

Anchorage Daily News

Letters to the Editor

Published: November 3, 2007

Rates for state's foster parents haven't been raised since '98

Currently, 1,700 children in the state of Alaska are being cared for by foster parents. These foster parents provide an extraordinary service, opening their homes and hearts to children in need. Yet Alaska's foster parents are woefully underpaid. Their reimbursement rates have not been raised in Alaska since 1998 and that rate increase was based on data gathered in 1993. That is far too long.

Low reimbursement rates severely harm foster parent recruitment and retention, setting off a chain reaction of long-term consequences for Alaska's children. Alaska's child protection system cannot maintain an adequate pool of foster homes. Without enough quality foster homes, children are more likely to be placed in institutions, which are more costly, or shuttled from placement to placement, a situation that demoralizes children and decreases their chances of ever growing up in a permanent family.

Alaska's foster parents, and the children they care for, deserve better. They deserve reimbursement rates based on the current cost of living in Alaska, not based on the cost of living in 1993. Further, the rates must be inflation-proofed. Foster parents show their extraordinary commitment to the children of Alaska every day. Shame on us for taking advantage of their compassionate hearts and further disadvantaging Alaska's foster children. It's time for Alaska to raise foster parent reimbursement rates.

-- Jacqueline Hardy

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EDITOR'S NOTE: The writer is a state social worker who is on educational leave.