

**STATEMENT  
OF  
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BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS  
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
BEFORE THE  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES  
SUBCOMMITTEE FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF THE UNITED STATES  
OVERSIGHT HEARING “REVIEWING THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION’S  
APPROACH TO THE MMIW CRISIS”**

**September 11, 2019**

Good morning Chairman Gallego, Ranking Member Cook, and Members of the Subcommittee. My name is Charles Addington, and I am the Deputy Bureau Director – Office of Justice Services (OJS), Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), at the Department of the Interior (Department). Thank you for the opportunity to present a statement on behalf of the Department regarding the crisis confronting our American Indians and Alaska Natives (AIAN) communities, which is Missing and Murdered AIAN (Missing and Murdered Indigenous People or MMIP). The Department has made it a priority to address this crisis head-on. My testimony will reflect the current work of the Department.

As you are aware, American Indians and Alaska Natives are two and a half times more likely to experience violent crimes and at least two times more likely to experience rape or sexual assault crimes in comparison to all other ethnicities, according to the Department of Justice (DOJ) Bureau of Justice Statistics. With AIAN facing disproportionately high levels of violence across the country, more can be done to support meaningful efforts to address these high rates in Indian Country.

The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and the Tribal Law and Order Act (TLOA) have helped bring attention to the high rate of violence in Indian Country and the gaps in identifying crime trends in Indian Country. The Department is coordinating with other Federal partners to strengthen crime data reporting. However, significant gaps in data that exacerbate the MMIP crisis remain. These challenges are present across multiple sectors but are particularly problematic in the context of criminal justice, in which Federal, state, tribal, and local governments share responsibilities. It is important to continue efforts to build accurate data and provide Congress, the public, and, most importantly, tribes, with the information needed to identify and analyze the criminal justice needs in Indian Country to better address this crisis.

These data gaps impact how law enforcement officials handle or follow up on cases. Underreporting, racial misclassification, potential gender or racial bias, and a lack of law enforcement resources required to follow through and close out cases appropriately, are just some of the challenges faced when working on MMIP cases.

In 2017, the Urban Indian Health Institute surveyed 71 cities across the U.S. to collect data on murdered and missing indigenous women and girls in urban settings. The Institute's survey and analysis of the collected data culminated in their 2018 report, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, which highlights some of the challenges of data collection with respect to AIAN populations in urban centers.

For Indian Country, BIA OJS collects monthly crime statistics from Tribal and BIA law enforcement programs and submits the information to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) each quarter. The information collected is specific to the data required for the FBI Uniform Crime Report (UCR), which currently does not track missing persons or domestic violence statistics.

As the UCR does not collect missing persons data, BIA OJS has partnered with DOJ's National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs), a program of the National Institute of Justice, to create new data fields in their system to specifically capture tribal affiliation data. The new fields were implemented and went live in late February 2019. This additional data will assist law enforcement agencies across jurisdictions with tracking and investigating missing persons throughout the country.

Going forward, better inter-agency coordination and cooperation is needed to improve the integrity of the data collected. While it is widely believed that there may be a correlation between opioid and other narcotics abuse, human trafficking, domestic violence, and MMIP, without sufficient data, it is difficult to draw solid conclusions. Federal agencies must develop concrete solutions to improve agency data collection to ensure these crimes are being tracked and investigated appropriately so that any trends can be properly identified and addressed. For example, adding the above listed types of incidents to the data collected by DOJ, BIA, and tribal and other cooperating law enforcement agencies is a positive step towards addressing the data collection problem.

BIA OJS has also begun efforts to raise awareness and provide training to Indian Country law enforcement personnel. In January 2018, the BIA Indian Police Academy (IPA) began discussions with the National Criminal Justice Training Center (NCJTC) on collaborating to create joint training programs for cold case investigations, long-term missing investigations, and child abduction investigations for use throughout Indian Country. The BIA OJS also continues to assess the need for greater training opportunities in the northern tier states to better support Indian Country Officers and Agents.

To specifically address the missing persons aspect of this issue, in 2018 the BIA-IPA launched human trafficking courses in the Indian Country Police Officer Training Program; the Basic Police Officer Bridge Training Program; and the Indian Country Criminal Investigator Training Program (a joint FBI, BIA, and Tribal attended program).

In February 2018, the NCJTC and BIA-IPA identified dates and locations for three pilot training programs on Advanced Cold Case Long Term Missing Investigations in Montana and North Dakota. The three training programs were held at Blackfeet, Montana and New Town, North Dakota. A total of 117 personnel were trained in these programs. The BIA-IPA is also scheduled to participate in the assessment of an NCJTC project to create a web/mobile-capable investigative guide for tribal first responders on endangered, missing, and abducted persons.

In addition to the focused efforts of BIA OJS, my office has been directly engaged in three listening sessions within Indian Country and Alaska since June. Participation has included DOI leadership, the Domestic Policy Council, the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Administration for Native Americans, and DOJ.

In May, an inaugural roundtable was hosted by the Gila River Indian Community in Sacaton, Arizona. With the leadership of Governor Stephen Lewis, we were able to convene tribal leadership, the Administration and other stakeholders to engage in a discussion on, “Reclaiming Our Native Communities.” In August, we took our “Reclaiming Our Native Communities” roundtable to Bethel and Nome, Alaska to hear from Alaska Native Communities. These face-to-face discussions between the Trump Administration and tribal leaders from throughout the United States highlight the Department’s commitment to promoting public safety in Indian Country and Alaska Native villages.

These engagements were well received by all tribal leaders in attendance. Many tribal leaders agreed that a holistic, multi-faceted approach to building safe and secure communities is necessary to address the particular criminal issues that plague Indian Country and Alaska Native villages. Broadband and improved communications development were perceived by many tribal leaders as a necessary support structure to promote critical response to crime and emergency situations. Tribal leaders also advocated for infrastructure for housing, community water and sewer, improved law enforcement facilities, training, and capacity building for tribal courts and justice systems to promote self-determined safety protocols within tribal communities.

The Trump Administration remains committed to partnering with American Indian and Alaska Native tribal leadership, communities and other appropriate stakeholders to better ensure safety and economic prosperity in Indian Country. It is imperative that we continue to work in partnership and create safe communities and arrest the trend of issues plaguing our Native communities.

I look forward to working with members of this Subcommittee and Congress to address this important issue.

I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.