

HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 21
IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA
TWENTY-NINTH LEGISLATURE - SECOND SESSION

BY REPRESENTATIVE TARR

Introduced: 2/5/16

Referred: Health and Social Services, Finance

A RESOLUTION

1 **Urging Governor Bill Walker to join with the Alaska State Legislature to respond to the**
2 **public and behavioral health epidemic of adverse childhood experiences by establishing**
3 **a statewide policy and providing programs to address this epidemic.**

4 **BE IT RESOLVED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:**

5 **WHEREAS** more than two-thirds of adults surveyed in the state report experiencing
6 adverse childhood experiences at a rate higher than other states that have conducted surveys;
7 and

8 **WHEREAS** adverse childhood experiences are traumatic experiences occurring
9 during childhood that may have a profound effect on a child's developing brain and body and
10 may result in poor health during the person's adulthood, including physical, emotional, and
11 sexual abuse, physical and emotional neglect, and household dysfunction, such as domestic
12 violence, separation or divorce involving household members, and substance abuse, untreated
13 mental illness, or incarceration of a household member; and

14 **WHEREAS** research over the last two decades in the evolving fields of neuroscience,
15 molecular biology, public health, genomics, and epigenetics reveals that experiences in the

1 first few years of life build changes into the biology of the human body that, in turn, influence
2 the person's physical and mental health over the person's lifetime; and

3 **WHEREAS** strong, frequent, or prolonged stress in childhood caused by adverse
4 childhood experiences can become toxic stress, affecting the development of a child's
5 fundamental brain architecture and stress response systems; and

6 **WHEREAS** Alaska Natives experience adverse childhood experiences at a rate of up
7 to twice the rate of non-Natives, according to the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System
8 in 2013, with nearly 30 percent of Alaska Natives having experienced four or more adverse
9 childhood experiences; and

10 **WHEREAS** adverse childhood experience studies have also found a strong
11 correlation between the number of adverse childhood experiences and a person's risk for
12 disease and negative health behaviors, including suicide attempts, cancer, ischemic heart
13 disease, diabetes, smoking, substance abuse, depression, obesity, unplanned pregnancies,
14 workplace absenteeism, lower educational achievement, and lower wages; and

15 **WHEREAS**, when compared with other states surveyed, an adult in the state with
16 four or more adverse childhood experiences is 2.6 times more likely to use Medicaid, 2.7
17 times more likely to be unable to work, 2.4 times more likely to be a current smoker, 2.6
18 times more likely to have not graduated from high school or received a general education
19 development diploma, 5.2 times more likely to have ever been diagnosed with a depressive
20 disorder, 1.8 times more likely to be a heavy drinker, 2.9 times more likely use a government
21 food program, and 4.2 times more likely to have experienced hunger in the previous year; and

22 **WHEREAS**, in research conducted outside the state, when compared with all states
23 surveyed, a person with four or more adverse childhood experiences is 2.4 times more likely
24 to have a stroke, 2.2 times more likely to have ischemic heart disease, 2 times more likely to
25 have chronic pulmonary obstructive disease, 1.9 times more likely to have a type of cancer,
26 1.6 times more likely to have diabetes, 12.2 times more likely to attempt suicide, 10.3 times
27 more likely to use injection drugs, and 7.4 times more likely to be an alcoholic; and

28 **WHEREAS** the Alaska Mental Health Board and the Advisory Board on Alcoholism
29 and Drug Abuse have estimated the direct and indirect cost to the state of adverse childhood
30 experiences in six categories (adult Medicaid, current smoking, diabetes, binge drinking,
31 arthritis, and obesity) to be approximately \$774,000,000 annually; and

1 **WHEREAS** the life expectancy of a person with six or more adverse childhood
2 experiences is 20 years shorter than the life expectancy of a person with no adverse childhood
3 experiences; and

4 **WHEREAS** early childhood offers a unique window of opportunity to prevent and
5 heal the effects of adverse childhood experiences and toxic stress on a child's brain and body;
6 and

7 **WHEREAS** the emerging science and research on toxic stress and adverse childhood
8 experiences have uncovered evidence of a growing public health crisis for the state with
9 implications for the state's educational, juvenile justice, criminal justice, public health, public
10 safety, labor, and commerce systems; and

11 **WHEREAS** it is more effective and less costly to positively influence the architecture
12 of a young child's developing brain than to attempt to correct poor learning, health, and
13 behaviors later in life;

14 **BE IT RESOLVED** that the state's policy decisions acknowledge and take into
15 account the principles of early childhood brain development and, whenever possible, consider
16 the concepts of toxic stress, early adversity, and buffering relationships; and be it

17 **FURTHER RESOLVED** that early intervention and investment in early childhood
18 years are important strategies to achieve a lasting foundation for a more prosperous and
19 sustainable state through investing in human capital; and be it

20 **FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Governor join with the Alaska State Legislature
21 and address the presence of adverse childhood experiences as factors for many societal issues
22 and to fund research for statewide solutions.