoil pretty quickly which led my Little to runaway. She was then forced to undergo a psychiatric evaluation at Prov by her former foster parent (tore from her bed at Covenant House at 1 am and then left at Providence Hospital with no communication until 5 pm the following day!). This former foster confiscated all her belongings and has since left my Little with none of her personal belonging. This has been ongoing for over 2.5 weeks. And lastly, her OCS case worker quit right as this was happening and she has had NO contact from anyone at OCS since. She is 16.

The foster system in Alaska is in dire need of more support - more people and more resources. My main motivation for writing today is because these children are just that - CHILDREN. They are forced into a situation that is not of their making and not their fault. They are placed in situations of high stress, uncertainty, and instability. The result of which is children who become permanently scarred and often times, unable to learn the right skills and achieve the right mental stability to prosper as adults. We owe them every opportunity.

I urge the Legislature to support the changes to HB 151, to support our most at-risk population and give these kids a fighting chance.

Respectfully,

Ruth Rosewarne Kimerer
907.350.6301
4500 Southpark Bluff Dr.
Anchorage, AK 99516

Laura Chartier

From: Lesa Hollen [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, March 21, 2017 12:39 PM
To: Laura Chartier
Subject: House Bill 151

Please support this house bill for our children. We have the highest violence against Alaska women & children in the United States. An ounce of prevention (foster care) is worth a pound of cure (private prisons). Why keep putting the health of our children into greedy prison institutions? We use to protect our youth and weak. While I was working at the Boys & Girls Home (4th level lockdown facility), I observed only the smart ones survived this long and reached a place of safety & caring. The things done to them by their own parents is unfathomable and truly disgusting. They need help before they are truly lost in fear, abuse, violence, and terror that is beyond anything we could comprehend. We need to stop burying our heads in the sand and act to help our abused and lost children, before they are the ones holding you at gun point. They need education on how to handle stress & life positively. "If you think education is expensive, try ignorance". It's our fault for giving them a bad 21st century education. It's our responsibility to help them. Love to you all.

--

Sincerely,

Lesla Hollen, (Alaskan White Dragon)

"Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited, while imagination encompasses the world" Albert Einstein

Neuroscience Visualization M.S.
Dept of Biochemistry & Chemistry
University of Alaska Fairbanks
(907) 978-8784

Laura Chartier

From: Alyse Galvin [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, March 21, 2017 1:39 PM
To: Laura Chartier
Cc: Rep. Les Gara; Rep. Andy Josephson
Subject: HB 151

Dear legislators,

I am asking for your support of HB 151. The chances of foster children ending up in prison is very high- 40%! Let's improve that- not only for the betterment of these lives but also for our community! Prison is expensive. This is so alarming and screams of a need for change.

This bill sets out to ensure better placement, inclusion of children 14 and up to help with decision making and brings the numbers of children per case manager to a reasonable amount. I support it! And I support our state front ending these costs which will result in a likelihood of foster children becoming self sustaining, loved adults!

If you cannot support all of the pieces in this bill, please make amendments so that as MUCH of these important elements as possible pass.

We must do better by all of Alaska's children!

I appreciate your very long hours of hard work for the Alaskans in our state!!

Many thanks,
Alyse Galvin

Please retain this letter for public record.
3117 Cottonwood Street
Anchorage, Alaska 99508
907-884-2299

Sent from my iPhone

Laura Chartier

From: Sharon Waisanen [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, March 22, 2017 7:55 AM
To: Laura Chartier
Subject: Support HB 151

I support Rep. Les Gara's bill, HB 151 concerning foster children. At a time when there are many children in foster care, an emphasis on stable, loving families is critical to their success in later life. Whatever money can be allocated to support foster children to grow up in loving, caring homes will only pay off into the future. We must be realistic in helping social workers as they place foster children rather than overwhelming them with unrealistic caseloads in their efforts to make sure these children are successful.

When we look at resources in Alaska, our children truly are our greatest resource. It is up to us to care enough.

Sharon Waisanen
44932 Eddy Hill Dr.
Soldotna, AK
262-6298

Laura Chartier

From: Sarah Ferrency [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, March 21, 2017 3:31 PM
To: Laura Chartier
Subject: Support foster care reform bill

As a formerly licensed foster parent and career educator, I support HB 151 which adds supports for foster youth and OCS. Thank you!

Sarah Ferrency
Sitka

Laura Chartier

From: Dael Devenport [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, March 21, 2017 12:22 PM
To: Laura Chartier
Subject: Support HB 151

Hi Laura,

Please support HB 151 Children Deserve a Loving Home. This bill will improve success for foster youth and get them into permanent, healthy loving homes.

Thank you!

Dael

With compassion for all beings



April 11th, 2016

RE: House Bill 151 Children Deserve a Loving Home Act

Representative Les Gara,

On behalf of Facing Foster Care in Alaska (FFCA) we would like to extend our support for House Bill 151, the “Children Deserve a Loving Home Act.” As current and former foster youth, we know all too well the challenges faced by children and families engaged with Alaska’s child welfare system. With record numbers of children and youth in foster care, Alaska is in dire need of the improvements outlined in HB 151.

This bill offers solutions to insure relative search/placement, sibling contact, normalcy and the prudent parent standard, and training and workload standards for child welfare staff, to help reduce caseloads, ultimately leading to the safe reduction of children in the foster care system.

Placement with Relatives & Friends

Identifying relatives promotes kinship placements for children and can help to maintain connections to family and avoid stranger foster care. HB 151 adds that an OCS supervisor must certify that a search for relatives of children placed in foster care has been conducted. This bill also requires that potential relative placements receive an answer when applying for a foster care license within 45 days.

Sibling Contact

Our youth often report that sibling connections are some of the most important relationships in their lives. Youth separated from their siblings can experience even more severe impacts of trauma and lose connections critical to their livelihood. HB 151 allows children separated from their siblings by the foster care system to maintain contact. It promotes that caregivers help to support sibling relationships, and requires OCS provide contact information for brothers and sisters to maintain connections.

Normalcy

Youth engaged in their communities have more connections to caring adults (teachers, coaches, mentors, the parent of a friend), strong connections to their peers, and opportunities grow and develop through age appropriate activities. HB 151 promotes the, “Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard,” allowing foster parents to make decisions about participation in extracurricular activities, travel, field trips, overnight activities, and cultural, and social activities.

Case Planning & Older Youth

“It’s better to plan for the battle, than battle the plan,” ~Abraham Lincoln. Youth engaged in their case plan are more likely to have positive relationships with their case workers, team members, and actively participate in permanency planning. HB 151 allows youth ages 14 and older, to participate in in meetings to develop a case plan and decide on a permanency goal. It adds that youth are allowed to identify two adults (other than foster parents) to attend meetings, and act as advocates.

**Documents**

Everyone needs proof of who they and where they come from as adults to get a job, go to the doctor, file for their PFD, and get a driver's license. and HB 151 requires OCS provide or get help obtaining birth certificate, social security card, health insurance information, medical records, driver's license or ID card, and Certificate of Degree of Indian/Alaska Native Blood for youth released from foster care at ages 16 or later.

Training & Workload Standards

Fully trained caseworkers who have the time and support to do their jobs allows for meaningful engagement with families to make better decisions about the removal, placement, and long term permanency of children. HB 151 requires OCS to provide a "Gold Standard," training and lower caseloads for newer workers. It also requires that OCS submit a written report to the legislature if the department is having trouble hiring and retaining front line staff.

All of the provisions outlined in this bill offer drastic improvements to the lives of more than 3,000 children in foster care in Alaska. As Alaska's only statewide organization of current and former foster youth, we are in full support of House Bill 151.

Regards,

Amanda Metivier

Amanda Metivier
Facing Foster Care in Alaska