

Child care regs 'criminally irresponsible'

As of Oct. 1, a change in child care regulations under the Bush administration's welfare reform has the potential to adversely affect the quality of child care for children who have a parent participating in the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Program, according to the Cook Inlet Tribal Council.

Child care subsidy is currently available to participants of the JOBS program and covers up to 100 percent of the actual cost if not in excess of the state established maximum.

Beginning in October parents will have the option of placing their children into child care of their choice including unlicensed homes. By choosing unlicensed child care while participating in the JOBS program, home studies before placement and monitoring of the child care by home studies conducted by the state may be waived by the parent.

Administrators at Cook Inlet Tribal Council, currently managing the JOBS program for Native applicants in the Cook Inlet region, said they are appalled at the change in child care guidelines, soon to be in effect.

"It is not the state we are at odds with, it is the federal government, and it comes directly from the White

House. The state workers involved with this program are as outraged as we are," said Leroy Bingham, senior planner of CITC.

"The whole situation is criminally irresponsible to the children," he said.

According to Bingham, the potential for tragedy to a child is very high.

"Under the new rules, a parent can place a child in the care of a known pedophile, and as long as the form is signed by the parent relieving the state of Alaska of all responsibilities for any claims arising as a result of this place-

ment, there is nothing our social workers or the state of Alaska can do about it," he said.

Bingham said losing the ability to monitor the homes is something his agency has feared since the day he first heard of welfare reform.

"Some of CITC's clients involved in the JOBS program, although not the majority, are dysfunctional. It only takes one individual who suffers impaired judgement to leave a child with another sick individual for the child to suffer from lack of care, abuse, injury

or death," he said.

The maximum number of children a caregiver can supervise at one time is six. The amount the state pays the caregiver varies, but is usually around \$300 to \$400 per child.

Besides quality of care and the safety of the child kickback arrangements between parents and caregivers are also of concern to CITC.

Administrators at CITC are currently looking into the legalities of the situation and hope to bring the situation to light nationwide.