



St. Regis Mohawk Tribe

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PRESS RELEASE

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Tribe to Start Child Support Enforcement Unit *Tribal Court Orders to Get Full Faith and Credit*

Akwesasne Territory – The Saint Regis Mohawk Tribal Court will soon be able to handle child support cases involving tribal members on lands within the jurisdiction of the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe. “This funding will be phased in over a six year period,” remarked Chief Judge Peter J. Herne. “The start-up phase of this grant will involve establishing the program, purchasing equipment and hiring staff.” The second phase is the operational phase which will start in the third year of the program, followed by the fully comprehensive phase in year six. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Service’s Office of Child Support Enforcement is providing funding for the program. This federal funding will meet 100 percent of the costs in the first phase, 90 percent in the second and 80 percent in the third. Seventy-five other tribes are doing Child Support Enforcement Unit work – “start to finish” child support work. “This will be the first Tribal Child Support Enforcement Unit in New York State,” said Tribal Court Administrator Dr. Barbara Gray.

“We currently have about 300 child support cases here in Akwesasne and parents pay about \$1.2 million in child support payments,” said Judge Herne. “As in any community, a number of cases need to be settled here.” Generally, a parent filing for a child support case will not need to retain an attorney to pursue the case, and nearly all matters involved in the case will be addressed at the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribal Court.

This program will allow the Tribal Court to handle all child support cases in its jurisdiction and confirms the court’s jurisdiction, both on and off Indian lands. “The biggest plus for the court and the children who will benefit from child support payment enforcement is that our court orders get full faith and credit across the country,” observed Judge Herne. In other words, the Tribal Court orders for child support payment can be enforced anywhere in the United States. With the Tribal Court handling all these child support cases, it will also alleviate the caseload in Franklin and St. Lawrence Counties, where Saint Regis Mohawk Indian Reservation cases are currently heard.

“This has been a long process,” said Judge Herne. “We began two years ago when I approached Tribal Council with the idea and they were very responsive and supportive.” The Tribal Court received a letter dated June 11, 2011, notifying them of the award. Judge Herne traveled to New York City to receive the notification letter and work out some of the final details of the entitlement funding. “We are very pleased to start this program to improve children’s lives here in Akwesasne,” said Judge Herne. The Tribal Court staff will be holding a series of public meetings to inform the public about the program.

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The Saint Regis Mohawk Tribal Council is the duly elected and federally recognized government of the
Saint Regis Mohawk People

Helping Build A Better Tomorrow

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