

# Native caucus asks court system investigation

By DIANE BENSON

Alleged racial bias and discrimination against Natives and blacks in the judicial sentencing process, as indicated in a study produced by the Alaska Judicial Council last August, prompted remedial actions by the Anchorage Native Caucus, and requests to examine the rest of the judiciary systems.

President of the Caucus, Sylvia Carlsson told the Governor's Commission on the Administration of Justice, Tuesday, December 12, "the official position of the Anchorage Native Caucus is that racial discrimination is institutionalized in Alaska's criminal justice today and that the Alaska Judicial Council study indicating possible racial impact in sentencing is a singular manifestation of prevailing system-wide practices and attitudes."

"We will not and cannot minimize the seriousness of the implications contained in that study. The spectre of racial prejudice and the mere suggestion that the basic constitutional rights of "equal protection" and

"due process" are being denied our people are not easily dealt with in an objective manner."

The Caucus urged for a "thorough and methodical investigation of the system." Commission Chairman Atty. Gen. Avrum Gross said he will conduct a conference call with all commission members by Dec. 19, to discuss the cost of such a study which would also include investigation of the courts, law enforcement and corrections.

Willie Hensley, when asked to respond as Chairman of the State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Civil Rights Commission on the action taken by the Anchorage Native Caucus, commented that the study requested by the caucus "is essential." Once a problem is recognized, the next step is to go more in depth to see in what particular areas the problem is more severe, and then try to seek a solution. Right now you only have a segment of the problem, and that is sentencing."

"I don't think that the state and those in the judicial and criminal justice system have really

taken a look at how the application of state law, since statehood, has impacted the Native community. We are living with rules that are made basically by another society. Nobody, I don't think, since statehood has looked at the affect of the application of law to a different culture. So I am not surprised that there are problems in sentencing in particular, and pro-

bably in other phases of the criminal justice system as well," Hensley added.

Carlsson also emphasized that the Judicial Council findings "held no element of surprise for our organization. Skin color and ethnic heritage are factors used in the criteria for sentencing. Many of our people have attested to that, and yet no one considered this a problem until

the findings were revealed in the judicial council study."

"I think the Anchorage Native Caucus took a good stand," stated Cliff Black, Vice President Human Resources of Alaska Federation of Natives. "However I think enough rhetoric has come down. I would advise the system to address the problem at a grass roots level — sensitivity training

(See CAUCUS, Page 12)

# ● Native caucus

(Continued from Page 7)

for all in the system. The problem is clear, the bias exists "

Supportive of the Caucus's actions are also, NAACP and the Alaska Federation of Natives Bob Kemp, President of the NAACP, told the Caucus, "we are very supportive, the Native Caucus has been leading on this issue. We look forward to any cooperation and support our two groups will give "

The President of AFN, Byron Mallott has sent a letter to Avrum Gross affirming AFN's backing on the requests of the Caucus.

The Anchorage Native Caucus is an advocate organization, not affiliated with other Native organizations. It is an organization oriented toward political action concentrating solely on civil and human rights of Alaskan Natives.