

Council urges more tribal courts

The Minto Tribal Court, Sitka Tribal Court and PACT - a Barrow non-profit conciliation organization - demonstrates local organizations can resolve disputes involving family cases, civil claims and local ordinances, according to an Alaska Judicial council evaluation, funded by the State Justice Institute.

The evaluation was conducted to get a neutral view of tribal courts, and the organizations voluntarily participated in the review, the report says.

The council found the organizations function inexpensively. Most participants receive little or no pay, the courts are driven by individuals who are strongly committed to the idea and who work

long hours.

Non-Natives voluntarily use or cooperate with tribal courts in family matters and civil cases, the report says, which "indicates that the tribal courts can serve citizens of all races in the state in their capacity as local dispute resolution organizations."

The organizations appear, in some instances, to save the state money. The Fairbanks District Attorney's office reports no misdemeanor prosecutions from Minto in several years and only a few felony prosecutions. In contrast, the office prosecutes an average of 50 to 75 misdemeanors and 10 felonies in other Yukon-Koyukuk villages annually the report said.