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## **Alaska and Tanana Chiefs Conference sign historic Tribal agreement today**

*Additional funding options available for Tribal child welfare*

FAIRBANKS — For the first time in Alaska's child welfare history, the state is entering into an agreement with a Tribal organization that supports and recognizes the ability of a Tribe to provide services to its own citizens, increasing the likelihood for Tribal foster children to stay in their communities with relatives, culture, and traditions.

The agreement will allow Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC) to receive federal Title IV-E funds to help pay for the care of Tribal children placed in Tribal foster homes. TCC, a nonprofit organization, comprises 37 member Tribes in Interior Alaska.

"This agreement is a positive example of what can be done when states and Tribes work together to improve the child welfare system," said Paula Bentz, a Region X child welfare specialist with the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services. "This partnership is a historic moment for Tribal child welfare in Alaska."

The historic agreement will be officially signed by TCC President Jerry Isaac and Department of Health and Social Services Commissioner William J. Streur at 2 p.m. today at the Morris Thompson Cultural Center in Fairbanks.

"For more than 23 years since it was incorporated into the state of Alaska's Division of Family and Youth Services strategic plan in 1990, five different governors on both sides of the aisle, six of their commissioners of Health and Social Services and at least seven separate directors of the Office of Children's Services have explored the possibility of such an agreement," said Don Shircel, Director of Client Development for TCC. "Some said it couldn't be done. This agreement is a testimony to the commitment and persistence of many Tribal and state leaders and their hard-working and talented staff. It's proof that when we all come together as Alaskans we can achieve what needs to be done for all of Alaska's children, families and communities."

More than 60 percent of children currently in state custody are Alaska Native or American Indian. In October 2013, out of a total of 2,098 children in out-of-home placement in Alaska,

1,306 were Alaska Native or American Indian children. Reducing the number of Tribal children in state custody is one of the goals of this agreement.

“This landmark agreement embodies the commitment and tenacity of DHSS and the Tribes to partner for the well-being of Alaska’s children. This effort has been in the works for a long while and our vision has been challenged more than once. But this day makes the efforts and challenges all worthwhile,” said DHSS Commissioner Streur.

“The success of this effort can also be credited to all of those Tribal and State members who have comprised the Tribal-State Collaboration Group (TSCG) for the last two decades in Alaska,” said Office of Children’s Services Director Christy Lawton. “Our collective vision, perseverance and commitment to true partnership to serve families in need have helped create this special moment in Alaska’s history.”

TCC’s President Isaac added: "From time immemorial Alaska's tribes have watched out for the safety, health and well-being of their children and families. Family; love of children; sharing and caring; getting along with each other; working together; and respect for one another. This agreement recognizes and supports these traditional values of Alaska's Tribes in the interior and paves the way for even closer collaboration and creative partnerships between the state and all of the tribes throughout Alaska."

The Title IV-E foster care program helps states and Tribes provide:

Safe and stable out-of-home care for children until they can be returned home safely or until they are placed permanently with relatives or adoptive families.

Services for children and families to address the underlying causes and consequences of abuse and neglect.

Support for children who are placed with relatives who become guardians or adoptive families.

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