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My name is Matt Hirschfeld, MD/PhD, and I've been a pediatrician working in the Alaska Tribal Health System for the past 16 years. In addition, I'm a Board Member of the All Alaska Pediatric Partnership, an organization that is dedicated to improving the health and wellness of children and families in Alaska.

I'm writing to testify my support for the Alyce Spotted Bear/Walter Soboleff Commission on Native Children Health's (Commission) comprehensive study to improve the health and wellness of Native children and their families by developing a sustainable system that delivers wrap-around services to Native children. With leadership provided by the Native community to obtain this goal, I also support the Commission's dedication to partnerships with all interested agencies, including Federal and State governments, non-profits, and private enterprise.

Although I support all of the programs identified by the Commission to improve long term outcomes for Native children, I would like to specifically mention three that stand out as critical to my area of child health.

1. A focus on improving early childhood education and development, to include access to high quality early care and learning programs, access to home visiting programs to support families with young children, access to early intervention and preschool services for children with developmental delays, and increased professional development opportunities for Native providers in all of these areas.
2. A focus on improving outcomes in childhood physical and mental health, nutrition, suicide, and substance abuse, which can be facilitated through increased access to Medicaid and its impact on access to healthcare services, increased access to mental health services—including in-school clinics to meet children where they spend a significant amount of their time, increased telemedicine services in order to provide access for children when they need mental or physical professional help, and a focus on providing high quality housing, sanitation, water, and foods to provide a healthy physical environment for children to thrive.
3. A focus on improving the child welfare system as it relates to Native families and their children, which includes working to decrease the disproportionality of Native children in foster care, working to increase the care coordination between all of the services that interact with children in foster care, improving professional development opportunities for Native providers who work within the child welfare system, and increasing the role of Tribal organizations in providing foster care services to Native children.

Of course, all of these goals can only be accomplished by having high quality data to measure outcomes and results for any changes that are made to systems to improve health and wellness for children and their families.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the Commission for this opportunity to testify. I'm happy to answer any questions or provide additional information.

Sincerely,



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