

**Testimony of Charles Addington
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**Before the House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittees on Indian and Insular Affairs and Oversight and Investigations**

**Oversight Hearing on Innovative Technologies and Initiatives to Tackle the MMIP Crisis
in Indian Country**

July 14, 2026

Chairmen, Ranking Members, and Members of the Subcommittees, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the Department of the Interior's efforts to address the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons (MMIP) and improve public safety throughout Indian Country.

The MMIP Crisis in Indian Country

The Department is committed to protecting Tribal communities, bringing justice to victims and their families, and improving public safety across Indian Country. Addressing the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons crisis remains one of our highest public safety priorities. American Indians and Alaska Natives continue to experience disproportionately high rates of violent crime, victimization, and unresolved missing persons and cold cases. Behind every statistic is a family seeking answers, a community seeking justice, and a shared responsibility across all levels of government to act.

As of June 30, 2026, there were approximately 1,485 active missing persons entered in the Federal Bureau of Investigation's National Criminal Information Center (NCIC) identified as an American Indian or Alaska Native. These figures underscore the significant challenges facing Tribal communities and law enforcement agencies across the country.

Strengthening Public Safety

Through the Office of Justice Services, Indian Affairs works closely with Tribal, Federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies to investigate cases, support victims and families, and strengthen public safety throughout Indian Country. Recognizing the need for additional investigative resources and improved coordination, the BIA established its first dedicated cold case and missing persons offices under Operation Lady Justice in 2020. In 2021, those efforts evolved into the Missing and Murdered Unit (MMU), a specialized investigative support unit dedicated to assisting missing persons and unresolved homicide investigations involving American Indians and Alaska Natives. The MMU provides investigative and analytical support

across jurisdictions by analyzing information, identifying leads, coordinating investigative resources, and assisting law enforcement agencies in resolving complex cases involving multiple jurisdictions and partners.

A Collaborative Problem-Solving Approach

The MMU employs a collaborative problem-solving approach that combines advanced forensic techniques, DNA analysis, artificial intelligence-assisted analytical tools, comprehensive case reviews, information sharing, and interagency coordination. DNA technologies continue to expand investigative capabilities and have proven invaluable in identifying victims, suspects, and investigative leads. Artificial intelligence-assisted tools help investigators organize large volumes of case information, identify patterns, prioritize leads, and review investigative materials more efficiently. This collaborative approach strengthens partnerships among Tribal, Federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies, ensures investigators have access to specialized expertise and resources, and helps provide families with greater transparency and support throughout the investigative process.

Fiscal Year 2027 Budget Request

The Fiscal Year 2027 Budget reflects the Department's continued commitment to improving public safety and addressing violent crime throughout Indian Country. The request includes more than \$560 million for Public Safety and Justice programs supporting law enforcement operations, criminal investigations, detention programs, Tribal courts, corrections, and victim services. The request also includes approximately \$11 million and 26 full-time positions dedicated to the Missing and Murdered Unit. These resources support specialized investigations, intelligence analysis, case coordination, and partnerships with Tribal and other law enforcement agencies.

Indian Country Violent Crime Task Force and Refocus of the MMU

In May 2026, Secretary Burgum signed Secretary's Order 3450 establishing the Indian Country Violent Crime Task Force and implementing additional public safety enhancements, including refocusing the Missing and Murdered Unit on its core investigative responsibilities. The Task Force strengthens coordination among Tribal, Federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies while focusing resources on violent crime, homicide investigations, missing persons cases, child exploitation, gang activity, narcotics trafficking, and other serious crimes affecting Tribal communities. The Department recently refocused the MMU on its core mission of supporting missing persons investigations and unresolved homicide cases, allowing personnel to dedicate additional time and investigative resources to complex cases and deliver more measurable results for victims and their families.

Secretary's Order 3450 complements existing initiatives such as the Missing and Murdered Unit by strengthening investigative services in Indian Country, improving information sharing, enhancing interagency coordination, and directing resources where they can have the greatest impact.

Partnership with Tribal Nations

The Department recognizes that addressing the MMIP crisis requires more than law enforcement action alone. Success depends on strong partnerships with Tribal governments, Tribal law enforcement agencies, victim advocates, service providers, community organizations, survivors, and families. We remain committed to working alongside Tribal Nations to strengthen investigations, improve data quality, enhance investigative coordination, support victims and survivors, and ensure meaningful consultation and collaboration. Together, these partnerships improve investigative outcomes, strengthen public safety, and help address the conditions that contribute to violence in Tribal communities.

Conclusion

The Department remains steadfast in its commitment to improving public safety throughout Indian Country and advancing justice for missing and murdered Indigenous persons. Through strengthened partnerships, specialized investigative resources, and coordinated law enforcement efforts, we are working to ensure every case receives the attention it deserves and that victims, families, and Tribal communities receive the support they need.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to answering your questions.