

April 6, 2005
Bethel, Alaska

Good afternoon Commissioners,

Thank you for coming out here to listen the concerns of the community members. My name is Geri Simon and I volunteer with the Alaska Native Women's Coalition, a statewide non-profit grassroots organization whose goal is to provide a unified voice for Alaskan Natives against domestic violence and sexual assault. The participants are both male and female and come from around the state - they are health care workers, tribal chiefs and administrators, shelter workers, and other concerned community members. ANWC provides direct victim services, court advocacy, shelter services, and training for tribal court issues.

During our teleconference this morning I was asked to raise a few issues of concern.

1. As I am sure you are aware, Alaska has some of the worst statistics for violence against women and children. There are very little resources to help women, especially in the smaller towns and even smaller villages.
2. The most responsive governmental assistance has come from the village tribal courts, which is great because that is where victims of these crimes feel most comfortably, right in their own hometown. Many victims have not been treated well by the western system of justice where law enforcement must come from the outside to investigate, the perpetrator then goes away from the village, and no one hears anything back before the perpetrator appears back in the village. Therefore **the village tribal courts must be recognized and supported for their assistance** in providing domestic violence restraining orders, for bringing justice closer to home, and for providing a community based and supported system that work.
3. A system of notifying villages of sex offenders living in the village must be made a priority. A woman from a medium sized village (approx 300-400 people) raised the issue of a sex offender running a store that serves mainly teens and younger kids. Kids actually treat the place as a hang out after school. There is no "official"

notification or poster to raise community members' awareness to this person's status. This particular lady looked online to find the information and made parents aware which is lucky but not everyone has access to the internet. She would feel safer if she could post a poster in the village with local registered sex offenders on there or have a **better community notification method**.

4. Plea-bargaining for perpetrators is not working quite right. Victims and communities are left out of the loop when the plea-bargaining goes on. They only know about the end result when it is too late for them to raise their voice. Members of ANWC would like to see **more interaction with the victims or communities prior to any plea-bargaining**.
5. Better training needs to be provided to VPSO's or tribal cops when investigating crimes of sexual assault and domestic violence. Many times crimes are not properly adjudicated because of lack of evidence or improper collection of evidence. If there is not better training for the VPSO's or tribal cops, **how can community members be of assistance** to the process? Some members of the group have suggested putting together a victim's response unit who can assist in "protecting the scene of the crime" until law enforcement arrives in the village.

We request for your support of the tribal court system, for additional resources for victims and communities, better notification methods of sex offenders, more victim/community involvement prior to any plea bargaining, and better training for investigations of sexual assault and domestic violence.

If you would like further information on the Alaska Native Women's Coalition, Eleanor Ned, who is the Co-Director or Virginia Ned, who is the Project Coordinator, can be reached at **907.479.0596**.

Thank you again for the opportunity and your thoughtful consideration of these issues.

Geri Simon