OUR MISSION:
to protect Indian rights,
foster Indian self-determination,
and facilitate tribal nation building.

A heartfelt thank you for the stunning artwork on the cover of our annual report. Baje Whitethorne, Sr. is an award winning Navajo artist from Arizona. Baje views his art as a window for the world to see into the reservation and its beauty. The painting, called “Coastal Songs”, is breathtaking. Yes, we can see the reservation from here. We hope you enjoy “Coastal Songs” as much as we do.
CILS CELEBRATES FIFTY YEARS

Escondido, CA – September 22, 2017: This year marked CILS’s 50th year of legal services in California Indian Country. Since its founding, CILS has taken on major issues impacting tribal sovereignty such as restoring lands to trust, quantifying tribes’ reserved water rights, obtaining equitable federal funding for California tribes, litigating discrimination and civil rights, and fortifying tribal governments. During the last five decades, CILS has also tackled tribal termination, Native prisoners’ religious rights, and renegotiating tribal gaming compacts.

“CILS never gives up... always defending and enforcing Indian rights from forces that would cause harm. We are celebrating fifty years of serving California Indian communities with legal services that involve issues unique to Native Americans,” explains Mark Romero, Chairman of CILS’s Board of Trustees. “I could not be prouder of these accomplishments and look forward to celebrating all the legal victories for Indian people that will come in the next fifty years.”

CILS continues to grow with tribal communities in California and serves them through four offices strategically located in Bishop, Escondido, Eureka, and Sacramento. Protecting tribal communities requires constant vigilance. CILS actively serves clients and handles cases in all fifty-eight California counties. The organization is guided by a Board of Trustees comprised of tribal and community leaders, appointees of the State Bar of California, and representatives of the client-eligible population.

Pictured: Dorothy Alther, Executive Director, CILS; Sheila Quinlan, CILS Board of Trustees and Attorney in private practice; Joe Ayala, CILS Board of Trustees and Attorney at State of California Office of Legislative Counsel

Pictured from left to right: CILS Board of Trustees Sheila Quinlan, John Hueston, Jessica Warne, Mark Romero, Andre Cramblit, Joe Ayala, and Tribal Advisor for the Governor’s Office Cynthia Gomez
CILS’s fiftieth anniversary coincided with another special occasion, the observance of California Native American Day turning fifty, which was observed on Friday, September 22, 2017.

In honor of our joint anniversaries, CILS and CNAD commissioned a poster to commemorate this historic double milestone. The poster featured a colorful bear created by award-winning artist John Balloue. These posters were distributed to all the attendees at CNAD. To honor the elders and tribal leaders participating in the festivities, CILS made gift bags that included posters, pins, and the history of CILS. The bags were handed out by members of the CILS Board of Trustees and its Executive Director, Dorothy Alther.

Following the CNAD celebration, CILS hosted an anniversary reception at the Hyatt Regency in Sacramento. The event was well-attended by tribal representatives, past and current clients, representatives of government agencies, alumni attorneys and friends old and new. Guests were treated to performances by the Southbay Ramblers drumming group and the Chumash Intertribal Singers. André Cramblit, CILS Board of Trustees member, a traditional storyteller, and singer/drummer honored us with our opening prayer and shared a touching story about why he serves on the CILS Board. CILS also presented a short film on the history of CILS produced by Jack Kohler of On Native Ground’s productions. Governor Jerry Brown’s Tribal Liaison, Cynthia Gomez presented the Board of Trustees and our Executive Director with a proclamation acknowledging CILS’s accomplishments and the “efforts of CILS in removing the legacies of [California’s] historic wrongs and forging a better understanding among our peoples as we face the future together.”
Dear Friends of CILS:

Welcome to the 2017 CILS Annual Report. It is an honor to be the Executive Director of CILS during this momentous year marking our 50th Anniversary. Established in 1967 by George Duke and David Risling as an independent non-profit dedicated to serving California tribes and Native Americans with federal Indian legal matters, CILS remains true to their vision and mission. CILS marked its anniversary in conjunction with the 50th Anniversary of California Native American Day in our state capitol. We were joined by tribal leaders, members of our tribal community, government representatives and both old and new friends of CILS.

2017 brought both successful and disappointing legal challenges. CILS scored a major victory at the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in the Bishop Tribe v. Inyo County et al. on July 19th, with the Court reversing the lower court’s dismissal of the Bishop Tribe’s case and remanding it to the lower court to proceed on the merits. CILS and its tribal partners worked tirelessly on AB 233 which would have allowed all students in the state to wear regalia that honors and celebrates their culture, traditions, and religion at high school graduations. The legislation passed almost unanimously by the Assembly and the Senate, only to be vetoed by Governor Brown who found such students’ rights were already protected under existing law. The Governor’s veto was a disappointment, but we remain optimistic since Assemblymember Todd Gloria is again moving the bill through both legislative chambers with the hope of persuading the Governor to reconsider his earlier veto. Our Report highlights many more of the cases and projects during 2017.

In closing, we want to thank all those who support our work and have made generous donations to support our mission. Hopefully, we will be here to serve you for another fifty years!

We have worked hard for our tribal communities by advancing tribal economic development, protecting tribal families in Indian Child Welfare cases, and sponsoring numerous trainings and community education events.

Sincerely yours,

Dorothy Alther
Executive Director
DEAR FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS OF CILS:

We celebrate California Indian Legal Services 50th anniversary of service to California Indian Country. From humble beginnings at our first office in East Bay we now serve every county in California with offices in Eureka, Sacramento, Bishop, and Escondido. In honor of this important milestone, this year’s painting by award-winning Diné artist Baje Whitehorse, Sr. called “Coastal Songs” is featured on the cover of this annual report. Tribal energies make up coastal songs, tribes have their own sacred prayers and songs they continue to pass on. Tribes all along the water have developed a relationship with how they connect and have respect for water. The Yei Bi Chei (Yébichai) represent the Navajo paying respect to those tribes and their coastal songs through depiction.

This year CILS assisted the Wiyot Tribe and the Bear River Rancheria to end racial discrimination in their school district, proposed AB233, the feather bill that was vetoed on the governor’s desk, and succeeded in reversing the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals dismissal of Bishop Tribe v. Inyo County, et al.

CILS provided Tribal Economic Development Trainings in Pit River, Coyote Valley, and Bishop. CILS presented Indian Child Welfare Act trainings consisting of fourteen events throughout the state. CILS received renewed funding for its Domestic Violence unit in San Diego that provides crisis intervention, safety planning, protection orders, and more. CILS held a conference on developing tribal courts with presenters from out-of-state tribes that exercise criminal jurisdiction.

CILS has won many cases, provided countless legal trainings, and defended the rights of many individual Indians. I feel proud to be the Chairman of an organization that dedicates itself to Indian rights, self-determination, and tribal nation building. CILS has represented nearly every California Indian tribe on a wide-range of legal and governmental issues. After 50 years of service, there are still more legal problems in our California Indian communities and CILS will continue to work tirelessly to address these legal issues faced by tribes and Native American individuals.

Thank you for reading our 2017 annual report, and I hope our work inspires you. I invite you to get involved with CILS as a board member, a volunteer, a client, or a donor. As a community, we need legal aid to provide for those who cannot afford justice alone.

Ijan,

Mark Romero
Chairman
2017—BY THE NUMBERS
Protecting and Serving California Tribes and Their Communities

61,649
PERSONS RECEIVED
CILS SERVICES

24 staff members
at 4 offices
serving all of California

including
28,588
read Legal Education
materials online
28,269
downloaded
Pro Se materials
2,808
attended
Legal Education
1,110
referrals to other
resource providers
874
direct service cases
136
were cases involving
Indian Child Welfare Act
IMPACT LITIGATION

CILS Presents Oral Argument Before the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, Fights and Wins for Student Rights, Vetoed AB233 Feather Bill and New Tribal Tax Forms

Ninth Circuit Allows Bishop Paiute Law Enforcement Case to Proceed

_Bishop Tribe v. Inyo County, et al._ – The Bishop Paiute Tribe’s case against Inyo County, its Sheriff and District Attorney continued into 2017. After the Tribe was successful in getting the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals to reverse the dismissal of its case by the lower court, the case was remanded to a new district court judge. Soon after the remand, the defendants again filed separate motions to dismiss the Tribe’s case. Oral argument on the defendants’ motions was held on October 17th before District Judge Dale A. Drozd in the Eastern District Court in Fresno. The Court denied the defendants’ motions on January 1, 2018, and so the case moves into 2018.

Wiyot and Bear River Tribes Call for “True Partnership” To Protect the Civil Rights of Loleta Students

In December of 2017, tribal leaders were pleased to hear the news that Loleta Union Elementary School District had entered into a Voluntary Resolution Agreement with U.S. Department of Education. The Agreement was the result of a complaint filed by CILS, National Center for Youth Law, and the ACLU of Northern California with the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights on behalf the Wiyot Tribe and the Bear River Band of the Rohnerville Rancheria against the Loleta School District for allegations of racial discrimination and other violations of federal law.

Tribal leaders are hoping that with the Agreement signed, the District will include tribal leaders and community members in a meaningful way as it works to fulfill the terms of the Agreement. “We appreciate that the District’s current leadership has agreed to address longstanding concerns of our community,” said Ted Hernandez, Tribal Chair of the Wiyot Tribe. “Entering into this agreement is an acknowledgment that the District can and must do better for our students.”
The Office for Civil Rights’ investigation found that the Loleta Union Elementary School District was discriminating against native students on the basis of race. The investigation found substantial evidence that the District had created a hostile environment for Native American students, disciplined native students more harshly than other students, and failed to provide legally-mandated services for students with disabilities. The complaint also charged the District with failing to pursue much-needed funding opportunities targeted to districts with significant Native populations.

The Agreement requires the District to hire experts to address these problems and to establish a community oversight committee with the participation of the tribes along with other stakeholders. Specifically, tribal representatives are requesting that an outside expert facilitator manage the community oversight committee to ensure all voices are heard and valued.

Proposed Legislation AB 233 Failed

CILS, with the support of tribes throughout the state, sponsored AB 233, a bill introduced by Assembly Todd Gloria (D. San Diego) that would have amended the Education Code to add a provision to specifically protect the right of students to wear religious, ceremonial, or cultural adornments at graduation ceremonies. The bill was well received and passed almost unanimously through both the Assembly and Senate. The only opposition to the bill was from the California School Board Association.

Much to everyone’s disappointment, Governor Jerry Brown vetoed AB 233 on October 16, 2017. The reason stated was that students’ right to freedom of speech is already protected under existing law, and the amendment would unnecessarily remove the local school’s discretion over controlling what students wear at graduation.

Tax Time: New Enrolled Tribal Member Certification Form

On January 2, 2017, the California Franchise Tax Board (FTB), the agency tasked with collecting state income taxes from residents, introduced Enrolled Tribal Member Certification Form (FTB Form 3504), on its website. FTB Form 3504, which was designed with input from tribal leaders and attorneys, allows tribal members to declare their tribal enrollment status and reservation residency to show an exemption from state income taxation. Without the form, the FTB does not always know who does or does not qualify for the tax exemption, which sometimes results in improper and unnecessary state income tax assessments.
INDIAN CHILD WELFARE ACT TRAINING

CILS Trains Tribal Leaders, Social Workers, and ICWA Advocates on Ensuring ICWA Compliance in State Court Child Welfare Cases

CILS ICWA Training Events

July 10, 2017: All four CILS offices participated in state-wide trainings to tribal leaders, tribal social workers, and ICWA Advocates assisting them in successfully pursuing ICWA compliance in state court child welfare cases. A total of 14 training events were held throughout California. This project was funded by the California Department of Social Services.

Mark Radoff, Escondido Senior Staff Attorney, and Blake Atkerson, Sacramento Staff Attorney, led two comprehensive two-and-a-half-day trainings for “ICWA Tribal Advocates” at Morongo on March 27-29 and at Thunder Valley on June 12-14. This course provided an overview of the ICWA’s requirements and its interplay with California juvenile dependency law and procedure. Participants also applied the legal framework to real-life simulated facts, and hone their advocacy skills.

In addition, the following series of three trainings were offered on April 17-19 at Sycuan, May 1-3 at Bishop, May 22-24 at Bear River, and June 19-21 at Thunder Valley.

Mark Vezzola, Escondido Directing Attorney, led trainings on the new BIA ICWA Regulations. This course focused on the new regulations’ practical implementation in California. Another goal was to help tribal and county social workers collaborate during the dependency process and elicit feedback regarding what is needed to better support county/tribal relationships.

Jedd Parr, Sacramento Directing Attorney, and Jasmine Andreas, Bishop Directing Attorney, led trainings on Tribal Customary Adoption that detailed the legal and practical considerations necessary to implement Tribal Customary Adoption. Tribes learned to more efficiently assess the appropriateness of Tribal
Customary Adoption and to navigate the process.

Dorothy Allther, Executive Director, led trainings on Criminal Background Checks. This course was designed to provide tribes knowledge of the legal and practical considerations necessary for new California legislation which allows tribes to conduct criminal background checks and to consider appropriate waivers/exemptions, potentially increasing the number of tribal placements available.

CILS Domestic Violence Team Update

The CILS Domestic Violence Attorney, Susan Dalati and Domestic Violence Legal Advocate, Yvette Morales (“DV Team”) continue to build collaborative relationships with DV community partners within the Native American community. The DV Team participates in the San Diego Intertribal Multi-Disciplinary Team meetings for domestic violence and sexual assault, and the Riverside County DV Tribal Alliance to address and work through issues affecting the Tribal communities.

The DV Team provides two monthly walk-in legal clinics from 11:00 am – 2:00 pm on the second Wednesday of each month at Indian Health Council on the Rincon Indian Reservation and fourth Wednesday of each month at the Southern Indian Health Council in Alpine. The DV team assists with issues pertaining to domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking and sex trafficking. The walk-in clinics operate on a first come, first served basis.

The Domestic Violence Team staffs two walk-in legal clinics a month at San Diego County Indian Health Facilities.

The DV Team served eighty three clients in 2017. The DV Staff participates in the Riverside Tribal Alliance DV Workgroup. In April the DV Attorney attended the long awaited Domestic Violence Restraining Order Stakeholder’s Meeting at Family Court in downtown San Diego. Ms. Dalati renewed her request to allow e-filing of TRO’s. In May the DV Attorney hosted the San Diego County Native American Multi-Disciplinary Meeting for DV, Sexual Assault and Stalking. In July the DV Legal Advocate attended a Multi-Disciplinary Team Meeting at Escondido Tribal TANF comprised of tribal DV, Sexual Assault and Stalking advocates in San Diego County. In August the DV Staff attended a meeting with the Lead Judge of Inter-Tribal Court in San Diego County and her Chief Clerk to discuss their DV program. They also participate in High-Risk Team meetings in San Diego. Our DV Attorney also chairs the North County San Diego DV Coalition.

CILS has free training videos and books available on the website at http://www.calindian.org/indian-child-welfare/
YEAR IN REVIEW

CILS Presents Technical Assistance on Background Checks, “California Tribal Courts Conference”, “Tribal Economic Development Training”, and “Public Law 280 Training”

Free Technical Assistance to Tribes on Conducting Criminal Background Checks

CILS offered free technical assistance to tribes interested in or conducting criminal background checks on prospective families who want to become a tribally licensed home for tribal member children being placed outside their home by County Protective Services. CILS provided information and guidance on: completing the California Department of Justice (DOJ) forms to access Criminal Offender Record Information; conducting Child Abuse Central Index checks; accessing list of “non-exemptible” crimes that require denying an application for placement; when and how a tribe may exempt crimes that are exemptible; policies the tribe should consider in operating its criminal background check program.

This service was provided through funding from the California Department of Social Services.

CILS California Tribal Courts Conference

On May 11, 2017, CILS held a one-day conference at Rincon Casino and Resort devoted to the “nuts and bolts” needed for California tribal courts to exercise criminal jurisdiction over Indian and non-Indian offenders who commit domestic violence on tribal lands.

Presenters from out-of-state tribes that currently exercise criminal jurisdiction

Pictured: Denise Bareilles, Directing Attorney, and Tamara Honrado, Staff Attorney from the Eureka CILS office
shared their knowledge. The agenda included presentations from tribal court judges, tribal prosecutors, tribal defense attorneys, court clerks, tribal law enforcement and correction officers. Highlights included the Honorable Chief Judge Lawrence King of the Colorado River Indian Tribes and the Honorable Judge Cindy Smith of the Suquamish Tribe discussing their tribal court perspective of exercising criminal jurisdiction in domestic violence cases. The conference generated dynamic discussion on the long-term goals necessary to implement domestic violence criminal jurisdiction in a PL 280 state.

The event was funded by Tribal Justice Support, Office of Justice Support, Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Tribal Economic Development Training in Pit River, Coyote Valley, and Bishop
CILS and the Mesa Grande Band of Mission Indians hosted one-day trainings, on November 27 at Pit River, on November 29 at Coyote Valley, and on December 12 in Bishop, for tribes with no or little current economic development on their lands. The training focused on how to form a tribal economic development entity that can not only evaluate economic proposals presented to the tribe but help initiate economic projects which are compatible with the tribe’s needs and resources. CILS provided various legal structures for establishing a tribal economic development entity, the pros and cons, and how to protect tribal sovereign immunity. Representatives from the Tribe spoke about their experience on how their economic development corporation has evolved over the years, how they got started, what worked and did not work and practical advice on their successes and failures.

The training was funded by the State Bar of California Legal Services Trust Fund Program Bank Settlement Grant and was attended by tribal leaders, tribal administrators, tribal attorneys, tribal administrative staff (e.g., from environmental departments, land offices, and water departments), and tribal community members.

Public Law 280 Training in Northern California
September 20, 2017: Directing Attorney Jedd Parr and Executive Director Dorothy Alther hosted an all-day training event at the Bear River Band of Rohnerville Rancheria. The daylong event included attending the Humboldt County District Attorney’s Roundtable, followed by a PL 280 training, and then a training specific to law enforcement. The event was well attended and local law enforcement was very engaged during the law enforcement training session.

Blue Shield of California Foundation Expands Grants to Prevent Domestic Violence
On March 22, 2017, nine community-centered groups received aid from Blue Shield of California Foundation to support the most vulnerable Californians and CILS was one of them.

“These organizations were selected, in part, because they’ve engaged local communities to affect positive change by focusing on the unique needs and experiences of the people they serve,” said Peter Long, PhD, president and CEO of Blue Shield of California Foundation. “These trusted community partners are shining examples of health care and anti-domestic-violence advocates in California who live our shared values every day.”
Escondido, CA – September 10, 2017: CILS completed renovation of the Escondido office building in August. The exterior of the building was renovated with the goal of providing a more welcoming and comfortable space.

The Escondido office is centrally located near several Indian reservations and provides legal assistance to individuals and tribes in Southern California. CILS purchased the building in 1998 to ensure legal services would be available for decades to come. This is the first time the Escondido office received an exterior facelift.

When starting the project, using Native-owned businesses was important to CILS, and CILS turned to California Indian Chamber of Commerce’s Tracy Stanhoff and Cheri Myron for help. The renovation was completed by GC Green Incorporated, an Indian-, woman-, and veteran-owned company. The project spanned eight months and cost $118,000 including painting, updated safety features, landscaping, lighting, new entry doors, and signage.

Dorothy Alther, CILS Executive Director, stated, “The building renovation made a big difference in the way the building feels. When visitors arrive for the first time, they can find our building because of the new signage. We brought the native landscaping inside the building by placing plants in both the downstairs and upstairs corridors. At night we have LED lights and video cameras to create more safety. The renovation has improved the staff and visitor experience.”

The new landscaping, designed by Costello Kennedy Landscape Architecture, has forty plants of twelve species, all native to southern California, and can be found throughout the new landscape.

The renovation was made possible by a Façade and Property Improvement Grant from the City of Escondido, a Neighborhood Reinvestment Program Grant from County Supervisor Dave Roberts, a donation from the Sycuan Band of the Kumeyaay Nation, and general donations throughout the year.
CILS ON THE ROAD

CILS offers a variety of trainings and presentations on federal Indian law topics to tribal communities, state and local government agencies, and the public at large. Below is a partial list of the presentations made by CILS staff during 2017.

**January**
- PL 280 Tribal Law Training
- Cal Western School of Law
- San Diego
- Sustainable Groundwater Management Act
- Coyote Valley
- Sustainable Groundwater Management Act
- Big Sandy
  - Negotiating Contracts on Tribal Land
  - Palm Desert
- Special Education Training
  - Tule River
- Tribal Court Development
  - Tule River
- AIPRA & Estate Planning
  - Palm Springs

**February**
- Community Education
  - CA Western School of Law
  - San Diego
- Crisis Intervention Training
  - San Diego
- PL 280 Tribal Law Training
  - CA Highway Patrol
  - Sacramento
  - Trespass Legislation
    - Western Indian Gaming Conference
    - Morongo

**March**
- AIPRA & Estate Planning
  - San Pasqual
- ICWA Tribal Advocate
  - Morongo
- AIPRA & Estate Planning
  - Big Sandy
  - Tax Assistance
  - Shingle Springs

**April**
- BIA ICWA Regulations
- Tribal Customary Adoption
- Criminal Background Check
- Sycuan

**May**
- BIA ICWA Regulations
- Tribal Customary Adoption
- Criminal Background Check
- Bishop

**June**
- ICWA Tribal Advocate
  - Auburn
- BIA ICWA Regulations
- Tribal Customary Adoption
- Criminal Background Check
  - Auburn

**July**
- ICWA & Tribal Customary Adoption
  - Upper Lake
- AIPRA & Estate Planning
  - Round Valley

**August**
- BIA ICWA Regulations
  - Tribal Customary Adoption
  - Criminal Background Check
  - Bear River
- AIPRA & Estate Planning
  - San Pasqual

**September**
- ICWA Tribal Advocate
  - Round Valley
- Family Day
  - Soboba
- AIPRA & Estate Planning
  - San Pasqual
  - Native American Day
  - Sacramento

**October**
- PL 280 Tribal Law Training
  - Bear River
- Exercising Criminal Jurisdiction
  - Rincon
  - Community Outreach at Friendship House
  - San Francisco
  - Trespass Legislation
  - Western Indian Gaming Conference
  - Morongo
  - Elder Law
  - Bridgeport

**November**
- Law, Policy, and History
  - Bishop
- Tribal Economic Development
  - Pit River
- Tribal Economic Development
  - Coyote Valley

**December**
- Tribal Economic Development
  - Bishop
- 2nd Wednesday of every month
  - Domestic Violence Legal Clinic
  - Indian Health Council
- 4th Wednesday of every month
  - Domestic Violence Legal Clinic
  - Southern Indian Health Council
“California Indian Legal Services provides a valuable and vital service to California tribes, and does an amazing job at navigating the complexities of tribal law in the United States. Like the California Nations Indian Gaming Association, CILS is dedicated to protecting tribal sovereignty, and we have often worked side-by-side and personally witnessed the organization’s indefatigable work on behalf of the state’s tribes. CILS has a proven track record now stretching back over a half-century and has been a major factor in many landmark events for California tribes, not the least of which is the right of tribes to conduct gaming on tribal lands. We are honored by their associate membership in our organization.”

Executive Director Susan Jensen
California Nations Indian Gaming Association

“Sycuan supports California Indian Legal Services and the many services they provide to the various tribes throughout California. Through CILS, Sycuan has had their help with organizing important organic governing documents and the oversight of elections which allows us to exercise our sovereignty as a Tribe. Their time and focus on our Tribes needs have allowed us to further appreciate the relationship formed between Sycuan and CILS. Sycuan is grateful for the work that CILS has accomplished and continues to provide especially to those tribes that don’t have the resources to do so.”

Sycuan Tribal Council

“If we look at our past history in California, our Indian people and tribal governments received shameful treatment. Looking at history what changed? Once we were able to fight back in terms of what the dominate society understood. Indian people and Tribal Governments started to be acknowledged. Fight back meant using the legal system to seek fairness, understanding, and equality. This effort to gain respect and acknowledgment of our Indian people and Tribal Governments was and is still being done to this day by California Indian Legal Services. Remember history, because our history set the journey we all must watch and take today.”

Chairman Bo Mazzetti
Rincon Band of Luiseño Indians

“We have been pleased by the level of service and expertise provided by California Indian Legal Services. CILS has provided exemplary service and has displayed extensive knowledge in multiple areas of Indian law. They have addressed our legal needs in the areas of environmental compliance, cultural resources protection, water rights, and governance. We are confident in the work product that CILS produces and we will continue to be a repeat client.”

Chairman Darrell Mike
Twenty-Nine Palms Band of Mission Indians
Thank You for Your Generous Support

Agua Caliente Band

Rincon Band

Cabazon Band

Santa Ynez Band

Campo Band

Sycuan Band

Graton Rancheria

Tolowa Dee-ni Nation

Pechanga Band

Twenty-Nine Palms Band

California Native Indian Gaming Association

Southern California Tribal Chairmen’s Association
OUR HISTORY

Fifty Years of Service to Native Communities in California

Birthed from the 1960’s upheaval of the status quo, California Indian Legal Services grew out of the California Rural Legal Assistance legal aid program that focused efforts on all rural communities. Recognizing the uniquely complex legal issues facing Native American communities in California, George Duke and David Risling began our story with the incorporation of California Indian Legal Services in 1967.

CILS began to stretch its legs and spread its wings in the 1970s. From the East Bay office, CILS added field offices in Bishop, Escondido, Eureka, and Ukiah. The fight against termination era actions against tribal communities raged on as CILS scored victories in restoring reservation lands, quantifying water rights, litigating civil rights cases, and strengthening tribal governments. These efforts laid the foundation for future generations to protect Native Americans in California.

The 1980s brought intense efforts by CILS to reestablish tribes that were once terminated through the Tillie Hardwick litigation. The victory was heralded as a major win for Indian Country and catapulted CILS forward as a leader in Indian Country. Shortly following, CILS stood up to the U.S. Forest Service who sought to build a 400-mile logging road between the towns of Gasquet and Orleans, leading to the project dubbed the “G-O Road.” CILS was able to convince the District Court judge to issue an injunction preventing the road from desecrating local tribal religiously significant areas.

As tribal governments matured in the 1990s, so too did CILS. Economic development became a focus for lifting Native communities in California out of poverty. CILS assisted in starting the new economic engine of Indian gaming after a alum of CILS was victorious in California v. Cabazon Band of Indians, that ultimately...
resulted in Congress passing the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act. The infusion of revenue allowed some tribal governments to expand services to their members and increase tribal sovereignty. CILS continues to assist tribes with providing social services and economic development for the twenty-first century.

Over the past twenty years, CILS further assisted Native Communities in California with Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) advocacy, understanding the American Indian Probate Reform Act (AIPRA), placing fee land into trust, challenging state taxation, discrimination in schools, religious discrimination in detention facilities, cultural resource protection under AB 52 and SB 18, and preparing for changes to state water rights systems. Some highlights include CILS’s efforts in passing SB 678, which extended federal ICWA protection to California’s Indian children. CILS also authored the California Judge’s ICWA Benchguide used at all levels of state and tribal court. In 2016, CILS was instrumental in the passage of SB 997, which gives tribal identification cards the same status as a California identification card when notarizing a document. Today, CILS is working with the state legislature and California communities to pass a bill allowing feathers and other culturally significant regalia to be worn at high school graduations, which addresses a major lack of cultural sensitivity pervasive in some California school districts.

We are proud of our five decades of championing the rights of Native Americans in California. CILS continues to grow with the tribal communities in California and serve those communities from our four offices in Eureka, Sacramento, Bishop, and Escondido. The protection of tribal communities requires constant vigilance. We work in all fifty eight California Counties, guided by our Board of Trustees comprised of tribal and community leaders, members of the California Bar Association, and representatives of our client-eligible population. We look forward to working with tribal communities in California for another fifty years.

Quotes from Clients and Community Members

“DEFENDING TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY”
“CILS has been the standard bearer of Indian Country in California for several decades, assisting with that never-ending challenge to defend tribal sovereignty. CILS represents tribes they have never spoken in the place of tribes they have always directed any questions to tribal leadership, and that is a key difference and one of their most effective tools, especially when representing tribes.”
Former Chief of Police Duane Sherman Sr.

“FOUND MY SOUL”
“Was able to find my soul again thanks to CILS and Strong Hearted Native Women’s Coalition.”
Native American Domestic Violence Survivor

“I APPRECIATE IT”
“Thank you so very much for always being willing to speak to my class each and every year. You are amazing, and I appreciate it.”
Lisa Wienreb, Law Professor at xCal Western School of Law
The selected financial data was derived from California Indian Legal Services, Inc.'s financial statements. The financial statements of California Indian Legal Services, Inc. are audited annually and are available upon request.
School Absences for Ceremonies

A native mother contacted our office because she was facing misdemeanor charges due to her children’s school absences to attend tribal ceremonies. Although we could not assist with the criminal charges she was facing, we prepared a legal memo to her Public Defender. We argued that her children’s participation in a Navajo Naming Ceremony, a religious right of passage under Navajo religion and tradition, and involvement in healing rituals with a Navajo Medicine Man, should not be used to tally excessive absences. This memo outlined the importance of the children’s participation in native religious exercises because it is an integral part of the child’s education. The court ruled that the mother had nine months to keep her kids in school and to record any breaks they take on a calendar to submit to the schools. She was not criminally punished for their absences.

ICWA at Work

Two years ago, a Southern California tribe retained CILS to represent it in a child dependency case involving the Indian Child Welfare Act. While the Court found the Act applied and active efforts were made to keep the Indian family together, in the long term the mother unfortunately continued to struggle with addiction. All the while the child remained in a non-Indian foster home. Their maternal grandmother wished to be considered for placement, but her request was denied due to a criminal record. CILS argued for more visits between the grandmother and grandson, and pushed for her criminal history, which was over thirty years old, to be exempted, and we were successful in doing so. The Tribe successfully assessed the grandmother’s home for placement and recommended a permanent plan of Tribal Customary Adoption. The court agreed, and the little boy was placed with his grandmother in time for the holidays.

Family Placement for Child

Last summer CILS successfully obtained a transfer to tribal court for a child who had been in the foster care system for more than six years, cycling through numerous placements. The Tribe was located in Alaska and had identified a highly-qualified extended family placement. A transfer to tribal court was the fastest way to put that placement into effect. The other parties showed considerable resistance to the transfer, but in the end, we succeeded in getting the court to order it, and the Tribe reports that the child is doing extremely well in his new home. We’re told that if we ever make it up to Alaska, we have a travel guide waiting.

Expungement for Trespass

This spring CILS worked with a client who is a career home health aide. Under assignment with home health care agencies, she cares for elders, infirm and disabled patients. Her work allows them to stay in their homes. In early 2015, our client participated in peaceful protest and as a result, was charged with misdemeanor trespass. She pled guilty, paid a fine and completed a twelve-month probationary sentence. In July 2016, she expunged her conviction. But later that year, her application to the home health aide registry was denied because of that conviction. The Home Care Services Bureau of the California Department of Social Services determined she needed a criminal records exemption to qualify for listing with the registry, and denied her exemption request because they felt not enough time had elapsed since her 2015 plea.

The exemption denial forced her to quit work immediately and prevented her from getting any other job with a licensed agency. CILS challenged the Department’s action through an administrative hearing process, and was able to obtain a three-year conditional exemption for her that becomes permanent at the end of the three years. She was able to return to work for a licensed agency immediately.

Unsealing Birth Records

A young man contacted CILS for help unsealing his original birth records. He had been adopted by a non-Indian family forty years earlier. CILS drafted a petition to unseal birth records. The client filed these documents, gaining access to his original birth records which he then in turn used to enroll in a Yaqui tribe. The client contacted CILS to share the good news and express his gratitude for our help reconnecting him with his family and Tribe.
Staff

Principal Office
Dorothy Alther, Executive Director
Robert Glen Bryson, Controller
Patricia De La Cruz-Lynas, Director of Administration
Tara Edmiston, Executive Assistant
Nicole Scott, Director of Marketing and Development
Davina Whitethorne, Executive Administrative Assistant

Bishop Office
Jasmine Andreas, Directing Attorney*
Kylee Andreas, Administrative Assistant
Adora Bissonette, Legal/Administrative Assistant
Anna Hohag, Legal Fellow

Escondido Office
Rachel Bilodeau, Legal Secretary
Susan Dalati, DV Staff Attorney
Summer Morales, Intake Advocate
Yvette Morales, DV Legal Advocate
Mark Radoff, Senior Staff Attorney
Mark Vezzola, Directing Attorney

Eureka Office
Denise Bareilles, Directing Attorney
Tamara Honrado, Staff Attorney
Laura Svoboda, Advocate

Sacramento Office
Blake Atkerson, Staff Attorney*
Sonia Montero, Advocate
Jedediah Parr, Directing Attorney
Jay Petersen, Senior Staff Attorney
Kimberly White, Legal/Administrative Assistant

Board

Board Chairperson
Mark Romero
Mesa Grande Band of Mission Indians

Board Vice-Chairperson
Joe Ayala
State Bar Appointee

Northern Region
André Cramblit, Karuk Tribe of California
Jessica Goodrow, Round Valley Indian Tribes
Victorio Shaw, Hoopa Valley Tribe
Jessica Warne, Walaki, Numsoos & Cahuilla

Southern Region
Mercedes Amavisca, Mesa Grande Band of Mission Indians
Mark Romero, Mesa Grande Band of Mission Indians

State Bar Appointees
Joe Ayala
John Hueston
Cary Lowe
Sheila Quinlan

* asterisk indicates left CILS in 2017
DONATIONS and Acknowledgements

CILS’ primary source of funding is through grants from the Legal Services Corporation and the State Bar of California. CILS also receives funding from the Bureau of Justice Assistance grant targeted to assist tribes with developing tribal justice systems. Smaller grants subsidize overall legal aid services and allow our Bishop Office to serve that area’s senior population. Of equal importance is CILS’ contract work in the fields of economic development, tribal government services and child dependency cases, all of which help CILS fulfill its mission.

CILS CONTRIBUTORS

CILS would like to thank the following contributors whose donations allow the organization to continue moving forward in advocating for the needs of California Native Americans and Indian Tribes.

Dorothy Alther
Kylee Andreas
Agua Caliente Band
Sharon Wylie &
Peter Armstrong
Joe Ayala
Denise Bareilles
Adora Bissonette
Blue Shield Foundation
Glen and Teresa Bryson
Cabazon Band
California Nations Indian Gaming Association
Campo Band
André Cramblit
Susan Dalati
Greg and Patricia De La Cruz-Lynas
Patti Dixon
Edison International
City of Escondido
Graton Rancheria
Anna Hohag
Tamara Honrado
John Hueston
Cheyānina Jaffke
Rachel Joseph
George and Grace Lee
Leisure Capital Management
Hampsonn-Medina
Family Fund
Carmen and Edward Mojado
Sonia Montero
Summer Morales
Jedd Parr
Pechanga Band
Sheila Quinlan
Rincon Band
San Diego County Supervisor
Dave Robert’s Office
Santa Ynez Band
Nicole Scott
David Singleton
Southern California Tribal Chairman’s Association
Larry Stidham
Laura Svoboda
Sycuan Band
Tarbell Family Foundation
Tolowa Deen-ni Nation
Twenty-Nine Palms Band
Mark Vezzola
Hermine Weyer
Davina Whitethorne
And many anonymous donors

Donate Today: Invest in California Indian Legal Services

Contributions to CILS are tax deductible as allowed by law. CILS is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization. Thank you for choosing to help further our mission to serve California Indian communities through your generous contributions. Contact our Development Director at info@calindian.org for more information.