



CENTRAL COUNCIL
TLINGIT & HAIDA INDIAN TRIBES OF ALASKA
AND
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES



PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

State and Tribe to Sign Tribal Title IV-E Maintenance Agreement

Additional Funding to Expand Tribal Child Welfare

JUNEAU, AK (March 2, 2016) – For the first time in its history, the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska (Central Council) will accept transfer of jurisdiction of cases from the State of Alaska.

Under an agreement between the State and Central Council, the Tribe will receive federal Title IV-E funds to provide an array of services through its Child Welfare program and Tribal Court, including extensive case management, foster home licensing, and financial support to tribal foster homes.

This agreement between the State of Alaska and the Tribe supports and recognizes the ability of Central Council to provide services to its tribal citizens, increasing the likelihood that tribal foster children will be able to stay in their communities with relatives, their culture, and traditions.

“This is a positive example of what can be done when states and tribes work together to improve the child welfare system,” said Paula Bentz, a Region X child welfare specialist with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. “This partnership is a historic moment for tribal child welfare in Alaska.”

This is the second agreement the State is entering into that provides Title IV-E funds to help pay for the care of tribal children placed in tribal foster homes. The first was with the Tanana Chiefs Conference in December 2013. Central Council is a nationally recognized tribe with over 30,000 tribally-enrolled citizens.

“This government to government agreement between the State of Alaska and the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska recognizes that tribes are uniquely qualified to meet the needs of their families. These partnerships greatly improve our ability to ensure the health and welfare of Alaskans, and we look forward to more opportunities to work with tribes,” said Valerie Davidson, Commissioner of the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS).

As of February 29, 2016, 55 percent of children in state custody were Alaska Native or American Indian. In Southeast, that percentage increases to 66 percent, with Juneau’s disproportionality rate at 64.5 percent.

“Reducing the number of tribal children in State custody is crucial to the Tribe and its citizens,” said Central Council’s President Richard Peterson. “Placing our children in culturally appropriate homes helps to ensure they will grow up with a sense of belonging to their community and develop an identity nurtured by our Tlingit and Haida traditions.”

Tribal Family and Youth Services Director Francine Eddy Jones said, "Central Council has had a Title IV-E Agreement for administration and training with the state for over 16 years. During this time, the Tribal Family and Youth Services department has strengthened and developed its infrastructure in order to assume tribal custody of Tlingit and Haida children. This has been a work in progress, continuously raising the bar to have a program that meets and exceeds all of the stringent federal requirements for Title IV-E."

The Title IV-E Foster Care program helps states and tribes provide:

- Safe and stable out-of-home care for children until they can be returned home safely or until they are placed permanently with relatives or adoptive families;
- Services for children and families to address the underlying causes and consequences of abuse and neglect; and
- Support for children who are placed with relatives who become guardians or adoptive families.

"The success of this effort can be credited to all of those who comprised the Tribal-State Collaboration Group for the last two decades in Alaska," said Office of Children's Services Director Christy Lawton. "Our collective vision, perseverance, and commitment to true partnership to serve families in need have helped create this special moment in Alaska's history."

The agreement will be officially signed by Central Council President Peterson and DHSS Commissioner Davidson at 5:30 p.m. today, March 2, in the Elizabeth Peratrovich Hall located at 320 West Willoughby Avenue in Juneau.

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