

OPENING STATEMENT

Good morning to you all, and a warm welcome to all our witnesses here today.

Today, we will be confronting a deeply troubling and disturbing situation affecting Indian Country nationwide – the hidden crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women.

A 2016, National Institute of Justice report noted that 1.5 million American Indian and Alaska Native women experience violence in their lifetime.

On reservations, American Indian and Alaska Native women experience murder rates 10 times the national average.

Additionally, an independent report found at least 5,712 cases of missing or murdered Indigenous women were reported in 2016.

In reality, these numbers are much larger, because Indigenous women are often unrepresented in national and local data.

A lack of comprehensive data to quantify the number of missing and murdered women in Indian Country is just one factor contributing to this crisis.

The witnesses we have here today will attest to many other factors that exacerbate this situation, including:

- extreme jurisdictional challenges in our criminal justice system leading to confusion, delays and lack of prosecution, and
- Inadequate resources for tribal justice systems.

Before we begin, I would like to share with you all just a few of the heartbreaking cases that have brought new attention to this situation in Indian country, and that highlight some of the failures of our current system.

Ashley Loring HeavyRunner was last seen in June 2017 on the Blackfeet reservation in Montana. Her family and friends spent a year searching for her on their own.

In February 2018, *nine months* after Ashley went missing, the Federal Bureau of Investigations finally joined the search. To this day, even with the help of the FBI, Ashley remains missing.

In 2013, Mackenzie Howard, a 13-year-old villager from Kake, Alaska, went missing after a memorial ceremony. After her body was found behind a local church, it took eleven hours – ***ELEVEN HOURS*** – for State Troopers to finally arrive, during which time the village men guarded Mackenzie’s body and the crime scene throughout the night.

In 2016, Ashlyne Mike, an 11-year-old Navajo girl, was found dead after being tricked into accepting a ride home from a stranger while playing after school on the Navajo Reservation.

Because of jurisdictional issues, an official Amber Alert for Ashlyne wasn't issued until *12 hours* after her disappearance. According to a study on child abductions by the Washington state Attorney General's Office, 76 percent of kidnapped children are killed within the first three hours.

In 2017, Savanna Greywind, a 22-year-old member of the Spirit Lake Tribe, went missing in Fargo, North Dakota.

Savanna was eight months pregnant. Her brutal attack and murder were perpetrated by a neighbor, and her body was found 8 days later by a kayaker near the Red River, north of Fargo.

I know these stories are hard to hear, but we must face this problem in order to address it.

We must improve data systems related to murdered and missing Indigenous women to truly identify the scope this problem.

We must prioritize intergovernmental communication to reduce lag time in responding to these atrocities.

And we must change law enforcement protocols to improve proactivity in combatting violence against indigenous women.

We must take action so that history doesn't keep repeating itself.

Today we'll hear invaluable testimony from experts who are fighting on the front lines of this battle on what is working, what is not, and what we can do here in Congress to end this cycle of violence.

I now would like to recognize the Ranking Member, Mr. Cook, for his opening statement.