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NEWS RELEASE
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Alaska Legal Services Corporation Launches Legal Learning Lab and Earned Income Tax Credit Project

FAIRBANKS — Alaska Legal Services Corporation's Fairbanks office will hold an open house to launch its new Legal Learning Lab from 4:30 to 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday, February 10.

Funded by a grant from the Beaumont Foundation of America, the Legal Learning Lab is designed for low-income residents who do not have access to computers, word processing, or the Internet. The lab, which is staffed at all times, serves as an access point where visitors can utilize the library of self-help legal information at www.AlaskaLawHelp.org, a statewide web site created by ALSC and a number of legal and social services providers, as well as the Alaska Court System's extensive collection of online forms and instructions.

The Legal Learning Lab serves as a site where low-income wage earners can prepare their tax returns, claim the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), and e-file their returns for free. For tax year 2003, the EITC can return up to \$4,204 per family to low-income wage earners. While the tax credit puts money back into the pockets of low-income earners, many people who might otherwise receive the credit either don't know about it or have no way to claim it without paying for tax preparation assistance.

In partnership with the Legal Aid Society of Orange County, California, which developed an online tax preparation module called I-CAN! EIC, the Fairbanks office has set up a pilot project that offers tax assistance to members of the low-income and senior community. ALSC's

Fairbanks office is an AARP Tax-Aide site, with assistance provided to income-eligible filers on an appointment-only basis by an ALSC attorney with expertise in tax issues.

The I-CAN! EIC online tax preparation module used in the Legal Learning Lab is written at the fifth grade level, is offered in English and in Spanish, and allows low-income filers with limited computer proficiency to successfully complete their own federal tax returns for free. Trained lab monitors will provide assistance with the use of the computers and printer. The module can also be accessed at www.icanefile.org from any computer with an Internet connection and a printer.

Low-income individuals who seek assistance from ALSC with tax preparation need to fill out an application and tax questionnaire. Applicants will be contacted to set up an appointment, either to use the I-CAN! EIC module in the Legal Learning Lab or to consult with ALSC's tax attorney. Applications and questionnaires can be picked up at ALSC's Fairbanks office at 1648 Cushman, Suite 300, from 9 a.m. to 12 noon and 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday or at the open house. The application can be obtained through the mail by calling ALSC at 907-452-5181 .