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Sponsor Statement for House Bill 153

"An Act relating to the identification, location, and notification of specified family members of a child who is in state custody."

HB 153: Ensures extended family members or close family friends are contacted as potential foster parents.

Under Alaska law, a youth who faces the unfortunate circumstance of being placed in foster care is entitled to a placement that is in his or her "best interests". Federal law and rules internal to the Office of Children's Services (OCS) note that a search of family members and friends who are akin to family members should be completed in a timely manner, within 30 days.

The main provision of HB 153 makes sure a supervisor signs off that the requirement of a diligent search for family members has occurred. If it has not, the social worker is directed to complete that search to the supervisor's satisfaction in as timely a manner as possible.

While the bill requires that there be a 30-day time limit for the search, it also recognizes that in such an expansive state as Alaska, that circumstances surrounding an extensive search may require additional time. This allows for that leeway but requires a supervisor to verify the progress.

HB 153 puts into statute this additional protection, which is not currently addressed by OCS statutes or policy but is warranted due to the continuous high social worker turnover rate. Some social workers are very new, and many do not make it as social workers beyond one year or two years. Having a supervisor sign off that a family search has been thoroughly conducted will ensure children are protected, and in the best foster home possible.

This provision is expected to be cost-neutral.

It is recognized that in the area of foster care that, where a good family placement is available, keeping a child in their family or as close to home as possible is often the placement that is in the child's best interests.

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