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News Release

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CONTACT: Helen B. Padilla
(505) 277-5462

AILC Receives Federal Grant To Conduct Tribal Court Reviews

ALBUQUERQUE— The Director of the American Indian Law Center, Inc. (AILC) Helen B. Padilla today announced that AILC is one of five vendors selected through a national competitive grant process by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Office of Justice Services (OJS), Division of Tribal Justice Support (TJS) to conduct Tribal Court Reviews. AILC will be conducting the court reviews in the Bureau's District IV which includes 26 tribal courts in New Mexico, Colorado and Texas. The court reviews will be performed at the request of tribal governments and are slated to begin in November 2013.

The tribal court reviews are intended to assess tribal court needs and provide recommendations for improved operational activities, if needed, and may include training and technical assistance opportunities to tribal governments. The format of the review is modeled on the Trial Court Performance Standards which will be tailored to specifically assess tribal justice systems and the unique characteristics in which they operate.

Issues surrounding due process and separation of powers, lack of adequate funding, accessibility of the court, timeliness, ensuring fairness and impartiality, and maintaining an independent judiciary are all factors that will be considered to the extent that they may impact tribal efforts to improve their court systems.

“We strongly believe the tribal court review project aligns with our organizational goals,” said Padilla. “For years AILC has worked to strengthen, promote, and honor self-sustaining tribal communities through education, training, tribal court development, and leadership. Our team specializes in working with tribal courts

and tribal governments and we are familiar with the complexities and challenges they face.”

The tribal court reviews will aid TJS in meeting its statutory mandate under the Tribal Justice Support Act of 1994. TJS is charged with furthering the development, operation, and enhancement of tribal justice systems and Courts of Indian Offenses. The Act requires TJS to provide an annual survey report on the status of federally funded tribal court programs. The survey helps the Secretary of the Interior to determine resources and funding, including base support funding needed to provide for expeditious and effective administration of justice.

Findings from the court review are provided to the tribe and may include a strategic action plan. The plan will provide the tribe with measureable goals and objectives that the tribe may wish to consider in formulating strategies for self-improvement.

“The need for reviewing court performance, along with providing resource information tailored to meet the specific needs of tribal courts, is an important step toward improving justice in our tribal communities,” said Francine Jaramillo, AILC staff attorney.

For additional information on the tribal court reviews contact AILC at (505) 277-5462 or visit the website at <http://www.ailec-inc.org/>.

AILC is a national Indian-controlled and Indian-operated legal and governmental advocacy organization. Since its inception in 1967, AILC’s principal interest has been the development of tribal government institutions and tribal courts. The AILC team has a unique, in-depth working knowledge of tribal courts and their important role in tribal governments. Over the years, AILC has provided training and technical assistance to tribal courts. They have also assisted specific tribal courts in assessing their needs and have collaborated on the development of their court systems, including the drafting of tribal codes.

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