



# NICWA

**National Indian Child Welfare Association**

*Protecting our children • Preserving our culture*

## PRESS RELEASE

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### Indigenous child welfare leaders and advocates open nationwide conference with ceremony, and opening remarks by Sen. Mark Bagich (R-AK)

A color guard of Alaska Native veterans carry the U.S. and Alaska flags, beside an eagle staff that also has baby moccasins attached, symbolizing the generations of Native children lost to American and Canadian communities, as the the largest gatherings of child welfare professionals in Indian Country, the National Indian Child Welfare Association's (NICWA) "Protecting Our Children" National American Indian Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect opened today in Anchorage, Alaska. Over 700 attendees, presenters, and organizers journeyed to Anchorage to be welcomed by Alaska's Native people and leaders, in order to share stories and build capacity to improve social services for children and their families.

Special guest Senator Mark Bagich attended the opening ceremonies, and gave remarks to the conference. "senator's quote here".

The event features over 60 workshop presentations, focus groups on the future of social work practice, and a featured panel to discuss the **Western and Pacific Child Welfare Implementation Center (WPIC) in Alaska**. A collaborative project between tribal leaders and state child welfare administrators, WPIC seeks to lower the rates of Alaska Native children in the state foster care system.

"There is something special about returning to Alaska," said NICWA Executive Director Terry Cross (Seneca Nation). "Our last conference was our largest ever and this one is shaping up to break that record. The Alaska Native people have asked that we bring attention to the high numbers of children in the child welfare system and the many non-Native placements far from family and culture," Terry said.

A keynote speaker at this year's event is Katherine Gottlieb, MBA. Katherine has served as president and CEO of Southcentral Foundation (SCF) since 1991. Under her direction, SCF has become a leader among the nation's healthcare organizations, winning national recognition for innovations such as same-day access to care.

**National Indian Child Welfare Association**

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**Terry L. Cross, Executive Director**  
*(Seneca Nation)*

“In Alaska, 60% of the children experiencing maltreatment are below the age of 8; 36% are below the age of 4. As a mother of six children, I truly believe that parents are the first line of defense. This is why I am involved with the Family Wellness Warriors Initiative. We are working together with other parents—through education and training—to create a safe umbrella of adults for the children in our communities,” said Gottlieb.

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NICWA is a national nonprofit and the most comprehensive source of information on American Indian child welfare and works on behalf of Indian children and families. NICWA provides public policy, research, advocacy, information, training, and community development services to a broad national audience, including state child welfare agencies and other organizations, agencies, and professionals interested in the field of Indian child welfare. Their website is [www.nicwa.org](http://www.nicwa.org), or you can call 503-222-4044 for more information.

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