



January 27, 2025

Subject: Support for HB 48, Civil Legal Services Fund

Dear House Judiciary Committee:

We are pleased to offer our support for HB 48, a bill to amend AS 37.05.590 (the statute creating the Civil Legal Services Fund) so that up to 25% of the filing fees paid annually to the Alaska Court System can be appropriated by the Legislature to the civil legal services fund each year to provide access to civil legal aid for low-income Alaskans with critical legal needs. Increasing the appropriation percentage from 10% to 25% will positively impact Alaska's most vulnerable populations and ensure that access to justice in Alaska does not depend on how much money you have.

Alaska Legal Services Corporation (ALSC) is a nonprofit civil legal aid agency who would benefit from this legislation. ALSC has provided no cost civil legal assistance to low-income Alaskans for over 55 years. Cook Inlet Housing Authority (CIHA) houses thousands of Alaskans every year, operating approximately 1,750 rental homes in Seldovia, Ninilchik, Kenai, Anchorage, and Wasilla. While civil legal aid is often viewed as a resource primarily for tenants, it also provides critical benefits to landlords and helps maintain stability in our communities.

As a landlord, CIHA strives to provide safe and affordable housing while maintaining positive relationships with our tenants. However, navigating the legal complexities of landlord-tenant relationships can be challenging for both parties, especially when disputes arise. The assistance provided by ALSC ensures that tenants and landlords have access to legal guidance and resources that can prevent misunderstandings, reduce costly litigation, and encourage fair resolutions. For example, when tenants are facing financial hardships and unable to pay their rent, ALSC can assist a tenant by making referrals for rental assistance, negotiating payment plans, discussing alternative housing options, and helping tenants to understand their rights and obligations. This results in tenants that are better equipped to meet their rental responsibilities, thereby reducing the likelihood of eviction or prolonged vacancies for landlords.

Additionally, civil legal aid plays a key role in educating landlords about evolving housing laws and compliance requirements, minimizing the risk of unintentional violations. This education helps landlords avoid penalties, streamline operations, and maintain trust with tenants. Moreover, when disputes cannot be resolved amicably, having access to legal resources ensures that both landlords and tenants can engage in fair and efficient proceedings. CIHA has found that when an attorney is involved in supporting a tenant, a case is more easily resolved.

Supporting civil legal aid funding is not just a tenant advocacy issue—it is a community stability issue – and by ensuring that everyone, regardless of income, has access to legal resources, we are supporting a fair housing market that benefits tenants and landlords alike. Funding civil legal aid programs helps to create a more equitable and efficient legal system that fosters more economically sound outcomes for all parties involved. Since the original passage of 37.05.590, the community need and demand for legal services has only increased. Demand for help continues to exceed supply, with many Alaskans turned away due to lack of resources with no other option for affordable legal help. SB 1 will be a positive step towards meeting the current need for services.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Respectfully,



Gabriel Layman  
President/CEO