



CENTRAL COUNCIL
Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska
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PRESS RELEASE

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Alaska Supreme Court Affirms Tribal Child Support Case

JUNEAU, AK (March 26, 2016) – On March 25, 2016, the Alaska Supreme Court issued a decision recognizing the authority of Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska’s (Central Council) Tribal Court to issue child support orders. In *State of Alaska v. Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska*, the Court affirmed Juneau Superior Court Judge Philip Pallenberg’s ruling in October 2011 that Alaska tribes have inherent authority to “regulate domestic relation among members,” specifically in child support cases.

The Alaska Supreme Court’s decision maintains the status quo that has been in place for several years that tribal child support orders are to be accorded the same recognition and services as support orders issued by other states. “This is a very important court ruling for not only our children and families, but for tribal sovereignty,” said Central Council President Richard Peterson. “The Tribe and the State’s Child Support Services Division have developed a successful working relationship and we will continue to work in a spirit of cooperation to ensure our children receive the support they need.”

Central Council filed a lawsuit in January 2010 against the State of Alaska in Juneau Superior Court. At the time, the State’s Child Support Services Division (CSSD) was not recognizing the tribal court support orders or providing interstate support services for cases with tribal court support orders. Subsequently, Central Council felt it had no choice but to seek relief on behalf of its tribal citizens who were being negatively impacted by the lack of interagency cooperation.

Following the Juneau Superior Court ruling, both Central Council and CSSD have been working closely to ensure tribal children receive the financial support of their non-custodial parents, which Judge Pallenberg noted in his ruling “may be the same thing as ensuring that those children are fed, clothed and sheltered.”

Child support services are vital to the health and well-being of our children, families, and communities. Greater state-tribal cooperation is not only necessary to meet the needs of our tribal citizens, it is becoming increasingly important to address Alaska’s economic crisis. The full text of the opinion can be read at www.courtrecords.alaska.gov/webdocs/opinions/ops/sp-7093.pdf.

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