

TESTIMONY OF DARON T. CARREIRO
OFFICE OF TRIBAL JUSTICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES
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Good morning, Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee. My name is Daron Carreiro. I am the Acting Director of the Office of Tribal Justice. Thank you for inviting me here to speak with you today about the Department of Justice's ongoing work to tackle the missing or murdered Indigenous people (MMIP) crisis and other pressing public safety challenges that continue to disproportionately impact American Indian and Alaska Native communities. The Department's efforts to partner with Tribes to address violent crime in Tribal communities, including MMIP, are years-long and Department-wide. Nonetheless, the Department recognizes that more must be done across the federal government and in communication, coordination, and collaboration with our federal and Tribal partners to resolve the longstanding public safety issues within Tribal communities.

Background

The Department has continued to enhance its efforts to address MMIP issues for more than five years. In 2019, the Department partnered with the Department of the Interior and the Department of Health and Human Services under the Operation Lady Justice Task Force, a two-year task force established by Executive Order 13898 that sunsetted in 2021. Through the Task Force and related work, the Department participated in Tribal consultations, developed best practices guides and resources for Tribal communities and law enforcement, and deployed 11 MMIP Coordinators to assist Tribal communities within 11 federal judicial districts in developing and implementing Tribal Community Response Plans (TCRPs).

Executive Order 14053 and the Department's MMIP Steering Committee

President Biden's 2021 Executive Order 14053 was developed to build on the work of Operation Lady Justice and ongoing work across the executive branch. EO 14053 included broader aims, including the improvement of public safety and criminal justice in American Indian and Alaska Native communities in addition to addressing issues of MMIP, and directed the Department, along with the Departments of the Interior, Health and Human Services, and Homeland Security, to work together with Tribal nations to address the persistent public safety issues within Tribal communities. The Department, along with the Department of the Interior, released a required report to the White House in July 2022, which outlined the Department's coordinated and comprehensive federal law enforcement strategy to address violent crime, including MMIP cases, in Tribal communities.

To assist in developing this strategy and to prepare for future work, the Department launched the Steering Committee to Address the Crisis of Missing or Murdered Indigenous Persons in November 2021. The Steering Committee, which included policy, law enforcement,

and grant-making components within the Department, was tasked—in close coordination and consultation with Tribal leaders and stakeholders—with reviewing the Department’s relevant guidance, policies, and practices to improve the law enforcement and MMIP response in Tribal communities. Following the Steering Committee’s review, the Deputy Attorney General issued a directive to all United States Attorneys and law enforcement component heads addressing public safety in Indian Country. The directive required all United States Attorneys with Indian Country jurisdiction to update and develop new plans to address public safety in Indian Country to include MMIP.

The Steering Committee continues to evaluate and enhance existing efforts to support coordinated federal law enforcement response in Tribal communities, including developing strategies to support victims and their families in federal matters; enhancing coordination with and support for the Department’s Tribal, state, and local partners; building on the Department’s efforts to improve data collection, data access and sharing, and education and outreach about federal databases; and assessing how the Department can best address the root causes of MMIP cases by supporting intervention and prevention efforts within Tribal communities.

Congressional interest in these issues has been critical to agency progress over the years and continues to be a key component to focusing our efforts and resources to address public safety, including MMIP. The passage of Savanna’s Act and the Not Invisible Act have been important catalysts to agency efforts since 2020. MMIP is not an issue that can be addressed by a single agency, so the Department is especially grateful for the partnerships that enable our progress. Partnership with the Tribes, sister agencies, Congress, as well as state and local agencies is fundamental to the Department’s ongoing efforts.

The NIAC’s Report and Recommendations and the Department’s Response

On May 5, 2022, as mandated by the Not Invisible Act of 2019, the Secretary of the Interior announced the members of the Not Invisible Act Commission (NIAC), a commission created to make recommendations to the Department of the Interior and the Department of Justice to improve intergovernmental coordination and establish best practices for state-Tribal-federal law enforcement to combat the epidemic of missing persons, murder, and trafficking of American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/ANs). The NIAC included individuals who are experts in or are dedicated to addressing the MMIP crisis, including Tribal officials, law enforcement personnel, mental health professionals, victim advocates, scholars, survivors, and family members of victims. Six Department employees were named as members of the NIAC. Through its significant work hearing from survivors, family members of victims, scholars, law enforcement personnel, and others, the NIAC developed comprehensive recommendations to address the MMIP crisis.

On November 1, 2023, the Department and the Department of the Interior received the NIAC’s final report, entitled “Not One More: Findings and Recommendations of the Not Invisible Act Commission.” Of the more than 300 recommendations included in the final report, 148 recommendations were directed to the Department. In a March 2024 joint response with the Department of the Interior, the Department made a variety of commitments. In addition to continuing to work to address both MMIP and human trafficking and provide effective services to survivors of crimes, the Department committed to the following:

- Collaborating more closely with our federal partners to align and coordinate our efforts to address MMIP and human trafficking;
- Exploring the possibility of new studies on the underlying causes of MMIP and human trafficking, reducing barriers to accessing Department resources, and examining data sharing opportunities with healthcare systems;
- Further engaging with Tribes to improve Department funding models;
- Working with Tribes and advocates to improve the use of social media and engage effectively with media;
- Reviewing existing practices and protocols to improve communication with families;
- Convening multi-jurisdictional working groups to further address the underlying factors that lead to youth voluntarily going missing; and
- Implementing fully our MMIP Regional Outreach Program, which is discussed in more detail below.

The Department’s response to the NIAC report and recommendations and commitments made therein are a cornerstone of the Department’s work to assist Tribes to address public safety and MMIP issues within Tribal communities. The Department is working through the previously established MMIP Steering Committee to oversee its response to the MMIP crisis and implement the commitments made in the NIAC response. In fulfilling these commitments, the Department acknowledges that it must communicate, coordinate, and collaborate closely with Tribal partners, amongst federal agencies, and across jurisdictions to ensure success.

Whole-of-the-Department Approach to Address MMIP Issues

The Department takes a whole-of-the-Department approach to honor its commitments to Tribal communities and address the MMIP and greater public safety crises within Tribal communities. The Department has engaged its policy, law enforcement, and grant-making components to work closely with Tribal partners, across federal agencies, and across jurisdictions. Outlined below are highlights of the work that has been done and is currently being completed across the Department to address the MMIP crisis.

The Department’s MMIP Regional Outreach Program

In response to feedback received during Tribal listening sessions, the Department established the MMIP Regional Outreach Program in June 2023 to build upon the 2020 MMIP Coordinator program. The program endeavors to aid in the prevention and response to MMIP through the permanent placement of five MMIP Assistant United States Attorneys (AUSAs) and five MMIP coordinators in five designated regions across the United States. In close coordination with United States Attorneys’ Offices and Tribal, state, and local governmental and non-governmental partners, the regional program works to address and combat MMIP issues through three core areas: cases, outreach, and training. Currently, eight of ten are in place to serve MMIP Regional AUSAs, and MMIP Regional Coordinators are in place to serve the five designated regions. Recent work through the program includes coordination with the Department of Interior’s Bureau of Indian Affairs Missing and Murdered Unit (MMU), prosecutions and case coordination in MMIP-related cases, participation in and coordination with Tribal, state, and local MMIP task

forces, coordination with and outreach to Tribal, state, and local victim organizations, and training and assistance in the development of TCRPs in Indian Country.

Tribal Special Assistant United States Attorneys

The NIAC recommended that the Department expand the designation of Tribal Special Assistant United States Attorneys (Tribal SAUSAs), recognizing the importance of these cross-designated Tribal prosecutors in improving coordination and prosecution efforts related to violent crime offenses such as domestic violence and sexual assault, which are often precursors to MMIP-related events. The Department encourages U.S. Attorneys' Offices (USAOs) to integrate Tribal SAUSAs into regular operations to increase the likelihood that every violent offense that is appropriate for prosecution is prosecuted in either federal or Tribal court, or both. In addition, DOJ grantmaking components—including the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW)—have funded grants to Tribes to hire prosecutors, who are identified in collaboration with their local USAOs, to be designated as SAUSAs. Tribal SAUSAs are trained in federal law, procedure, and investigative techniques and complement the work of Tribal Liaisons and Indian Country prosecutors to strengthen relationships between Tribes and USAOs. As resources allow, the Department is committed to expanding this successful model.

Safe Trails Task Forces

The FBI collaborates with Tribal law enforcement each day to address violent crime, including MMIP. Much of this FBI collaboration occurs through the Safe Trails Task Force (STTF) program and through the development of partnerships in areas where there are no STTFs. The FBI currently leads 26 Safe Trails Task Forces (STTFs). Established in 1994, STTFs consist of teams of local, state, Tribal, and federal law enforcement partners dedicated to enforcement of federal law in and around reservation lands and Tribal communities. The STTF model enhances law enforcement in Indian Country by maximizing investigative and prosecutorial collaboration across jurisdictions. STTFs combat the most violent crimes and the most dangerous offenders in Indian Country through enforcement of the Major Crimes Act, including crimes that have led to the MMIP crisis we see in Native communities today. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2024, the FBI created two additional STTFs to address the increasing violent crime threat in Indian Country. In the same time period, the FBI Indian Country Crime and International Violent Crime units partnered with the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) to establish a DEA Liaison to each of the FBI's 26 Safe Trails Task Forces. The DEA Liaison will partner with the STTFs going forward to conduct joint investigations to combat drug trafficking in Tribal communities.

FBI Operation Not Forgotten

In 2023 and 2024, for three months each summer, the FBI has surged resources into Indian Country through "Operation Not Forgotten" to focus on pending, unresolved cases. Cases prioritized in this surge effort included investigations of child physical and sexual abuse, child sexual abuse material, serious violent assaults, domestic violence, and death investigations. Operation Not Forgotten has produced excellent results, demonstrating what is achievable when federal resources are devoted to Indian Country.

For the 2024 operation, 51 FBI personnel were deployed in support of this operation. Those personnel included 47 Special Agents and 4 Intelligence personnel. For the first time in 2024, this surge was a joint operation with the Department of the Interior's Office of Justice Services and MMU. The joint nature of this operation significantly strengthened the federal effort and temporarily ameliorated the impact on public safety from a significantly underfunded law enforcement need in Indian Country. As a result of this surge effort, over 300 cases received investigative assistance, focusing on those cases with the most vulnerable victims, including child physical and sexual abuse, serious violent assaults, and domestic violence and death investigations. In just three months, Operation Not Forgotten led to over 40 arrests; 11 indictments; the identification and recovery of 9 child victims from situations of abuse or neglect; and over 400 victims and next-of-kin impacted by these cases being provided support by FBI victim service specialists.

U.S. Marshals (USMS) National Missing Indigenous Children Initiative

In furtherance of the DOJ's MMIP efforts, the USMS is piloting the *Missing Indigenous Children Initiative* (MICI). This initiative commenced on October 1, 2024, and will last throughout FY 2025, ending on September 30, 2025. This Initiative has four primary goals:

1. Demonstrate the USMS's commitment to underserved Indigenous communities throughout the United States;
2. Promote the missing child program and create lasting partnerships with Tribal law enforcement to better position Tribal law enforcement and the USMS to locate future missing Indigenous children;
3. Recover high-risk missing Indigenous children, remove them from dangerous situations, and facilitate victim services to help reduce the potential for future victimization; and
4. Locate long-term missing Indigenous children who have reached the age of majority and update national databases accordingly.

On May 6, 2024, the USMS Missing Child Unit (MCU) conducted community outreach at the Newewaipaipian Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women conference in Elko, NV, and on August 27, 2024, at the Native American Law Enforcement Conference in Las Vegas, NV.

In addition, during August and September 2024, the USMS in the Northern District of Oklahoma conducted Operation Relentless Search to assist Tribal law enforcement agencies with missing child investigations. The goal was to locate missing Indigenous children who were at risk of trafficking or other harm. As a result, five children who were at high-risk of endangerment were safely recovered and an additional three children were located in safe locations and allowed to remain at the direction of Tribal authorities.

On October 19, 2024, MCU hosted a table at the 2024 New Mexico Missing Person's Day held in Shiprock, NM. The event, hosted by the New Mexico Department of Public Safety, brought in law enforcement, Human & Social Services, non-profit organizations, as well as the New Mexico Secretary of Indian Affairs and other representatives from the New Mexico Indian Affairs Department. Throughout the day, families from New Mexico attended the event to learn about resources for those who have a loved one who has gone missing.

Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) MMIP Internal Detail

To support MMIP investigations and prosecutions involving fire as a weapon, gun violence, or the recovery of firearm(s), ammunition and/or ballistic evidence, the Department's Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives dedicated a special agent to assist federal and Tribal law enforcement in the review and investigations of MMIP cases for two years. The assigned special agent has worked extensively with law enforcement partners to address cases throughout Tribal communities. Presently, the ATF MMIP detail has three active cases in Indian Country where fire was the weapon used to commit homicide.

National Native American Outreach Services Liaison

The Department announced the first National Native American Outreach Services Liaison (NAOSL) in November 2022. The position was created as directed by Executive Order 14053. The NAOSL serves as a critical point of contact for American Indian and Alaska Native victims of crime. The NAOSL is available to coordinate with victims and their families on individual cases to help ensure that they have a voice as they navigate the federal criminal justice system. The NAOSL coordinates with the MMIP Regional Outreach Program on MMIP cases.

Savanna's Act Guidelines

Savanna's Act guidelines are intended to improve the federal government's response to MMIP matters. All USAOs in federal judicial districts with Tribal lands, including Public Law 280 states, have had Savanna's Act guidelines in place since the spring of 2022. As recommended by the NIAC and with the assistance of DOJ's MMIP Regional Outreach Program, USAOs with Indian Country responsibilities will continue to refine and update their guidelines with input from federal, Tribal, state, and local partners to ensure that they remain effective in enhancing inter-jurisdiction cooperation as victims' families await word on their loved ones.

Tribal Community Response Plans (TCRPs)

As recommended by the NIAC, USAOs, with assistance from the MMIP Regional Outreach Program, will continue to support and assist Tribal communities in the development of TCRPs, which are cross-jurisdictional protocols tailored to a specific Tribal community that govern law enforcement and community responses to emergent missing person cases in a Tribal community. In addition, in FY 2023, the Department's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) funded a project with the National Criminal Justice Training Center to support community-led TCRPs.

Healing and Response Teams

In response to the NIAC findings and recommendations, OVW launched a new initiative in May 2024 to support the creation, training, and sustainability of Healing and Response Teams (HRT) in Tribal and urban Indian communities. HRTs are designed to provide victim-centered support, advocacy, resource liaisons, healing pathways, and systems navigation assistance using a Tribal-based model of care in responding to MMIP cases that involve domestic violence, dating

violence, sexual assault, stalking, and sex trafficking crimes. OVW provided \$2 million to the Minnesota Indian Women's Sexual Assault Coalition to assess HRT models and expand their use across Tribal and urban Indian communities. The FY 2025 President's Budget requests an additional \$10 million to build on this initial award and directly fund HRTs in Tribal communities.

Tribal Access Program

The Department's Tribal Access Program (TAP) provides Tribes with access to national criminal information systems for federally authorized criminal justice and non-criminal justice purposes. Using TAP, Tribes share information about missing persons; register convicted sex offenders; enter domestic violence orders of protection for nationwide enforcement; run criminal histories; identify and arrest fugitives; enter bookings and convictions; and complete fingerprint-based record checks for non-criminal justice purposes such as screening employees or volunteers who work with children. The Department has continued to expand TAP to additional Tribes each year since the program launched in 2015 and currently supports 149 Tribes with over 460 participating Tribal government agencies.

Resolution of MMIP cases through NamUS

The National Institute of Justice's (NIJ) Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) program improves the resolution of missing or unidentified Native persons by strengthening the case information of missing, unidentified, and unclaimed American Indian and Alaska Native persons in the NamUs database. Further, the NIJ's NamUs program has direct support for Tribal forensic service requests to assist in the identification of Native persons cases. Finally, NIJ's NamUs Tribal Liaison facilitates trainings for Tribal law enforcement and community members to better understand how to use NamUs to address cases of missing, unidentified, or unclaimed human remains.

AMBER Alert in Indian Country

The Department's AMBER Alert in Indian Country Program provides training and technical assistance to Tribal leadership, law enforcement, emergency responders, and other stakeholders in Tribal communities to support the safe recovery of endangered missing or abducted children. Through the program, Tribal communities may receive a technology toolkit that contains equipment needed when responding to an urgent missing child report. Additionally, the program works with Tribal agencies to develop and deliver a variety of training based on the needs of the community, such as Child Abduction Response Team training and certification.

Interagency Human Trafficking Summits

The Department's Human Trafficking Prosecution Unit (HTPU) and the National Indian Country Training Initiative (NICTI) Coordinator have partnered with the MMU to enhance the MMU's capacity to conduct victim-centered, trauma-informed, culturally sensitive investigations into human trafficking and related crimes impacting indigenous persons and communities. In August 2024, the HTPU and NICTI Coordinator held the second annual human trafficking summit with the MMU.

Tribal Justice, Safety, and Wellness Summits

The Department, in partnership with the Department of the Interior, hosts multi-faceted training summits for federal, Tribal, state, and local partners to address public safety issues, including MMIP, in Indian Country. Training tracks include resources, MMIP, criminal justice law enforcement and prosecution, and technology. Most recently, a summit was held in July 2024. The three-day virtual event featured several key presentations and panels on public safety taught by nationally recognized subject matter experts working in American Indian and Alaska Native communities. More than 900 participants, including federal, Tribal, and state law enforcement officials, prosecutors, advocates, court staff, victim/witness services staff, and Tribal leaders, attended the Summit.

Multi-Jurisdictional Collaboration in MMIP Cases Training

The Department's COPS Office partners with Tribal, state, and local agencies to provide multiple MMIP-related services. In January 2024, the COPS Office launched an eLearning course that explores how partnerships between Tribal law enforcement and local, state, federal, and private sector agencies can strengthen the prevention and response to MMIP cases using a fair, victim-centered and trauma-informed approach. The course details how employing Memorandums of Understanding or Agreement can enhance law enforcement partnerships and strengthen responses to MMIP.

Grant and Program Support

The Department is also using DOJ's grantmaking power to support Tribal Justice systems and strengthen law enforcement responses. In October 2024, the Department of Justice awarded more than \$210 million to American Indian and Alaska Native communities to support their public safety and justice operations. These funds help enhance Tribal justice systems and strengthen law enforcement responses; improve the handling of child abuse cases; combat domestic, sexual, and dating violence; stalking, and sex trafficking; support Tribal youth programs; and fund an array of services for American Indian and Alaska Native crime victims. Funding from the Department continues to be an important source of support in addressing crime, the MMIP crisis, improving and enhancing Tribal criminal and juvenile justice systems, and providing critical services to survivors of crime and family members. Specifically, grantees under the Office for Victims of Crime's (OVC) [Tribal Victim Services Set-Aside](#) program may use funding to provide financial assistance and support to the families of missing persons, raise awareness about MMIP issues and missing person's cases, and create MMIP response protocols.

The Department remains committed to improving the way we provide funding support to Tribal nations. We continually meet with Tribes to receive input on our grantmaking processes. We make improvements every year based on that feedback. Recently, in recognition of requests from Tribes that the Department consider additional or even alternative funding models, we issued a Dear Tribal Leader Letter and Framing Paper in early October of this year, launching formal Nation-to-Nation consultation throughout October and November to explore those ideas. We have engaged in two in-person consultation sessions already, as well as two virtual sessions, with a final in-person consultation scheduled this week and written comments accepted through November 25.

In accordance with the Department's consultation policy, we will publish a report that summarizes what we hear from Tribes and Tribal organizations as well the Department's response to that feedback.

The Department is committed to working within its components, with other federal agencies, and with our Tribal partners to continue to aggressively address public safety and MMIP issues that persist within Tribal communities. It is only through this communication, coordination, and collaboration that we can truly tackle the MMIP and public safety crisis and honor those who are still missing, those who were lost, and those who are left to suffer with unimaginable pain. Tribal communities deserve safety and justice.