

October 25, 2021

Governor Mike Dunleavy  
Alaska State Capitol, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
PO Box 110001  
Juneau, AK 99811

Sent Via Electronic Mail

Dear Governor Dunleavy,

We are writing to you again about an important issue that has been a concern and ignored for far too long – we need your leadership and partnership to protect our Alaska Native women, girls and two-spirit relatives. We thank you in advance for your review of recommendations listed below and request a response at your earliest opportunity. The month of October is designated as Domestic Violence Awareness month and what better way to recognize the gender-based violence that disproportionately targets American Indian and Alaska Native women, girls, people and two-spirit individuals than to act now to send a clear message that such violence will no longer be tolerated by addressing this issue.

### **Background of the Issue**

There is a nationwide crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit relatives (MMIWG2S). The Center for Disease Control and Prevention has reported that murder is the third-leading cause of death among American Indian and Alaska Native women and that rates of violence on reservations and rural areas can be up to ten times higher than the national average.<sup>1</sup> We are experiencing too many tragedies across our state and continue to see insufficient action by our state and law enforcement to adequately address this crisis.

In a study by the Urban Indian Health Institute (UIHI), Alaska as a state ranks fourth in the nation for the highest number of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls cases with Anchorage listed as having the third highest number of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in cities across the US.<sup>2</sup> These statistics are disturbing and heart breaking on many levels. You have the power to make change, to make a difference

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<sup>1</sup> Echo-Hawk, A. (2018). Our Bodies, Our Stories: Sexual Violence Among Native Women in Seattle, WA.

<sup>2</sup> Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Report, Urban Indian Health Institute, November 14, 2018.

and to protect the lives of our Alaska Native women and girls, and all Alaskans who are experiencing violence in their own homes. The Violence Policy Center found that in 2017 Alaska ranked first with the highest homicide rate among female victims killed by male offenders – three times the national average. In this same report, it found that American Indian and Alaskan Native females were murdered at a higher rate than white females.<sup>3</sup> We need change now.

It is widely known the reported data does not capture the full extent of our crisis. Data for Indigenous Justice, an Alaska based non-profit, continues to do research in Alaska and released a new report – [We Are Calling to You](#) - in February 2021 sharing an additional 229 Indigenous women and girls who have been missing or murdered, and who were not a part of the UIHI report.<sup>4</sup>

“There is so much work to be done. We need everyone to be a part of the solution in responding to this call for justice. As an Indigenous led effort, we share our work so our communities can build, co-create, and rise together. We invite allies to support Indigenous people's efforts, in relational solidarity, against colonial systems contributing to this issue. Throughout the work we have ahead, we know the transformational healing that must take place if we are to realize the justice we seek. Let's move together from a place of love, be courageous about speaking our truths, and deliberate in actions for justice,” Dr. Charlene Aqpik Apok, Executive Director, Data for Indigenous Justice.

We are here to advocate for the wellness and protection of Alaska Native peoples. We need partners across the state from the Governor's office to troopers and police, to nonprofits, Tribes, and communities to come together and be the voice for those who are being silenced through these acts of violence. We are reaching out to seek your assistance and leadership to help us address the preventable violence happening in our state, to stand up for Alaska Native women and children, and to send a clear message that Alaska can become a safe place for everyone.

**Requested Action by your Administration is Needed.**

We are urging your support to include funding in the state operating budget to investigate and take real actions to address the MMIWG2S crisis and to continue this funding as long as it is needed. We need the Department of Public Safety and the

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<sup>3</sup> Violence Policy Center. Report: When Men Murder Women. <https://vpc.org/studies/wmmw2019.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Data for Indigenous Justice. <https://dataforindigenousjustice.com/we-are-calling-to-you/>

Department of Law to have the resources and the ability to work together to address this crisis – the lack of data is dire and the need for state special investigations is critical.

**We urge your support to include funding in the state operating budget for the following:**

- Specific funding to support at least two new investigators in the Department of Public Safety for cases of MMIWG2S and to continue this funding as long as it is needed;
- Funding for parallel state positions to the Federal Cold Case Investigation Unit so we can bring closure to families of the victims who have been murdered and who are missing. It was stated in a House State Affairs hearing in 2019 that administrative support is also severely underfunded and that cases are not being pursued because of the lack of digital records and cases needing many hours of attention to organize the casework;
- Funding of at least \$500,000 to the Criminal Division at the Department of Law to prosecute cases of MMIWG2S;
- Data system upgrades for law enforcement – ABSIN, RMS to improve tracking and reporting across systems;
- Grant funding for Tribal Governments for self-determined resources to address the MMIWG2S crisis in their communities;
- Mandatory Cultural trainings and funding to support the trainings in all state agencies led by Indigenous Organizations – if we are to end systemic racism and build relationships across the board it is important there is true understanding of the Indigenous people and culture to better our state as a whole;
- Increase funding and support for Village Public Safety Officers.

**We also need legislation enacted to do the following, but not limited to:**

- Require the Department of Public Safety to conduct a study to determine how to increase state criminal justice protective and investigative resources for reporting and identifying missing and murdered Indigenous women in the state;
- Require training for all public safety officials – troopers, local police, village public safety officers - in government relations with Tribes, racial equity and culture;

- Establish a fatality review commission that will specifically review missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and two spirit relatives cases;
- Establish a grant program for Tribes that creates annual non-competitive direct funding to communities to address MMIWG2S and tribal public safety for self-determined local needs;
- Requirements for interagency cooperation to establish state protocols for missing persons;
- Audits and reporting on law enforcement conducting thorough investigations;
- Review of case management by law enforcement;
- Review of prosecution/judicial outcomes of homicides;
- Direct the Police Standards Council to work with federally recognized Tribes;
- Require the Department of Public Safety to write best practices for how to investigate a missing persons report involving Indigenous women;
- Create two liaison positions within the Department of Public Safety to act as liaisons between law enforcement agencies and federally recognized Tribes to investigate cases involving missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls;
- Update the outdated 911 system to ensure all communities across Alaska have the same access to this critical service. Alaska's state 911 system is roughly 30 years behind other states and one of three states without a unified system. Among the flaws of the system, emergency calls from cell phones do not track caller locations throughout most of the state.

The National Crime Information Center reports that, in 2016, there were 5,712 reports of missing American Indian and Alaska Native women and girls, though the US Department of Justice's federal missing persons database (NamUs) only logged 116 cases. We know that these numbers are incomplete and that Alaska rural communities haven't been fully represented in this research. As of August 2021, Alaska has the most unresolved missing person's cases among American Indian and Alaska Native cases, at 292, with Oklahoma second with 79-- these numbers are unacceptable.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> American Indian/Alaska Native Missing Persons Cases.  
[https://namus.nij.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh3336/files/media/document/namus-stats-ai\\_an-report-august-2021.pdf](https://namus.nij.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh3336/files/media/document/namus-stats-ai_an-report-august-2021.pdf)

## Conclusion

It is imperative that we have a collective effort to address the safety of our people. It is not just the responsibility of our state government, but of our Tribes, organizations, and individuals to work together.

We appreciate your consideration and hope that we can work together to solve this crisis. Please do not hesitate to contact us, we stand ready and able to help in any way possible.

Gunalchéesh/Háw'aa/Quyana/Mahsi' Choo/Baasee'/Maasee'/Dogedinh/Thank you,

Kendra Kloster  
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Native Peoples Action



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Cc:

Mr. James E. Cockrell, Commissioner of Public Safety  
Mr. Treg R. Taylor, Attorney General  
Mr. Adam Crum, Commissioner of Health and Social Services  
Neil Steininger, OMB Director  
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Alaska Native Justice Center  
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