



Press Release

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Alaska Court System and Kenaitze Indian Tribe Signing Ceremony Will Create Joint-Jurisdiction State-Tribal Community Wellness Court

Anchorage, Alaska (Oct. 19, 2016) – Representatives of the Alaska Court System, Department of Law and Kenaitze Indian Tribe on Thursday will sign a government-to-government Memorandum of Understanding supporting the creation of a joint-jurisdiction state-tribal therapeutic court. The signing will occur at 2:45 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 20, in Courtroom 203 of the Rabinowitz Courthouse in Fairbanks.

The Kenaitze Indian Tribe, state court judges and the Department of Law have been meeting for the past several months with stakeholders and members of Project TEAM – Together Everyone Achieves More – to develop the Henu' Community Wellness Court. The joint jurisdiction state-tribal wellness court will operate on the Kenai Peninsula. The U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance provided training and technical assistance to help design and implement the joint jurisdiction justice project. The court is based on other joint-jurisdiction courts where results have shown reduced recidivism, increased public safety, and improved relationships between the tribe and the community.

The Henu' Community Wellness Court will target system-involved drug and alcohol offenders, including those in families with Children in Need of Aid (CINA) cases, living within the Kenaitze Tribal service area. Defendants charged with property crimes may also be considered if the offense is drug related. Two judges – Kenai Superior Court Judge Anna Moran and Kenaitze Indian Tribe Chief Judge Kimberley Sweet will sit together for hearings in the Kenaitze Indian tribal courtroom.

“Our community is inundated with addictions and the collateral damage that this epidemic is leaving in its wake,” Sweet said. “Henu’ in the Dena’ina language means the willingness to work, to cooperate and to be helpful – and that is what this project embodies. It has been a

privilege to collaborate with the Alaska Court System and our dedicated community partners and I am honored to be part of this team.”

Added Moran: “This has been a long time in the making. The Kenai court and the Kenaitze court have worked collaboratively for several years. Both courts have a deep commitment to their community and to resolving the substance abuse issues that affect the well-being of our community. The dual jurisdiction court will be an important resource for our community because it will allow Kenai to provide a therapeutic court to its community struggling with addiction and other issues. I am proud to be a part of this innovative court and look forward to working with Judge Sweet and the Kenaitze tribe on this exciting new project.”

Kenaitze Executive Director Jaylene Peterson-Nyren said the Henu Community Wellness Court is a perfect fit for the tribe’s integrated approach to wellness. “Our Dene’ Philosophy of Care features a holistic approach to serving families,” Peterson-Nyren said. “We believe in physical, behavioral, spiritual, educational, social and judicial wellness.”

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