

**STATE OF ALASKA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

2019

Source
HR 7

**House
Resolve No.**
7



Urging the governor to continue to fully implement the Alaska Tribal Child Welfare Compact and build ongoing partnerships between the state and tribal governments.

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES:

WHEREAS all children in the state have the right to have basic needs met, including food, shelter, and clothing, to be free from abuse and neglect in body and mind, to experience love, affection, and belonging, and to be raised by the children's parents, receive special protection through foster care, if necessary, or achieve permanency through adoption, so the children can reach their full potential; and

WHEREAS the well-being and welfare of a child are often determined by a number of factors, including family and social conditions, economic circumstances, physical environment and safety, health care coverage, quality of education, and behavioral and overall health; and

WHEREAS Alaska Native tribes, tribal organizations, and the state share in the obligation to protect the best interests of Alaska Native children in the state and establish policies to promote the stability and security of Alaska Native families; and

WHEREAS the state is home to 229 federally-recognized tribes; and

WHEREAS increasing tribal involvement in child welfare matters encourages community involvement, creates greater local accountability for the well-being and safety of Alaska Native children, and promotes a stronger relationship between tribes, the state, and all residents of the state; and

WHEREAS, historically, the lives of Alaska Native families in the state have been negatively affected by trauma, but a strong foundation of healing exists within Alaska Native cultures, values, and traditions; and

WHEREAS tribes and tribal organizations increasingly demonstrate the capacity to improve the life outcomes of tribal members and their beneficiaries; and

WHEREAS certain tribes in the state have formed and authorized certain tribal organizations and consortia, including intertribal consortia, for the purpose of contracting with federal and non-tribal agencies to provide services to Alaska Native and non-Native residents of the state, as well as to provide services to residents within their respective service areas, as permitted under the Indian Health Care Improvement Act, or applicable law; and

WHEREAS Alaska Native children are removed from their homes at rates disproportionate to non-Native children; and

WHEREAS, between 1973 and 1976, statistics show that one out of every 30 Alaska Native children in the state was adopted and 93 percent of those children were placed with non-Native families; and

WHEREAS, when drafting 25 U.S.C. 1901 - 1963 (Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978), Congress was keenly aware that adoptions of Native children into non-Native homes through state court proceedings resulted in the removal of Native children from their tribes and cultures; and

WHEREAS, now, 40 years after the Indian Child Welfare Act was enacted, severe disproportionality still exists in the numbers of Alaska Native versus non-Native children in the foster care system in the state; and

WHEREAS 57 percent of children in foster care in the state are of Alaska Native descent, but Alaska Native children make up only 18.9 percent of the overall population of children in the state; and

WHEREAS high disproportionality and caseload ratios within the Office of Children's Services have resulted in poor permanency outcomes for children in state custody;

and

WHEREAS Alaska Native children are more likely than non-Native children to remain in foster care for extended periods of time, and the reunification rate is lower for Alaska Native families compared to overall reunification rates; and

WHEREAS families are healthier when children can remain in their homes or communities and parents can access supportive services close to home; and

WHEREAS, when a child must be removed from the child's home, frequent and meaningful visitation significantly increases the likelihood of reunification as an outcome; and

WHEREAS, through the establishment of the Alaska Tribal Child Welfare Compact on December 15, 2017, the state recognized the inherent authority of Alaska Native tribes to initiate and adjudicate actions related to Alaska Native children and to deliver local, culturally relevant services and other programs to support the well-being of their communities through a holistic and healing approach; and

WHEREAS 161 tribal governments and consortia participate in the newly formed and historic Alaska Tribal Child Welfare Compact, successfully identifying family placements and restructuring programs to promote meaningful collaboration with the state and striving for increased federal funding under Part E, Title IV, of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 670 - 679c), which pertains to federal payments for foster care and adoption assistance; and

WHEREAS state and tribal resources are limited, and the House of Representatives recognizes the need to partner with tribes and tribal organizations and to prioritize and maximize existing resources for the benefit of families in the state;

BE IT RESOLVED that the House of Representatives urges the governor to continue to fully implement the Alaska Tribal Child Welfare Compact and build ongoing partnerships between the state and tribal governments in the interest of the children of the state.