



CENTRAL COUNCIL

Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Tribe's Child Support Orders to be Recognized by State of Alaska

On October 25, 2011, the Superior Court for the State of Alaska, First Judicial District at Juneau, issued a decision with significant implications for tribal courts throughout Alaska in *Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska v. State of Alaska Child Support Services Division*. The Court's order reaffirms the Tribe's inherent jurisdiction to handle the full range of family law issues affecting its citizens, including the particular issue of child support for the benefit of tribal children.

At issue in the case is the State of Alaska's failure to honor tribal court support orders issued under the Central Council's Family Responsibility statute and federally recognized Tribal Child Support program. As the lack of interagency cooperation negatively impacted families with tribal support orders, the Tribe was left with little choice but to file suit seeking relief requiring the State of Alaska to recognize tribal child support orders under recognized principles of tribal sovereignty and Alaska's own Uniform Interstate Family Support Act. The Tribe was represented throughout the litigation by Alaska Legal Services Corporation attorney, Holly Handler.

The Juneau Superior Court ruled on Tuesday that Alaska Tribe's have "inherent authority to regulate internal domestic relations among its members" which includes without exception, the support of tribal children. Tribal child support orders are to be accorded the same recognition and services as support orders issued by other states. In its detailed opinion, the Juneau Court founded its decision on the precedent established by the Alaska Supreme Court's rulings in *John v. Baker* and *Alaska v. Native Village of Tanana*.

The President of the Central Council of Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska, Edward K. Thomas, commented "This is a very important court ruling for our Tribe's children. We will make every effort to work with the State of Alaska in carrying out our responsibilities to our Native families." The full text of the opinion can be found at *Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska v. Alaska*, 1JU-10-376 CI [Summary Judgment Order of October 25, 2011].

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