



March 2, 2023

Alaska State Legislature
Alaska State Capitol
120 4th Street
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: Support for House Bill 59 – Medicaid Eligibility: Postpartum Mothers

Honorable Members of the Alaska State Legislature,

The Alaska Children's Trust (ACT) offers our support of House Bill 59, "Medicaid Eligibility: Postpartum Mothers." As the statewide lead organization focused on the prevention of child abuse and neglect, ACT wholeheartedly supports Governor Dunleavy's efforts to extend postpartum Medicaid coverage from 60 days to 12 months. Ensuring new mothers have the necessary care and coverage to build a healthy foundation with their newborn babies is a perfect example of primary prevention, and could not align more with ACT's mission.

Of all substantiated child abuse and neglect cases in Alaska, 41% involve children birth to age 4, with children aged 0 to 1 at highest risk. By extending postpartum coverage, new mothers will have more time to deal with post-birth health issues such as postpartum depression, a condition that increases a family's risk of entering the child welfare system. Postpartum depression, often not evident until six months or more after a baby is born, is associated with an array of negative outcomes, including:

- decreased child safety practices;
- reduced emotional and developmental learning opportunities;
- decreased health check-ups, which can result in missing key developmental milestones;
- and
- bonding difficulty between mother and child, which is a primary predictor of child abuse.

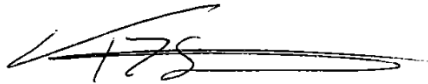
In addition to strengthening health outcomes, extending postpartum coverage is shown to reduce maternal mortality rates, ensuring mothers are alive and healthy to raise their children. This extended coverage also helps to protect new parents from medical debt in that first year, reducing financial stress that can so often lead to child abuse and neglect.

Per national KIDS COUNT program data, Alaska ranks 44th in health when compared to other states. ACT is in full support of efforts to improve primary prevention, such as in House Bill 59,

to increase health outcomes for Alaska's children and families. We thank Governor Dunleavy for introducing this legislation and look forward to Alaska joining over 35 other states who have made this extension permanent.

Given it will take more than 12 months for the State of Alaska to implement, we urge your support and very swift passage of House Bill 59. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'TJS', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Trevor J. Storrs
President & CEO
Alaska Children's Trust