



**CENTRAL COUNCIL**  
*Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska*  
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## **PRESS RELEASE**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Executive Council Issues Support for Tribal Court Judge to Fill Juneau Superior Court Vacant Seat**



**JUNEAU, AK** (February 23, 2018) – The Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska’s (Tlingit & Haida) Executive Council officially issued their support for tribal citizen Debra O’Gara to be considered for an expected vacant seat on the Juneau Superior Court. O’Gara was one of 10 applicants who put their name forward following an official solicitation issued by the Alaska Judicial Council.

O’Gara currently serves as Tlingit & Haida’s Tribal Court Presiding Judge and previously served as the Tribe’s Chief Justice and Magistrate. She has over 25 years of experience practicing law as a prosecutor, staff attorney, private practitioner and mediator. Her areas of expertise are in Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), child support, domestic violence, criminal law, tribal sovereignty, fishing and hunting rights, and jurisdictional issues. She worked on ICWA cases for over 15 years and also participated in the federal, state and tribal taskforce that began in 1996 to provide information to all tribes on the Welfare Reform Act, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and child support.

“I’m happy to see someone of Judge O’Gara’s caliber and with her diverse background put themselves forward,” said President Richard Peterson. “Her experience will help bring balance to the bench and the courts be more representative of the people who stand before them.”

The application closing date for the Juneau Superior Court seat vacancy was February 2, 2018 and applicant interviews are tentatively scheduled for May 14-18, 2018. Interviews typically follow a bar poll where attorneys from around the State are invited to rate the applicants and offer their opinions about their suitability for the judicial vacancy. A public hearing with candidates will also be scheduled before the Alaska Judicial Council selects the names of individuals to recommend to the Governor. The Governor then has 45 days to select the judge from that pool.

O’Gara earned a Bachelor of Art’s degree in Political Science from the University of Washington, a Juris Doctor from the University of Oregon, and a Master’s degree in Public Administration from the University of Alaska Southeast. Her Tlingit name is *Djik Sook* and she is a Raven from the *Teey Hit Taan* clan.

“I firmly believe my life and career experiences have prepared me to lay one more stone in the bridge between tribal justice and the State court system that will help to increase access, mutual respect, and much needed collaboration for all citizens of this region,” said O’Gara.

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