"The Saint Regis Mohawk Tribal Council and Tribal Court are pleased to announce the Community Engagement phase of an assessment of the Tribe's justice system within the context of justice in the Akwesasne community. Our goal is to develop a long-term strategic plan in 2023. The justice assessment is based on a Coordinated Tribal Assistance Solicitation (CTAS) grant the Tribal Court received from the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance in late 2020. The project consists of three phases. Phase 1 was the development of a Justice Strategy Advisory Board to identify stakeholders. Phase 2 is a needs assessment and community engagement to gain community members' voices. Phase 3 will focus on the development of a long-term (minimum 10 years) Strategic Plan to address the identified needs and recommend steps to move forward. In addition to possible exercise of criminal jurisdiction, other areas already under study are expanded collaboration in Akwesasne justice systems with Mohawk Council of Akwesasne programs; creation of an Elder Code to help families protect elders from abuse through training and prevention; trauma-informed justice reform to protect Domestic Violence survivors and streamline the protective order process and help families regain strength; a new comprehensive Youth Justice approach to identify why some youth do not remain in school or get into the justice systems, and to engage youth and elders in an early, restorative process; and development of a community-based program to help Mohawk men and women reenter the community after time in jail, prison, or treatment to reduce damage to families, reduce return to crime and prison, and thereby promote public safety.

“This project is important to the community because it is in itself an expression of inherent sovereignty,” said Chief Judge Carrie Garrow. “2023 will mark 75 years of State criminal jurisdiction in our territory. The community will have the opportunity to participate in focus groups and a survey which will be well-advertised. The process is expected to recommend whether or not the Tribe should go forward to exercise inherent criminal authority progressively and selectively by community need, or to the fullest extent allowed under the Violence Against Women Acts of 2013 and 2022, and importantly, how we can employ additional civil and traditional methods of alternative dispute resolution that protect the community while promoting return of the offender to a good mind.”

Akwesasne is not alone in assessing its justice system – approximately one dozen tribes are engaged in similar assessments from 2020-2023, and over 25 additional tribes have completed the process. The Advisory Board is comprised of tribal officials of the SRMT and Mohawk Council of Akwesasne governments, guided by non-governmental organizations, traditional components, and certain invited off-territory partners. The Justice Assessment project is companion to expansion of the Tribal Court’s inherent and coordinated jurisdiction in the cross-border Healing to Wellness (Drug) Court Team, Child Support Enforcement authority, a Family Treatment Court program, and the developing remainder of the Family Court that will address the needs of children, elders, women, men, LGBTQ+ persons, and families in Akwesasne.

Keep an eye on the Tribe’s website and Facebook page! If you have questions, you can contact the Tribal Court at tribal.courts@srmt-nsn.gov or 518-358-6300 or find more information on the Tribal Court website. https://www.srmt-nsn.gov/tribal_court.