

Resident Law Not Opposed To Rights Laws

ANCHORAGE — The Executive Director of the Alaska Human Rights Commission said today that the one-year residency requirement for state employment does not contravene Alaska human rights laws, and should therefore be defended.

In a release from his Anchorage office, Robert Willard said, "If the Court invalidates the residency rule, it will do irreparable harm to Alaska Natives and other minorities." The Director said for his agency to hold otherwise it would be a disservice to those persons affected by the purview of this Commission.

"I strongly believe if the rule fails the test in the Superior Court case, challenging the residency rule, it will cause an economic slump in terms of welfare and food-stamps," he said. "Because, in the absence of a residency rule, bonafide residents, particularly Alaska Natives, would take a second seat to the anticipated influx of out-of-state job seekers."

"I have great admiration for Governor Egan's administration's fight in this issue," the Director said, "and, I believe that the sovereign (state) should have a right to govern its economic and social programs to accommodate the socio-economic circumstances of the State."

The Human Rights head said that Alaska is plagued with a constant unemployment problem in at least two levels. One in urban areas and another more perplexing areas, that of Bush Alaska.

"The average urban unemployment rate is about 11-17 per cent while in the 'Bush', it approaches 70-80 per cent," he said, "which, in percentages figures to two to three times the national average in urban centers and more than ten times in Rural Alaska."

Willard is a member of the Governor's Equal Employment Opportunity Committee, a ten-member group that is working to devise a plan of action to improve the state's minority posture.

He said if the residency rule is struck down, there would be little chance to accomplish the objective.

"I see little chance to improve if the rule is struck," he said.

The Rights director pointed to a recent court of appeals decision which rules that U.S. citizenship requirement for work does not violate the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended, when the complaint is based on national origin.

"That decision could be applied to Alaska's one year residency rule also," Willard said.

"I'm surprised that in this campaign year, no one has mentioned this and it should be a number one issue," Willard continued, "Politicians always make promises to solve the unemployment problem and this issue certainly qualifies."