

## **Testimony of Tamra Truett Jerue, Anvik Tribe**

Before the US House of Representatives, Committee on Appropriations, Sub House Committee  
on Interior, Environment, and related agencies.

### **Public Safety and Justice panel Feb. 12, 2020**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, it is an honor to testify before you.

Ade', Tami Truett Jerue. Hello, my name is Tami Truett Jerue, I am a tribal citizen of the Anvik Tribe and represent the Tribe here today. I recently moved from the village of Anvik and currently reside in Fairbanks, Alaska where I work for the Alaska Native Women's Resource Center.

The Anvik Tribe is a Deg Hit' an Athabascan community with a rich history. We are located on the west bank of the Yukon River in the Interior of Alaska. We are an isolated Tribe with 378 enrolled members and less than 100 members living on our traditional lands. Access to Anvik is by small plane, boat or snow machine.

With the permission and support of the Anvik Tribal Council, I am here today to testify to the harsh realities that we face every day.

When we talk about public safety and justice for Alaska tribes, it's a complex discussion. Chapter 2 of the 2013 Indian Law and Order Commission Report to Congress and the President documents very well our challenges and barriers. Like over half of Alaska's tribes, Anvik does not have law enforcement. This absence of law enforcement combined with other challenges facing Alaska tribes results in an unacceptable lack of public safety and justice. Lack of resources such as safe shelter, sexual assault advocacy and crisis services, jails, treatment and other interventions continue to impact victims, survivors and their families, the community and the perpetrators.

My home has often been the safe house in the community in many instances, for victims and their children of violence. Some villages have these safe houses and some do not. My husband, former Tribal Chief for 28 years and tribal citizens often must respond to crises, including dangerous ones, given the lack of law enforcement and resources. We respond to violence, search and rescue, medical emergencies and deaths. Is there law enforcement? Not law enforcement as defined by the state or federal governments, but tribal citizens have had to maintain order as best they can to keep women and children safe. This is a common occurrence in our rural communities in Alaska and unfortunately became a normal part of village life.

At this point in time Anvik does not have law enforcement. The only other law enforcement option are the State Troopers who are located one and half hours away by airplane, where 3 Troopers are responsible for responding to calls for 46 villages. Anvik often has impassable weather for days, leaving victims vulnerable and crimes neglected. This seems like an unending complaint, but in reality, we are **repeating** ourselves to help you understand that the unique conditions that exist in Alaska and all over the US demand that we become creative and resourceful in our ability to provide a response.

As I just shared, there has been a consistent pattern of inadequate state law enforcement response and lack of federal appropriations for tribal justice responses, including the lack of comprehensive, systemic infrastructure to address safety and accountability for the extreme levels of domestic and sexual violence in Alaska's villages. Please review findings and recommendations from the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights' 2018 briefing report titled *Broken Promises: Continuing Federal Funding Shortfall for Native Americans*.

Since the U.S. purchased Alaska from the Russians in 1867 to today, the federal government has not fulfilled its trust responsibility to Alaska tribes, including the failure to fulfill the federal fiduciary obligations to Alaska tribes for the last 153 years. The competitive grant programs for public safety and justice do not fulfill the federal trust responsibility. Out of 229 of Alaska's tribes, approximately 1/3 to 1/2 may access these grants. Without federal funding, public safety and justice remain out of reach for most of Alaska's Tribes. Further, the federal competitive grant process poses difficult challenges to building infrastructure for tribes for various reasons including the limited grant periods of 2 or 3 years which is not enough time to significantly change and implement tribal justice responses, crisis and long term healing services and accountability for perpetrators.

Alaska has 18 state funded shelters, including two Tribal Shelters located in the rural communities of Emmonak and Kotzebue. We thank them for all the hard work they do, but that number is far too low to properly serve all 228 Tribes in Alaska. These shelters are almost always at capacity, therefore we cannot protect our people if we have nowhere for them to go, if we have no resources for them to access.

**The Anvik Tribe recommends the following for House Appropriations' consideration:**

1. Support the authority of Alaska Native tribal governments to design and carry out local, culturally relevant solutions to public safety and justice by appropriating funds specifically for Alaska tribes to develop and strengthen tribal law enforcement and judicial responses. The past 3 years, we've seen new appropriations for Alaska tribal courts which need to continue, but we also need tribal justice funding to support other tribal justice efforts as defined by Alaska tribes.

2. Provide training and funding directly to Alaska Native tribal governments for the Village Police Officers and Village Public Safety Officers.
3. Continue appropriating increased tribal funding under the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act within the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services for life-saving shelter and supportive services to ensure adequate shelter services are accessible in the villages for Native women.
4. Continue appropriating dedicated tribal funding under the Victims of Crime Act to support much needed tribal crime victim services designed and managed by tribal governments.

This is a quote from my daughter who provided testimony at the 2019 annual Violence Against Women government-to-government Tribal Consultation, “As a young girl, I had never imagined that I would have to be here today, pleading to have adequate funding and assistance to protect my sisters, my aunts, my cousins. I had sworn that I wouldn’t get into this line of work because I saw the toll it took on my mother and family. I’ve seen how hard our advocates work with what little resources they have. I’ve seen how hard our people are trying to make a change. I am honored but also saddened that I am up here as the next generation to provide my testimony on the realities we face day in and day out.” As her mother, I am also sad that history is still repeating itself and inadequate resources to address the many issues we face as Alaska Native people.

Dogidhn, Thank you.