

# ***Alaska Supreme Court Asks —*** **Retain 4 Judicial Districts**

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**Alaska Native Foundation**

**ANCHORAGE** — The Alaska Supreme Court is encouraging the state legislature to retain only four judicial districts instead of increasing to seven although findings of the Second Justice in the Bush conference showed that rural people want more influence over the system as it applies to

them.

In a letter Feb. 13 letter to all members of the Alaska House of Representatives, Chief Justice Jay Rabinowitz explained that the court judges have unanimously recommended retention of four judicial districts with realigned boundaries to conform to existing transportation and communication patterns.

“It is our belief that this proposal will enable the Alaska Court System to continue to provide more readily available and quality judicial services to all areas of the state,” Rabinowitz said in the letter.

The Alaska Judicial Council has recommended creation of seven judicial districts but the Supreme

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# Judicial Districts...

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court judges feel that the proposed districts would be "too small and too homogeneous to provide the kind of atmosphere that promotes judicial independence."

"It looks like they think they have to have the urban vote to keep rural judges honest," commented Frank Flavin, Alaska Legal Services director. "It's absurd if they think that all the Native people will vote together if they don't like a decision — that's like saying the people of Anchorage would all vote a judge out if he ruled against the city of Anchorage."

The Superior Court decision also states that "single judge districts have been recognized as inherently inefficient." Flavin expressed concern that the judges are so preoccupied with their own "efficiency" they forget about their responsibility to citizens who live in rural Alaska.

The Judicial Council's proposed districts would include the following:

**Southeastern District** — including all of southeast Alaska from the right-hand line which divides central Alaska from Canada to the southern-most point of the state.

**Prince William Sound-Copper**

**River District** — to include the area along the northern boundary of the Ahtna Regional corporation to the 148 longitude line, then south to the point intersecting the western boundary of Ahtna and along that boundary to a point intersecting the northern boundary of Chugach Native corporation. From there the line goes south through Port Wells, Wells Passage into the Gulf of Alaska, and finally east to the 141 degree point again.

**Southcentral-Aleutian District** — to include the area north of the northern line of Southcentral along the eastern boundary of Cook Inlet Regional Corporation and north along the 148 degree longitude line to a point intersecting the southern boundary of Doyon, Ltd. From there it goes west.

**Interior District** — to include all of the Doyon region.

**Lower Yukon-Kuskokwim District** — to include the area designated to the Calista regional corporation.

**Bering Straits-Kobuk District** — including most of the area of NANA and Bering Straits regional corporations.

**North Slope District** — including the exact area of the North Slope Borough.

The Bush Justice conference, which was held in Minto during June of 1974, found that police protection for village people is inferior; that there is a need to strengthen fish and game protection and enforcement, and that game and fish laws are unequally applied between sport and subsistence users; that the village people do not generally understand the state justice system and the state justice system does not generally understand village people; that village people do not want their children and elderly removed from the village by schools and courts and agencies; that there are too few village people working in almost all the agencies of the judicial system; that village life should be governed by village law and that progress and improvement of bush justice since the first justice conference in December of 1970 has been entirely too slow.