

# Native woman awarded settlement

A Native woman who was barred from a coin-operated laundry because she had earlier filed a complaint of discrimination won the smallest settlement ever awarded by the Alaska State Commission for Human Rights this week.

"The amount of the settlement, \$6 is significant," said Human Rights Chairwoman Carol Smith. "It demonstrates that no complaint filed with the commission is too small to be investigated.

It also shows that the commission takes retaliation charges seriously."

The complainant alleged that the laundry operator refused her access because two weeks previously she had charged the operator with discrimination after a machine malfunctioned.

"The law says that retaliation because filing charges with the commission is illegal," Executive Director Niel Thomas said.

"Ironically, her original charge was found invalid," Thomas explained. "Our investigator, Calistro Rodriquez learned that the woman got angry when a machine wasn't working.

The laundry owner told her she could go elsewhere if she didn't like the facility. It looked to us like the kind of flare-up people often get into when a machine eats their money—not a racial matter."

Rodriquez's findings reflected a "no cause" determination, but added a finding of violation when the complainant was rejected the next time she went to the laundry.

The laundry operator told her he resented her filing the complaint against him, according to the commission's findings.

Dorothy Case, Anchorage investigative supervisor for the commission, noted that the laundry operator was illiterate.

"We spent quite some time explaining our findings and the law to him," Case said.

The settlement amount, \$6, represented the extra costs which the complainant incurred when she did laundry elsewhere for three weeks while the commission investigation was pending.

Because a settlement was negotiated without the need for a public hearing, names of the parties were not revealed, in accordance with the commission's policy to resolve most matters informally.