



Written Testimony of the National Indigenous Women's Resource Center  
For the House Committee on Natural Resources, Subcommittee on Indian and Insular Affairs  
1324 Longworth House Office Building

May 21, 2026

Thank you Chairman Hurd and Ranking Member Leger Fernandez for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Mary Kathryn Nagle. I'm a citizen of the Cherokee Nation, and I serve as General Counsel to the National Indigenous Women's Resource Center (NIWRC). The NIWRC is a Native-led nonprofit organization committed to providing national leadership to promote safety for Native women and communities by supporting culturally grounded grassroots advocacy and strengthening Tribal sovereignty. Our primary focus is ending the high rates of violence that impact our Tribal communities and the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Relatives (MMIWR).

NIWRC submits this testimony in strong support of H.R. 1010, the *Bridging Agency Data Gaps and Ensuring Safety (BADGES) for Native Communities Act*. Every day, we work alongside survivors, families, and advocates of domestic violence, sexual assault, and trafficking across Indian Country. They face the devastating consequences of chronically underfunded services and programs, insufficient resources, inadequate data collection, jurisdictional gaps, and fragmented federal coordination. This legislation is long overdue and Native people are paying the price for the delay.

According to the National Institute of Justice, more than four in five American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) women (84.3 percent) have experienced violence in their lifetime, and more than half have experienced sexual violence (56.1%) and intimate partner violence (55.5%).<sup>1</sup> The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention identifies homicide as a leading cause of death for American Indians and Alaska Natives, with 45 percent of homicides of female victims precipitated by intimate partner violence.<sup>2</sup> Many of these cases are never entered into federal databases and never investigated with the urgency they deserve, leaving families searching for their loved ones on their own.

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<sup>1</sup> Rosay, André B., "Violence Against American Indian and Alaska Native Women and Men," *NIJ Journal* 277 (2016): 38-45, available at National Institute of Justice, *Violence against American Indians and Alaska Natives*, National Institute of Justice, <http://nij.gov/journals/277/Pages/violence-against-american-indians-alaska-natives.aspx>.

<sup>2</sup> Petrosky E, Mercer Kollar LM, Kearns MC, et al. Homicides of American Indians/Alaska Natives — National Violent Death Reporting System, United States, 2003–2018. *MMWR Surveill Summ* 2021;70(No. SS-8):1–19. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.ss7008a1>

The BADGES for Native Communities Act addresses longstanding systemic failures that leave Native communities and families without adequate support. Title I of the Act expands Tribal access to the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) by requiring federally employed Tribal facilitators to conduct ongoing Tribal outreach, serve as a point of contact for Tribes and law enforcement agencies, and provide training to improve the resolution of missing persons cases. Enabling Tribal law enforcement to access, upload, and utilize the data in NamUs will save lives. Far too many MMIWR families routinely wait months, only to learn that the state, county, or federal law enforcement agency they contacted never entered their loved one's name into the database – a failure that is both unacceptable and preventable.

Title I also requires the creation of a report documenting Tribal law enforcement needs. Because the federal government has consistently failed to meet its trust and treaty obligations to Tribal Nations in terms of federal spending,<sup>3</sup> and because the right of Tribal governments to collect taxes on their own lands has been significantly truncated by federal law, public safety in Indian country remains dangerously under-resourced. This report will help policymakers to understand the scope of this funding crisis.

Title II grants the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) authority to conduct its own background checks, enabling the BIA to hire officers more efficiently. This provision is critical. Currently, the Office of Justice Services (OJS) is so severely understaffed that Native families have been waiting for more than eight months to receive a returned phone call or email from the Missing and Murdered Unit (MMU).

This is the case with Kaysera Stops Pretty Places, a young Crow and Cheyenne teenager who was murdered in Montana in 2019. For nine months, her family has been told that no one at the MMU or OJS has time to speak with them, yet they are still waiting to learn the results of DNA testing performed on the clothing she was wearing when she was killed. The reason they were given: every MMU agent in Montana is covering field shifts due to understaffing. This is not only a resource issue, it is a failure of institutional priority.

Title II also establishes a grant program funding States, Tribes, and Tribal organizations to coordinate efforts to search for missing persons. This funding is essential for Tribes precisely because federal law enforcement has consistently refused to make such searches a priority.

The case of Ella Mae Begay illustrates why this matters. Ella Mae went missing on the Navajo Reservation five years ago. Just two weeks ago, her family sat in federal court and listened to the Assistant United States Attorney argue that the government should release the defendant with just time served. The reason the family was given was because the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) had never recovered Ella Mae's body and the evidence in the case file is too weak to win the case at trial, despite the defendant's confession to kidnapping Ella Mae from her

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<sup>3</sup> U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. (2018). *Broken promises: Continuing federal funding shortfall for Native Americans*. Washington, DC. Retrieved from <https://www.usccr.gov/files/pubs/2018/12-20-Broken-Promises.pdf>.

home, knocking her unconscious, and disposing of her body by the side of the road on the Reservation. When Ella Mae's family asked whether the FBI had used a drone to search on the Navajo Reservation – a vast landbase with challenging terrain – the response was no because the FBI cannot afford one. The United States government can find resources when it chooses to. If the FBI can offer a six-figure reward for information leading to the recovery of Nancy Guthrie, it can dedicate one drone to search for Ella Mae Begay and bring her family closure and justice. The absence of a single drone in Ella Mae's case is a choice and a deprioritization of our missing relatives and the safety of our communities. The *BADGES Act* redirects resources to those who will actually search for our relatives.

The *BADGES for Native Communities Act* offers meaningful, concrete solutions to systemic violence and institutional neglect that Native people have endured for far too long. The National Indigenous Women's Resource Center offers its strong support for this legislation and we hope to see it enacted into law without further delay, because every day that passes is another day a family waits by the phone for answers.

Wado. Thank you.