

**Senate Committee on Indian Affairs Roundtable on the
Alyce Spotted Bear and Walter Soboleff Commission on Native Children
Implementation Act**

**Alaska Federation of Natives
President Benjamin Mallott**

The Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) welcomes U.S. Senator Lisa Murkowski's comprehensive draft legislative package aimed at advancing the well-being and future opportunities of American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian children. This effort builds on the transformative recommendations of *The Way Forward* report issued by the Alyce Spotted Bear and Walter Soboleff Commission on Native Children (the "Commission").

AFN represents 174 federally recognized Tribes, 154 village corporations, 11 regional corporations, and 10 regional nonprofit Tribal consortia. AFN's mission is to enhance and promote the cultural, economic, and political voice of Alaska Native people. The draft legislation reflects AFN's 2024 Convention theme, "Our Children, Our Future Ancestors," and emphasizes collective responsibility to nurture and empower the next generation.

AFN fully supports the findings and recommendations of the Commission and calls for their full implementation. AFN urges the White House, along with the Secretaries of Interior, Health and Human Services, Justice, and Education, to use their full authority to act on these recommendations without delay. We further encourage Congress to take immediate steps to operationalize the proposals, recognizing that they reflect solutions decades in the making and address urgent needs for Native children and families.

The Commission's recommendations are grounded in themes critical to improving outcomes for Native youth. These include prioritizing cultural engagement and language learning as essential to identity, healing, and resilience; ensuring community control and decision-making that affirms Tribal sovereignty; and securing flexible funding that fosters innovation, wraparound services, and quick responses to emerging challenges. The recommendations also highlight the need to address personal, intergenerational, and historical trauma while promoting benevolent childhood experiences; adopt inclusive definitions to ensure all Native children in need are eligible for services; and achieve resource equity through stronger compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act. Further priorities include reforming juvenile justice systems to emphasize prevention and treatment over detention, advancing holistic health and education that integrates behavioral health, nutrition, and culturally tailored instruction, and strengthening data

sovereignty through collaborative, community-driven research that reflects Native priorities and aspirations.

The child welfare provisions in the draft legislation would directly improve the protection, stability, and well-being of Native children. By increasing Tribal set-asides under key federal programs, the bill ensures that more resources flow directly to Tribes to design and operate culturally grounded services. Under Section 102, the boost in Title IV-B funding would help Tribes expand early intervention efforts to keep children safely with their families, reduce the trauma of foster care placement, and prevent repeated involvement in the child welfare system. Section 103's amendments to the Social Services Block Grant would give Tribes flexible funding for a range of supports, from child protection to elder care, addressing the interconnected needs of Native households.

Section 104 strengthens the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) to guarantee a greater share of prevention grants for Tribal communities, increasing the number of Tribal awards from just two to at least ten per cycle. This change would broaden access to evidence-based and culturally relevant prevention strategies, improve data collection on Native child welfare, and foster innovative community-based approaches to stop abuse before it occurs. Together, these provisions recognize the chronic underfunding of Native child welfare, currently less than 1% of federal funding despite Native children making up roughly 4% of the U.S. population, and seek to correct this imbalance. By investing in Tribal capacity, the bill would strengthen family connections, protect children in ways that honor their heritage, and give states stronger partners in providing safe, culturally connected placements.

AFN urges swift passage of these provisions, as they directly advance the priorities and commitments outlined in AFN Resolution 24-06, passed by AFN delegates at the 2024 Annual AFN Convention. Resolution 24-6 voiced strong support for the recommendations of the Alyce Spotted Bear and Walter Soboleff Commission on Native Children and called upon federal, state, and Tribal partners to take immediate action to implement them. This legislation represents a concrete and long-overdue step toward fulfilling that charge, translating decades of research and community input into measurable changes that will improve outcomes for Native children and youth across Alaska and the nation. Our children deserve no less.