
Autumn Smith-Amy

1120 E. Huffman Rd Ste 24 Box 405
Anchorage Alaska 99515
(907) 744-7003
amyconsulting907@gmail.com

15th March 2024

Representative Dibert

State Capitol, Room 424
Juneau, AK
99801

Dear Representative Dibert,

As Owner of amy consulting and Northwest Regional Relative and Kinship Providers, the largest BIPOC led support group for relative providers in CINA (Child in Need of Aid Cases) within a five-state region of Alaska, Idaho, Washington, Oregon, and California. I am writing this letter of support for HB 366. As a former foster child, relative provider, and foster parent; it is imperative that children who need mental health treatment especially within the context of State custody have extra protections to ensure that they are being treated with dignity, respect, and well intentions.

Children; especially children in CINA cases, who are placed at residential psychiatric facilities as a form of placement due to the lack of options in foster homes statewide should be free from unnecessary medications, restraints, and seclusion and further should have the right to reach out to their parents/guardians and or service providers who assist children when they are being mistreated.

I support your bill with a caveat. Children should have a right to seek counsel if they feel they are not being heard by the people and agencies who are charged with protecting them. I would like to see something that requires placements, whether residential psychiatric facilities and/or licensed foster homes that specifically verbalizes to youth that they have a right to an attorney and provides contact information to them. Additionally, for placed children in Office of Children's Services custody; I would like to see the requirement for visiting foster children's eyes on in residential facilities from once every 30 days to once every 15 days.

I understand that your leadership is working hard on this bill and acknowledge that any change is progress for children that need these services. I have concerns for the 67% of children in Office of Children's Services custody who are Alaskan Native and American Indian, whose parents and legal guardians are many hundreds of miles away with limited technology. Specifically, these children are removed from their home region and village and placed often in these treatment facilities in Anchorage and/or Matsu areas, families must trust that the service providers and those charged with protecting the children are physically viewing the children's wellness and that children will not be silenced, bullied, or threatened harm from voicing concerns of their own.

These facilities are private and oftentimes; there is no requirement or law that enforces the ability for the child's Tribal leadership whether that be a assigned ICWA worker or a Designated Tribal Authority to visit the children in these facilities. I would like to see language that requires that Tribal entities have access to their Tribal children a minimum of every 30 days.

I am happy to provide public testimony if requested. I appreciate your leadership on this matter.

Sincerely,

Autumn Smith-Amy

Owner

amy consulting and Northwest Regional Relative and Kinship Providers