

# BETHEL MAY SUE ASCAP FOR RESCINDING POVERTY FUNDS

## City Sends Protests To LBJ, ASCAP Chairman, Others

"We're on our last legs..." This OEO decision is striking right at the hearts of our village people. I intend to prove to them that it can't be done; that they are being simply dishonest," so wrote Mike Rowan in an anguished note.

Rowan is the city manager of the City of Bethel.

Rowan is charging the Office of Economic Opportunity of being dishonest in its words by pulling out funds from under the Bethel Pre-Maternal Home and classifying it as "low priority."

The Bethel City Manager has sent protests to President Lyndon Johnson, Sargent Shriver, director of OEO in Washington, the Congressional delegation, State Senator Ray Christiansen, and Dan Lisbourne, chairman of the Alaska State Community Action Program.

In his protest to Johnson, Rowan wrote, "This program was initiated because of the extremely high index of infant mortality and other poverty factors in the Bethel area, among the Eskimo people.

"An OEO policy has abruptly

pulled the funds from this program....I know you agree with us that the poverty problem is bad enough, and we do not had to add distrust to it. This, however, is what the OEO is doing in Alaska."

The money was funded by OEO last June to the sum of \$137,000. Operating under the promise of financial assistance, the City of Bethel purchased a building for \$18,000 and spent an additional \$1500 to renovate it for use as a pre-maternal home.

The purpose of this project is to provide housing for women who come from ten to one hundred miles away until

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entrance to the Public Health Service is required. The hospital has an insufficient number of beds.

Infant mortality rates in Bethel are among the highest in the nation, and before establishment of the Pre-Maternal Home women were forced into unsanitary quarters prior to delivery.

The home went into operation January 4. On October 31 ASCAP signed over \$73,000 for support of the project, per OEO grant.

The City of Bethel also constructed a log building for use as a Foster Care Home to the cost of \$8,100. OEO has also rescinded funds on this project.

Reasons given by OEO are that the City of Bethel projects are "low priority" although located in an extremely high poverty area.

"Our basic concern is one of honesty, word, trust, and contract," Rowan wrote to Shriver. "This city has trusted the good will of OEO in approving the grant last summer, and we have trusted the honesty of ASCAP to fulfill its contract with us to follow up on this program."

Rowan wired ASCAP chairman, Dan Lisbourne in Kotzebue, threatening to sue ASCAP for breach of contract if that agency withholds its funds.