

**NEWS** from the North Dakota Department of Human Services  
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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**N.D. Department of Human Services and Three Affiliated Tribes sign historic agreement to cooperate on providing child support enforcement services**

BISMARCK, N.D. – North Dakota and the Three Affiliated Tribes have signed a historic agreement pledging to cooperate in providing child support enforcement services. Laurie Alberts, Federal Programs Executive Officer for Three Affiliated Tribes, and Carol K. Olson, Executive Director of the N.D. Department of Human Services, signed for their respective governments. Within the next year, tribal officials expect to join about 30 Tribal Nations out of over 560 federally recognized tribes in offering child support enforcement services to members in its jurisdiction.

“We are very fortunate to see this agreement happen,” said Tribal consultant Catherine Bryan of the National Tribal Justice Resource Center. “North Dakota officials have been accommodating. There are many good people working for the common goal of helping children.”

Olson said, “The Department of Human Services is very pleased to be a part of this effort. We are agreeing to share resources and expertise, to collaborate on training, and to work together in good faith to serve children within the appropriate jurisdiction.”

As sovereign nations, Tribes have the authority to govern members and provide government services. Within Tribal territory, the authority of State and local governments is limited. As a result, States have been limited in their ability to provide child support enforcement services on Tribal lands. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 provided, for the first time, federal funding to Tribes for child support enforcement activities, creating an opportunity for Tribes to provide those services to members.

Tribal Program Director Ellen Wilson explained the key benefits of the agreement. “Families living on the reservation have a relationship with both the State and the Tribe. We serve children best by working together because children should not have to go without needed services because of jurisdictional issues.”

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Wilson credited Tribal Chief Judge El Marie Conklin and Tribal Prosecutor Bill Woods for their support in making Tribal child support enforcement services possible.

“This effort started about three years ago when we met with federal authorities and started discussing cooperation to get a IV-D unit going,” Woods said. “The N.D. Department of Human Services had invited Tribal officials to Bismarck and said they were willing to work with all of the Tribes if they wanted to establish their own programs.”

In 2005, the Three Affiliated Tribes submitted and received a federal planning grant for start-up funding. The N.D. Department of Human Services’ Child Support Enforcement Division submitted a letter supporting the grant application.

According to Wilson, the Tribe’s child support enforcement program will open next winter, and the Tribe expects to assume responsibility for serving about 300 cases currently handled by the state program. They will also work together on other cases.

“Having a child support enforcement program on the reservation is a step in the right direction. Before, the only services available were offered by N.D. Legal Services, which were subject to income-based guidelines, or by private attorneys, which made it unaffordable for some. This makes services such as establishing support orders more available.” Wilson said.

She said that while the office will be located in New Town, N.D., staff will go out to the communities and take services out to the people. The Fort Berthold Reservation covers a five-county area.

“The Department is ready to assist and help the Tribal program implement the services they choose to provide,” pledged State Child Support Enforcement Division Director Mike Schwindt.

Three Affiliated Tribes representatives Ellen Wilson, Tribal IV-D Director; Bill Woods, Tribal Prosecutor; and Nicole Wagner, Tribal IV-D Financial Specialist, attended the signing along with consultants Ruth Hara of Maximus and Catherine Bryan of the National Tribal Justice Resource Center. N.D. Department of Human Services (DHS) officials attending included Carol K. Olson, Executive Director; Mike Schwindt, DHS Child Support Enforcement Division Director; and numerous staff members.

PHOTO



N.D. Department of Human Services Executive Director Carol K. Olson and Three Affiliated Tribes' Tribal IV-D Director Ellen Wilson celebrate signing the historic child support enforcement service agreement.