



CENTRAL COUNCIL
Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Tribe Strongly Opposes Exclusion from Violence Against Women Act

The Central Council Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska (Central Council), a federally recognized tribe representing over 28,000 tribal citizens, strongly opposes the exclusion of Alaska Native tribes from the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA).

As presently written, VAWA allows Alaska Native tribal courts to issue civil domestic violence protection orders to provide culturally appropriate intervention in family crises. It also allows significant cooperation between tribes and the State of Alaska, State Troopers and the Judicial System. The current versions of the re-authorization of VAWA (H.R.4154, H.R.4271, and S.1925) discriminates by singling out all Alaska Native tribes with the exception of the Metlakatla Indian Community, and removes the pre-existing authority of Alaska Native tribes to issue civil protective orders.

The State of Alaska contains nearly half the federally recognized tribes in the United States. This legislation, if enacted, would prevent Alaska tribal courts from protecting its people from the plague of domestic violence and takes the unprecedented step of extinguishing the well-recognized and inherent authority to adjudicate domestic violence issues. Although Alaska Natives comprise only 15.2% of the state's population, they comprise 47% of the victims of domestic violence, and 61% of the victims of sexual assault.

"I am shocked and outraged that a bill intended to protect Native American women does not protect Alaska Native women. I had to flee Alaska and I know many other women who did the same," said Seattle Delegate and Civil Rights Liaison Pamela Dalton Stearns.

Central Council considers this an emergency situation and has directed the President and the Executive Council to work with the Alaska Congressional Delegation, National Congress of American Indians, Alaska Federation of Natives, Alaska Native Brotherhood and Sisterhood, and other federally recognized tribes to ensure Alaska Native women and children have the same civil protections as all Native Americans in the United States.

Strong support came from male delegates who came forward and swore under oath to the Chief Justice to never commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women and girls.

Bob Loescher, Tribal Judiciary Committee member stated, "We believe the way Congress is addressing the law is a challenge to the sovereignty to our Tribe and all tribes in Alaska. There's no need to do that. We have the inherent right under the U.S. Constitution to protect our children and families, and our women, and that right should be upheld by the Congress. We believe that Congress should eliminate this amendment to the Violence of Women Act on behalf of all tribes and all women in Alaska."

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Photos:

1. Pamela Dalton Stearns
2. Members of the Tribal Assembly and other supporters stand united against domestic violence, while Pamela Dalton Stearns courageously shares her story.

Soundbite

(click [here](#) to download .MP3 file)

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