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Laverdure Praises DOI-DOJ Tribal Court Trial Advocacy Training Program for Enhancing Practitioners' Trial Skills

*Training furthers mandate to strengthen tribal sovereignty over
criminal justice matters on federal Indian lands*

WASHINGTON – Acting Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs Donald “Del” Laverdure today praised a federal training program that is working to develop tribal courts by enhancing and improving the trial advocacy skills of tribal court prosecutors, defenders and judges. The Tribal Court Trial Advocacy Program is a joint effort by the U.S. Department of Justice and the Department of the Interior that furthers the mandate of the Tribal Law and Order Act of 2010 (TOLA) to strengthen tribal sovereignty over criminal justice matters on federal Indian lands by strengthening the skills of those who practice within the tribal court system.

“Tribal courts are fundamental to strengthening tribal sovereignty because of their role in administering and dispensing justice in Indian Country,” Laverdure said. “The Tribal Court Trial Advocacy Program is bringing much-needed and desired training to those who practice law within the tribal court system, which will only enhance the courts’ ability to serve their communities. I am very pleased that this program is already proving its worth, and I want to thank the Justice Department for partnering with us on meeting the Tribal Law and Order Act’s mandate in this area.”

The result of a collaborative effort by the Bureau of Indian Affairs Office of Justice Services (OJS) and DOJ’s Access to Justice Initiative (AJI), the Tribal Court Trial Advocacy Program is the first national effort by DOI and DOJ to offer trial advocacy training with courses designed specifically for tribal courts and free training to the judges, public defenders and prosecutors who work in them. Training is provided in three topic areas – domestic abuse, illegal narcotics and sexual assault on children and adults – with faculty and instructional materials prepared by experts knowledgeable about tribal court issues. The program is unique because it also has training specifically for public defenders.

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A pilot training session on domestic violence held by the OJS and the ATJ in August 2011 in Rapid City, S.D., proved so successful that the OJS and its federal partners provided funding for seven additional sessions. The first of those, which focused on illegal narcotics, was held March 13-15, 2012, in Phoenix, Ariz. Each of the six remaining sessions, to be held through the rest of 2012 and into 2013, will focus on one training topic. The schedule for the coming sessions is:

- July 24-26, 2012, Duluth, Minn.
- August 14-16, 2012, Durango, Colo.
- September 11-13, 2012, Great Falls, Mont.
- October 2-4, 2012, Seattle, Wash.
- October 23-25, 2012, Chinle, Ariz.
- January 15-17, 2013, Albuquerque, N.M.

Training is structured in a way whereby participants are brought together for combined training, with breakout sessions provided where prosecutors and defenders can be trained separately to further develop their trial skills. Coursework is focused on evidentiary issues and provides participants with opportunities to work one-on-one with faculty and practice opening statements, direct examination, cross-examination and closing arguments in a small, courtroom-like setting.

In addition to the ATJ, the Department's other DOJ partners in designing the training program and serving as trainers include the U.S. Attorney's Offices for the Districts of Arizona, Minnesota, Montana and South Dakota; the Federal Public Defender's Office for the District of Arizona; and the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts' Office of Defender Services.

For more information about the DOI-DOJ Tribal Court Trial Advocacy Program, which training topic will be offered at which site, and how to register for upcoming sessions, contact the BIA's Indian Police Academy at 575-748-8151.

The BIA Office of Justice Services' mission is to enhance public safety and protect property in Indian Country by funding or providing law enforcement, corrections and tribal court services to the nation's federally recognized tribes. It also coordinates emergency preparedness support on federal Indian lands by working cooperatively with other federal, state, local and tribal law enforcement agencies throughout Indian Country. It also operates the Indian Police Academy in Artesia, N.M., which provides training and professional development to BIA and tribal law enforcement personnel.

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