



CENTRAL COUNCIL

*Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska*

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Tribe Adopts New Marriage Statute**

By a unanimous vote on February 20, the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska's (Central Council) Executive Council, a governing board of seven elected council members, adopted a new tribal statute clearly authorizing its Tribal Court to conduct marriage ceremonies, divorce proceedings, and establish custody arrangements.

The passage of the new statute code is noted especially because it clearly defines that any person may enter into a legal marriage with another person regardless of gender. Central Council is the latest to join a growing list of tribes in the United States that have either amended or adopted new tribal codes to recognize gender equality in their marriage statutes. Central Council's codification of same-sex marriage is at the vanguard in the State of Alaska.

As all federally-recognized tribes, the Central Council retains inherent sovereign authority over the domestic relations of its tribal citizens and exercised this right by developing its own laws regarding marriage.

"The impetus for the new tribal code on marriage came from two places; exercising our self-determination and sovereign authority and making sure that we provide for equal treatment of our tribal citizens, said President Richard Peterson. "All of our tribal citizens should be provided the same rights. It's an important statement for the Tribe to make and one that was not difficult for our Executive Council to stand behind."

Tribal Court Chief Justice Debra O'Gara expressed, "We are pleased to expand our Tribal Court to meet the needs of our tribal citizens. Our court can now be utilized by tribal citizens for the happy occasion of marriage without discrimination and regardless of gender."

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