

Human trafficking to be discussed at ICWA Conference Aug. 13 at Choctaw

August 11, 2015

Human trafficking will be among the topics discussed during the Fifth Annual Indian Child Welfare Conference on Aug. 13 at the Silver Star Convention Center at Choctaw, Mississippi.

This year's conference theme is Pathways to Justice for Native American Children. Other discussions will include tribal-state collaboration and ethical principles for working with federally recognized Indian tribes.

The 8:30 a.m. opening ceremony will include the National Anthem, sung by Darian Tubby in the Choctaw language. Welcoming remarks will begin at 9 a.m. from Chief Phyllis J. Anderson of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, Mississippi Court of Appeals Presiding Judge T. Kenneth Griffis, and Department of Human Services Deputy Executive Director Mark Smith.

Victoria Sweet of Reno, program attorney at the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, will give the keynote address at 9:30 a.m. Sweet is expected to discuss human trafficking and victimization.

Special Assistant Attorney General Pat McNamara of the Bureau of Victim Assistance is scheduled to speak at 10:45 a.m. McNamara is coordinator for the Mississippi Human Trafficking Act and the newly formed Encourage Sexual Assault ARREST program. The program's goal is to increase arrests, prosecutions and convictions in Mississippi courts.

The Choctaw Elder Dancers will perform during lunch.

At 1 p.m., Michigan judges Michael Petoskey and Timothy Connors will discuss collaboration between tribal and state courts. Petoskey has served as a judge of various tribal courts for almost 30 years, most recently as chief judge of the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi. Connors, a state trial judge for 24 years, is committee chair of Tribal - State Court Relations of the Michigan Judges Association.

The ethics panel discussion will begin at 2:45 p.m. Choctaw Tribal Assistant Attorney General Cheryl Hamby will moderate a panel that will include Rankin County and Youth Court Judge Thomas Broome, Mississippi Jurist in Residence John Hudson and Mississippi Assistant Attorney General Earl Scales.

The conference is a collaborative effort among the Tribal Courts of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, the Mississippi Administrative Office of Courts, the Mississippi Judicial College, the state Department of Human Services, Casey Family Programs and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. The annual conference began five years ago as an effort to educate state judges and social workers on the requirements of the Indian Child Welfare Act, ICWA. The conference brings together state and tribal judges, court staff and social workers. Tribal judges from across the country are expected to attend.

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