

Alaska Dispatch News

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Main Image:

Court Judge Caseloads 01.jpg ^[2]

The Alaska Department of Law will give out about \$2.4 million next year for civil cases resolved against the state in 2015, millions less than the previous appropriation.

Portioning out payments for settlements and judgments against the state is a routine practice carried out during Alaska's legislative session. Lawmakers appropriate money from the general fund to pay for the cases.

This year, legislators are being asked to earmark the money for four cases, three of which will take the bulk of the funds. The three cases involve Alaska Native voting rights, gay marriage and the proposed Pebble mine.

A total of \$1.89 million pays for attorney fees between the state and Alaska Native plaintiffs who sued in federal court over the translation of voting materials. The parties reached a settlement ^[3] in September that called for the Division of Elections in the Alaska lieutenant governor's office to hire a full-time employee to administer language assistance.

The money allocated for the three major cases are attorney fees the state has to pay to plaintiffs, said Law Department spokesperson Cori Mills.

The second largest payment involved a group called Nunamta Aulukestai, which is fighting the proposed Pebble mine. The department owes the group \$350,000, according to the state Office of Management and Budget.

The group consisted of 10 Bristol Bay tribes, their sister village corporations and four individuals including former first lady Bella Hammond and state constitutional convention delegate Vic Fischer. The Alaska Supreme Court ruled in the group's favor ^[4] in May on two cases. The plaintiffs argued in the underlying case that the state Department of Natural Resources violated the Alaska Constitution by failing to give public notice; the second case centered on recovering fees and court costs.

In the same-sex marriage case, a federal judge ordered the state in April to reimburse court costs ^[5] to the plaintiffs after the state lost the case when U.S. District Court Judge Timothy Burgess overturned Alaska's constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage.

According to the budget office, the state will pay \$164,139. That's less than the \$258,000 plaintiffs requested.

Another \$7,950 is going toward a case involving the Department of Health and Social Services.

Last year, the Legislature appropriated \$8.4 million ^[6] to pay settlements and judgments.

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