

## ARI Policy Victory: SB 105

In the dark early hours of Mother's Day, May 13<sup>th</sup>, before the 2018 Alaska legislative session adjourned, [Senate Bill 105](#) was approved by both the Alaska House and the Senate. On August 6<sup>th</sup>, at the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce meeting, Governor Bill Walker signed the bill into law, making Alaska one of only a handful of states to pass ACEs awareness into statute. The passage of the ACEs language within SB 105 represents years of education by and collaboration among those in the ACEs field in Alaska, the perseverance and creativity of its sponsor, Representative Geran Tarr of East Anchorage, and an organized grassroots and grasstops advocacy effort by the [Alaska Resilience Initiative's](#) policy workgroup.



Photo: David Lienemann, Office of Governor Bill Walker

## Content

Senate Bill 105 represents a collaboration between multiple legislators across both major parties, addressing licensing of marriage and family therapists (introduced by the bill sponsor, Senator David Wilson of the Matanuska-Susitna Valley), healthcare price transparency (introduced by Representative Ivy Sponholz of Northeast Anchorage), and the ACEs-related amendment introduced by Representative Tarr, which reads:

*“It is the policy of the state to acknowledge and take into account the principles of early childhood and youth brain development and, whenever possible, consider the concepts of early adversity, toxic stress, childhood trauma, and the promotion of resilience through protective relationships, supports, self-regulation, and services.”*

This amendment supports youth and families by encouraging policymakers, administrators, and those working within state programs and grants to make decisions for Alaska in a trauma-informed way.

## Background



This legislative victory began in a different form, as a concurrent resolution calling upon the legislature and governor to consider these concepts. Representative Geran Tarr of East Anchorage -- who is a steering committee member of the Alaska Resilience Initiative (ARI) and a member of ARI's policy workgroup -- first introduced the resolution, then called HCR21, in the 2016 session. However, it did not advance out of committee. She introduced it again during the 2017 session as [HCR2](#). The Alaska Resilience Initiative steering committee submitted revisions to the resolution in Spring of 2017 and after those were incorporated, actively threw our support behind it, joining dozens of individuals and groups who had written letters of support or offered education and testimony. In fact, the groundwork

for this resolution had been laid by years of education and advocacy on ACEs and related child and family issues, led by groups such as the Alaska Mental Health Board, the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, All Alaska Pediatric Partnership, the Alaska Children's Justice Act Task Force, the Alaska Children's Trust (ARI's backbone agency), and many more. Even with public support, however, the 2017 legislative session adjourned with the resolution stuck in its second House committee.

Also in spring of 2017, the Alaska Resilience Initiative, still a nascent Collective Impact initiative, formed a policy workgroup. In December of 2017, just prior to the 2018 legislative session, the workgroup used our policy [decision making matrix](#) and decided that passing HCR2 would be its primary advocacy priority. In concert with the committed work of Representative Tarr and her staff, and education and advocacy led by others in the ACEs field and by First Lady Donna Walker, the Alaska Resilience Initiative's policy workgroup members took on the task of moving HCR2



through the House and Senate. This involved paying multiple in-person visits to legislators and their staffers throughout session in order to gain bipartisan co-sponsors in both chambers and to influence committee assignment. It involved offering testimony during committee hearings, activating grassroots pressure on key legislators, op-eds in the newspaper, and running social media campaigns (through both

ARI and [Voices for Alaska's Children](#)) that facilitated people to write emails to their legislators and that allowed us to celebrate those legislators who signed on as co-sponsors. However, despite the resolution passing the House and gaining bipartisan support, even among Senate leadership, it got stuck in committee. As session drew to a close, it appeared that all was lost for HCR2.

That is, until the day before Mother's Day, May 12<sup>th</sup>, when Representative Tarr developed a strategy using key language from the resolution as an amendment to a senate bill that was before her House committee. With support from the bill's sponsor, Senator David Wilson, and a with a number of amendment co-sponsors signing on in the House, the ACEs language was placed into SB 105, where it passed the House and then the Senate that night, right before adjournment of the 2018 session. Not only did this last-minute effort save the resolution, it strengthened it by passing it into law. And although what the Alaska legislature voted for that night was not the original resolution, we believe that the bipartisan support we and other groups had helped bolster for the resolution helped SB105 to pass with as much support and enthusiasm as it did, and will strengthen future efforts to build upon this ACEs amendment for further trauma-informed policymaking.

### Next steps

State of Alaska Departments are in the process of determining how to apply the ACEs amendment, now within Section 47.05.060 of Alaska statute. This process of implementation was supported by the Office of the Governor and the First Lady of Alaska partnering with Casey Family Programs to host a Sep 4 – 5 convening of all State of Alaska Commissioners and teams from each department. These teams learned about the science of ACEs and resilience, Alaska Native leaders shared about historical and ongoing systemic trauma and tribal perspectives on trauma work, and the department teams began to plan out ways to apply trauma-informed approaches. Throughout this gathering, First Lady Donna Walker cited SB105 as one of the major drivers of this work and one of Alaska's victories as a state.



The Alaska Resilience Initiative continues to stay involved in moving forward the implementation of the ACEs and trauma-informed language of the statute. One of the ways we have supported a trauma-informed and culturally-responsive approach to State government is by working with national expert Dr. Andrea Blanch to prepare an Alaska-specific brief introducing government officials to trauma-informed approaches and offering examples from other states. This brief can be found [here](#). We also created a





one-page overview of available trainings, in anticipation that many Departments would be seeking further training on ACEs and trauma-informed approaches for their staff.

Stay connected with the Alaska Resilience Initiative via our [website](#) and social media platforms to learn more about trauma-informed progress in Alaska, and where our policy advocacy efforts go from here.

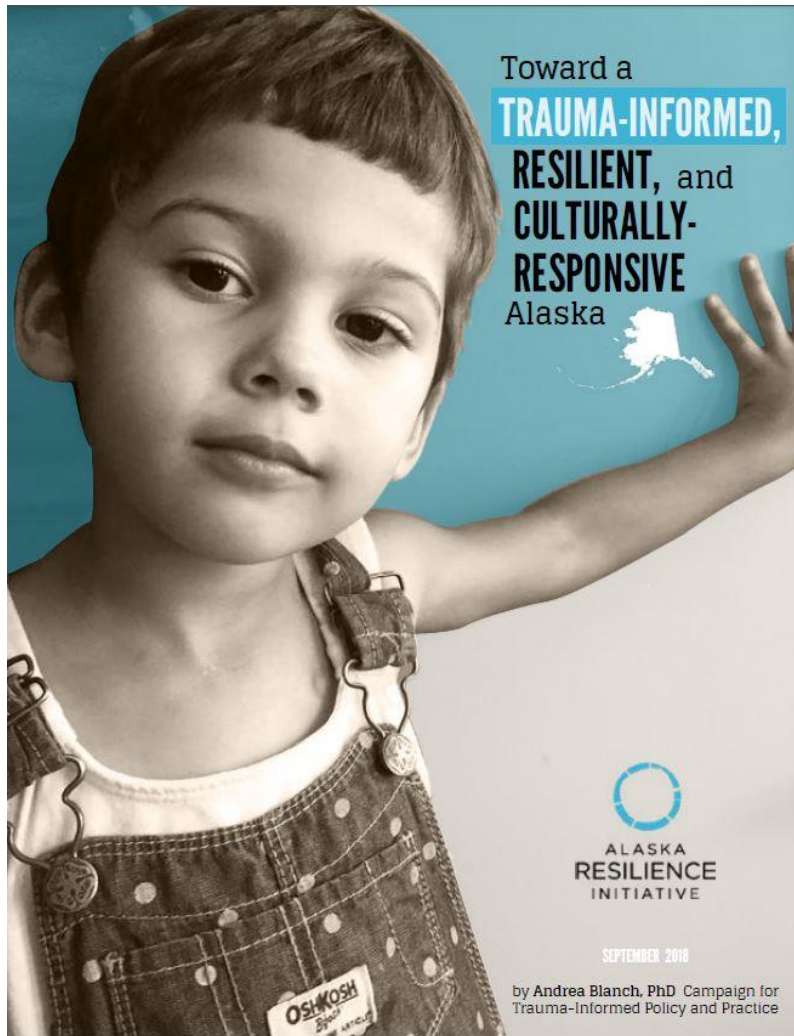


Photo credits: Laura Norton-Cruz, unless otherwise noted.

The Alaska Resilience Initiative is a statewide Collective Impact initiative dedicated to “Mobilizing Alaska to end child maltreatment, intergenerational and systemic trauma through healing and strategic advocacy.” Its backbone agency is the Alaska Children’s Trust.

