NANA

February 2, 2023

Chair Jesse Sumner
House Labor & Commerce Committee
Alaska State Capitol
120 4th St.
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Chair Sumner and Honorable Members of the House Labor & Commerce Committee,

On behalf of NANA Regional Corporation, Inc. (NANA), I am writing to thank you and the members of the House Labor & Commerce Committee for recently hearing legislation and subject matter addressing childcare shortages in Alaska. We support your efforts to improve childcare access, quality, and employment rates in our state.

The childcare sector in Alaska is necessary to support every other sector of our economy, allowing Alaskans to get to work and children to experience the care and early learning that provides a foundation of lifelong wellness and success. Additionally, child care facilities bring people together in special ways that promote feelings of togetherness and community. This is especially the case with child care centers serving as hubs to perpetuate indigenous languages and cultures – like Nikaitchuat Ilisagviat in Kotzebue – which are resiliency factors among indigenous children and families. In much of rural Alaska, there are no child care facilities, resulting in significant barriers to employment and child and community prosperity. Where there are child care facilities, low wages and a lack of a benefits structure has resulted in an inadequate supply of childcare and the high turnover of childcare providers. We haven't yet recovered from the shock that the pandemic caused our communities, resulting in the loss of childcare centers, providers, and employees.

Simply put, Alaskans are not able get back to work if parents do not have access to the resources needed for children to be taken care of safely and reliably.

Thank you for taking up this important issue in your committee. We look forward to continuing the conversation and supporting the committee as you look for solutions to support parents and children.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Saagulik Hensley
Vice President, External and Government Affairs