



## **ACLU, NARF, Northern Justice Project And State Reach Settlement In Yup'ik Language Voter Assistance Case**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**February 19, 2010**

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**ANCHORAGE, Alaska** – The American Civil Liberties Union of Alaska Foundation today joined the Native American Rights Fund (NARF), the American Civil Liberties Union, the Northern Justice Project, four Alaska Native elders and four tribal governments, and the Alaska Attorney General's Office in announcing a settlement of litigation in *Nick, et al. v. Bethel, et al.* According to the settlement, the state of Alaska will make enhancements to language assistance for Yup'ik-speaking voters available at elections in the Bethel area.

The resolution of the case, originally filed in June 2007 on behalf of Alaska Native elders Anna Nick, Billy McCann, Arthur Nelson and David O. David and the tribal governments of Kasigluk, Kwigillingok, Tuluksak and Tuntutuliak, was welcomed by all parties involved.

“The right to vote – to have an equal voice in the political process – is the most fundamental of civil liberties,” said Jeffrey Mittman, Executive Director of the ACLU of Alaska. “The ACLU is pleased to have partnered with NARF in vindicating the Constitutional rights of the Alaska Native community, and ensuring the right to vote regardless of what language one speaks.”

“We are extremely pleased the state of Alaska will provide Yup'ik-speaking voters in the Bethel area with the tools they need to fully participate in the political process,” said Natalie Landreth of NARF. “That is what this case was all about – equal access to the polls.”

The settlement recognizes improvements to language-assistance protocols implemented by the state during the 2008 and 2009 elections, while providing for enhancements designed to ensure that limited-English-proficient voters receive effective assistance.

Key protocols for the Division of Elections include:

- Training bilingual poll workers to provide language assistance to voters;
- Coordinating language assistance through a bilingual staff person with a toll-free number;
- Relying on Yup'ik language experts to translate election materials, including information on ballot measures, candidates, absentee and special-needs voting and voter registration;
- Preparation of a Yup'ik-English glossary of election terms and phrases to guide bilingual poll workers providing language assistance;

- Providing sample ballots in Yup'ik;
- Generating pre-election publicity in Yup'ik through radio ads, television programs and public service announcements, including announcements over VHF radios in villages that do not receive regular radio broadcasts; and
- Undertaking outreach to the villages in the census area.

“I have said all along that all we wanted was to be able to understand what we are voting for. Now that will happen, and I am very, very happy,” said Billy McCann, a plaintiff in the case. “Being a plaintiff is not easy, but when you come together to fix a problem like this, it is worth it.”

“Our right to vote is one of the most important that we as Americans possess,” said Alaska Lieutenant Governor Craig Campbell, who oversees the Division of Elections. “Here in Alaska, we want all our citizens to exercise that right, regardless of where they live or the language they speak. We are pleased to have come together to ensure that this case is a win-win for Yup'ik-speaking voters and the state of Alaska.”

“We are committed to equality under the law and fair voting practices and effective access to the voting booth for all Alaskans,” said Alaska Attorney General Dan Sullivan. “We will vigorously implement the terms of this settlement.”

The settlement agreement in the case can be found online at [www.akclu.org](http://www.akclu.org).

State of Alaska attorneys who worked on the case are Gilman Dana S. Burke, Sarah J. Felix, Margaret A. Paton-Walsh and Michael Barnhill.

Attorneys for the plaintiffs are the ACLU of Alaska Foundation, Natalie Landreth of NARF, Laughlin McDonald of the ACLU Voting Rights Project, James J. Davis, Jr. of Northern Justice Project, and Dr. James T. Tucker.

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