

Testimony of Abigail Echo-Hawk, MA (Pawnee)
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House Judiciary Committee
Subcommittee on Crime and Federal Government Surveillance
Missing and Murdered Indigenous People: Strengthening Public Safety in Tribal Communities
September 15, 2026

Chairman Biggs, Ranking Member McBath, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee, Subcommittee on Crime and Federal Government Surveillance: My name is Abigail Echo-Hawk, and I am a citizen of the Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma living in an urban Indian community in Seattle, Washington. I am the Director of the Urban Indian Health Institute (UIHI), an Indian Health Services (IHS) designated Tribal Epidemiology Center (TEC), where I oversee our research, data, and evaluation initiatives in addition to my role as the Executive Vice President of the Seattle Indian Health Board, an urban Indian organization (UIO) contracted with the IHS to provide medical, behavioral and social services to American Indians and Alaska Natives in the Puget Sound region of Washington. Our work provides data to tribal leaders and federal and state policymakers to ensure the fulfillment of treaty and trust obligations for Tribal nations. I have spent my career producing research and data that expose violence against AI/AN people, including a landmark report on Missing and Murdered Indigenous and Girls in 2018 that was key to the passing of Savanah's Act and the Not Invisible Act. This research not only identified the problems but also included community and Tribe-identified solutions. We have given the path forward but have seen a federal failure in following it.

Six years after the passage of Savanna's Act and the Not Invisible Act, the federal government has failed to provide adequate oversight and sustained investment to address the MMIP crisis. These failures are not simply a moral failing; they are a violation of the federal government's responsibility to uphold the trust and treaty obligations to provide for the public safety of AI/AN people. Despite clear Congressional mandates, the federal agencies charged with implementing these laws have repeatedly failed to act with the urgency our communities deserve. Every day I see the impact of these failures in my clinics as my staff and I work directly with victims of rape, domestic violence, assault, human trafficking and MMIP. This failure has not gone unseen. In 2021, the Government Accountability Office released a report that revealed federal agencies' gross failures to implement the provisions of Savanna's Act and the Not Invisible Act.¹ GAO highlighted that DOI and DOJ delayed their mandate to create a Joint Commission on Reducing Violent Crimes Against Indians. Eight months after the deadline specified in the Not Invisible Act, the agencies had not made a single appointment to the mandated Commission. After a delay of almost two years, in November 2023, the Not Invisible Act Commission released its report, *Not One More*,² which provides a crucial roadmap shaped in partnership with Tribes, MMIP families and experts in ending violence against Native people. Again, Indigenous people created a path forward toward healing and ending the violence, with the report's findings and recommendations illustrating that federal policies, programs, and services continue to underserve our community and remain complicit in perpetuating the violence against AI/AN people. The Department of Justice (DOJ) and Department of Interior's (DOI) subsequent response,³ released in March 2024, did nothing more than cite existing resources and efforts to address concerns raised in the report. To date, they have yet to release any documentation of which, if any, of the Joint Commission's recommendations have been implemented and the report has been removed from federal websites. Despite the tireless work of

¹ U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Missing or Murdered Indigenous Women: New Efforts Are Underway but Opportunities Exist to Improve the Federal Response*, GAO-22-104045, October 28, 2021, <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-22-104045>.

² Not Invisible Act Commission, *Not One More: Findings and Recommendations of the Not Invisible Act Commission*, November 2023, https://www.justice.gov/d9/2023-11/34%20NIAC%20Final%20Report_version%2011.1.23_FINAL.pdf.

³ U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of the Interior, *Section 4(c)(2)(C) Response of the Departments of Justice and the Interior to Not One More: Findings and Recommendations of the Not Invisible Act Commission Pursuant to Public Law 116-166*, March 2024, <https://www.justice.gov/tribal/media/1341181/dl?inline>.

Tribes, UIOs, MMIP families, and community members, our voices have been silenced and our treaty obligations ignored as our people continue to die.

This hearing cannot be another exercise in acknowledging the crisis without changing the federal response. I am not here to display our pain and grief for political consumption; I am here to demand the justice that the law of the land, our treaties, says we are owed. I ask the members to take the urgent actions this crisis demands and to use the findings of this hearing to press your colleagues and the Administration to act. You have the authority and responsibility to examine why federal agencies have failed to fulfill their obligations to address violence against AI/AN people, and to compel them to act.

To uphold the federal government's trust and treaty responsibility to provide for the public safety of AI/AN communities, I urge this Subcommittee to partner with us and address the MMIP crisis by taking the following actions urgently:

- **Protect programs serving survivors of the MMIP crisis, and urge appropriators and other authorizing committees to protect related IHS and HHS programs.**
- **Facilitate law enforcement response to the MMIP crisis by**
 - **Immediately schedule a committee markup of H.R 4712 - Parity for Tribal Law Enforcement Act, H.R 1010 - BADGES Act, H. R 3773 – PROTECT Act.**
 - **Direct DOJ to make permanent the current FBI surges in Indian Country.**
- **Institute a dedicated MMIWP event code in the Federal Communications Commission (FCC)'s Emergency Alert System.**
- **Direct DOJ to fulfill the mandates of the Not Invisible Act and the Savanna's Act and improve AI/AN data collection in collaboration with Tribes.**
- **Close jurisdictional gaps that prevent MMIP cases from being brought to justice by expanding VAWA Tribal Jurisdiction and enacting a jurisdictional fix.**

The Role of the Urban Indian Health Institute in Addressing the Crisis

My organization, UIHI, has refused to stand by as our communities suffer and continues to lead national efforts to secure our treaty right to public safety. I continue to question why a small Native nonprofit organization is doing the work our federal agencies have been tasked to do, often with no financial resources. UIHI's work is beyond documenting disparities. We have used research, data, technical assistance, training, advocacy, and partnerships with local, state and federal government agencies to change systems that contribute to the MMIP crisis. I have co-authored the following reports with little to no federal funding that have changed the landscape of MMIP by providing the first of its kind data and Tribally informed solutions to this crisis.

Reports

- Our 2018 national report, *Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls: Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls: A snapshot of data from 71 urban cities in the United States*,⁴ was the first-ever to define the crisis in concrete numbers and directly supported the passage of the bipartisan Not Invisible Act of 2019 and Savanna's Act of 2020. It additionally influenced Executive Order 13898: Establishing the Task Force on Missing and Murdered American Indians and Alaska Natives.
- In 2019, our report *MMIWG: We Demand More*,⁵ an independent analysis correcting serious flaws in Washington State Patrol's legislatively mandated MMIWG report. The report analyzed community testimony, identified systemic failures in data collection and

⁴ Urban Indian Health Institute, *Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women & Girls: A Snapshot of Data from 71 Urban Cities in the United States*, November 2018, <https://www.uihi.org/resources/missing-and-murdered-indigenous-women-girls/>.

⁵ Urban Indian Health Institute, *MMIWG: We Demand More: A Corrected Research Study of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women & Girls in Washington State*, September 20, 2019, <https://www.uihi.org/resources/mmiwg-we-demand-more/>.

government response, and promoted community solutions. UIHI also developed the *We Demand More Partner Toolkit*⁶ to help communities across the country hold state governments accountable for meaningful implementation of MMIP legislation within the Office of the Attorney General.

- UIHI developed *Improving Law Enforcement Data for Missing and Murdered Indigenous People*,⁷ providing guidance for law enforcement on collecting race, ethnicity, and Tribal affiliation data; working appropriately with AI/AN data; and conducting both Tribal Consultation and Urban Confer processes. UIHI also partnered directly with one of the nation's largest counties' Prosecuting Attorney's Office, King County, WA, to change how victim race and ethnicity data are collected and recorded within law enforcement systems. That partnership was documented in the A Step Toward Justice case study as a model for institutional change and has been credited with investigating and solving missing persons and homicide cases in the county.
- In 2024, UIHI published *A Step Toward Justice: Community Informed Law Enforcement MMIP Websites*,⁸ which included research with AI/AN families affected by MMIP. The report gives law enforcement concrete recommendations for improving websites and public facing systems so families can understand how to report a missing relative, what to expect during an investigation, how to contact investigators, how cold cases are handled, and where to seek accountability and support.
- Most recently, UIHI's 2026 report, *Sacred Responsibility: Protecting Our People*,⁹ examined how federal funding cuts are affecting AI/AN programs responding to domestic violence, sexual assault, and MMIP, showing that UIHI continues to document not only the crisis itself, but the federal decisions affecting communities' ability to respond to it.

Technical Assistance

- We designed and facilitated training for law enforcement agencies on data collection and use, including with federal databases such as the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) to address the crisis.
- We have supported Washington and California as they launched MMIWP-specific emergency alert systems and supported the establishment of MMIP task forces across the US.
- We support states and Indigenous partners in conducting data analysis on the high rates of MMIP cases in their jurisdictions. In 2021, the state of Hawaii mandated the creation of a report similar to UIHI's 2018 report, but provided no substantial funding for this mandate. UIHI collaborated with Native Hawaiian partners and provided both technical assistance and the only financial support they received in the amount of \$100,000 for their first report.
- We directly support victims and families, serving as the technical assistance provider to the 27 IHS-funded Urban Indian Organizations (UIO) that hold IHS grants through the Sexual Assault, Suicide Prevention, and Domestic Violence Prevention project (SASP/DVP) and providing victim services in the Puget Sound region of Washington.

The responsibility of doing the research and completing these reports continue to fall on backs of Tribes and Native organization like UIHI as federal agencies continue to not comply with federal mandates including the Department of the Interior (DOI) who has yet to release the reports for the past two fiscal years titled “Report to the Congress on Spending, Staffing, and Estimated Funding Costs for Public Safety and Justice Programs in Indian Country” as mandated by Tribal Law and Order Act of 2010 (TLOA)

⁶ Urban Indian Health Institute, *We Demand More: Partner Toolkit*, September 20, 2019, <https://www.uihi.org/resources/mmiwg-we-demand-more-partner-toolkit/>.

⁷ Abigail Echo-Hawk and Adrian Dominguez, *Improving Law Enforcement Data for Missing and Murdered Indigenous People*, 2021, <https://www.uihi.org/resources/improving-law-enforcement-data-for-missing-and-murdered-indigenous-people/>.

⁸ Abigail Echo-Hawk, Emily Vega, Sacena Gurule, Banita McCam, and Cheyenne Seneca, *A Step Toward Justice: Community Informed Law Enforcement MMIP Websites*, September 10, 2024, <https://www.uihi.org/resources/a-step-towards-justice-community-informed-law-enforcement-mmip-websites/>.

⁹ Urban Indian Health Institute, *Sacred Responsibility: Protecting Our People: A National Snapshot of the Impact of Federal Funding Challenges on Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, Missing and Murdered People, and Other Violence-Related Services for American Indians and Alaska Natives*, July 2026, <https://www.uihi.org/resources/report-sacred-responsibility/>.

effectively stifling the ability of Congress to move data driven policy decisions forward. At a minimum this action should be demanded from them.

Recommendations

1. PROTECT FEDERAL FUNDING FOR MMIP SURVIVOR SERVICES

An effective response to the MMIP crisis goes beyond investigation and prosecution. Victim services are crucial for helping people report violence, navigate the law-enforcement process, and remain safe while cases move through the justice system. These services are essential for reducing the monetary costs of violence, and the DOJ is the largest funder of these programs due to its obligation to administer Tribal set-asides for public safety.

Federal funding plays a key role in sustaining victim services and is a matter of trust and treaty responsibility, but has yet to be fully fulfilled. This July, UIHI released a national report in partnership with the National Congress of American Indians and the National Indigenous Women's Resource Center titled *Sacred Responsibility: Protecting the People*,¹⁰ which documents the devastating impacts of federal funding cuts to victim services for AI/AN people. The report describes the findings of a national survey of 201 AI/AN service providers, including Tribes, Tribal coalitions, Native nonprofits, and Urban Indian Organizations (UIOs).

Since January 2026, 63.8% of responding organizations reported being substantially impacted by cuts to federal funds that were not due to expire. These essential organizations across Indian Country are the very ones responding to the MMIP crisis. In 2025, they served more than 25,074 AI/AN survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and MMIP; 8.2% of survivors were pregnant or postpartum, and 28% were children. 58% of all of the services they provided were for the basic needs of housing and shelter; 42% were for supportive services, including transportation, court accompaniment, and counseling. Additionally, the organizations have provided training sessions to 12,541 members of the public—including law-enforcement—on topics like violence prevention and early intervention. These services are a necessary part of the safety net victims, families, Tribes and communities need in order to heal.

Yet federal funding cuts have forced these organizations to reduce crucial services by 44%, directly undermining Indian Country's work to address the MMIP crisis.

- **44% of housing-related services have been or will be reduced**, including emergency shelter hotel/motel stays, advocacy with landlords, and transitional housing. This is especially concerning because organizations repeatedly identified housing as the greatest need for survivors, and the most frequently unmet need.
- **41% of language and interpretation services have been or will be reduced**, leaving survivors to navigate legal systems without a full understanding of their rights.
- **41% of advocacy services have been or will be reduced**, including services for victims with disability issues, elders, children, and services for trafficking and stalking.
- **36% of children's support and advocacy services have been or will be reduced**, including childcare, child welfare and protective services, safe exchange and visitation, therapy and counseling.
- **39% of services for substance misuse and 38% of mental health services have been or will be reduced**, threatening to deepen the substance use crisis.

¹⁰ Urban Indian Health Institute, *Sacred Responsibility: Protecting Our People: A National Snapshot of the Impact of Federal Funding Challenges on Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, Missing and Murdered People, and Other Violence-Related Services for American Indians and Alaska Natives*, July 2026, https://www.uihi.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/UIHI_Sacred-Responsibility-DV-Report_Final.pdf.

- **40% of financial services have been or will be reduced.**
- **40% of legal services have been or will be reduced**, leaving survivors to navigate the justice system without support. Legal services are key to assisting survivors to obtain restraining orders, determine child custody, and other legal issues.
- **20% of services provided to Active Duty or Veteran Victims in the U.S. Armed Forces were reduced.**

The organizations have been forced to turn away 1,156 survivors with unmet needs due to these reductions.

These organizations have seen delayed grant disbursements, pending NOFOs, suspended communication with federal agencies, and program officer turnover and layoffs, and complete elimination of long-standing grant opportunities. Impacts of these cuts have been far-reaching across Indian country with 84% of responding organizations reported that more than half of their operating budgets rely on federal funds.

Even in cases where funding has eventually been reinstated, they have created uncertainty for providers, introducing high risk for investing in or reinstating programs that could again be cut without notice, with no opportunity for recourse. This is even more devastating for survivors, for whom a delay in accessing services can be fatal. I urge you not to stand by and watch my people die.

Recommendations

Given this Subcommittee's jurisdiction over DOJ and the administration of justice, I urge you to protect survivor services as a key part of the response to the MMIP crisis. I urge you to uphold trust and treaty responsibility by protecting the funding streams that support these services for AI/AN communities. Congress must include consistent and sustainable noncompetitive funding for Tribal Nations for all public safety and victim service needs.

For the DOJ, I urge you to:

- Support the total amount of funding authorized for Tribal programs in the Violence Against Women Act.***
- Prevent the subsuming of the Office of Violence Against Women into the Bureau of Justice Programs, to protect this dedicated funding stream, which has funded our critical survivor support services.***
- Call upon appropriators to fund these programs at their authorized levels.***
- Introduce and pass a permanent Tribal set-aside fix for the authorizing legislation of the Victims of Crime Act Tribal funding stream. This DOJ program has served as a crucial source of funding for victim services, allowing Tribes to administer their own programs, yet it remains vulnerable.***

Although IHS funding falls outside of this Subcommittee's direct jurisdiction, the programs it funds are necessary to support victim safety, and without the work of TECs like UIHI, we would have absolutely no information on the MMIP crisis. I ask that you urge your colleagues on the relevant authorizing and appropriations committees to:

- Support full funding for the Indian health care system. For IHS, the National Tribal Budget Formulation Workgroup has calculated that it would require \$73.01 billion to fully fund IHS and the I/T/U system in FY2027.***
- Protect HHS grant programs for survivors, as they are critical to supporting the underfunded IHS system.***

Housing is foundational to establishing safety and stability for survivors and preventing future

incidents of violence, and as our survey revealed, it is a frequently unmet need. To support AI/AN survivors and their families in accessing safety, I ask that you:

- g. Support the Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Modernization Act of 2026.**
- h. Reauthorize the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act to support the full spectrum of housing.** *It is the only dedicated federal funding source for domestic violence shelters, and its authorization expired in 2015.*

Across all agencies:

- i. Exempt funding established specifically for AI/AN communities from the elimination of DEI programs.** *AI/AN is not a racial or ethnic group, but rather a political class. These programs are not DEI, but are the fulfillment of trust and treaty obligations to provide for public safety.*

2. FACILITATE LAW ENFORCEMENT RESPONSE TO MMIP CASES

Data from our report *Sacred Responsibility: Protecting the People*¹¹ also underscores the urgency of improving Tribal law enforcement capacity for addressing the MMIP crisis. Nearly half of the organizations that responded reported difficulties recruiting Tribal law enforcement officers in their area, and more than 40% reported challenges to retaining them. One of the most commonly cited barriers was the disparity in pay and benefits compared to other law enforcement agencies. In Alaska, the situation is dire. Over 40% of rural Alaska Native villages have no full-time officers, and vast distances mean response times are often delayed. While the VAWA 2022 Special Tribal Criminal Jurisdiction pilot program has brought key improvements, it remains insufficient to address the crisis or address existing jurisdictional issues.

These data highlight the need for policy change, and three key, bipartisan legislative efforts seek to address some of these very factors and are supported by the National Congress of American Indians in a recent letter to the House Committee On Natural Resources . The *Parity for Tribal Law Enforcement Act (HR4712)* would improve recruitment and retention by extending to Tribal law enforcement the same benefits that federal officers already receive. It would also allow qualifying Tribal law enforcement to enforce federal law within Tribal jurisdictions, reducing red tape and jurisdictional issues. The *Bridging Agency Data Gaps and Ensuring Safety (BADGES) for Native Communities Act (HR 1010)* would improve responses to MMIP cases by expanding Tribal access to missing persons data systems, increasing training for Tribal law enforcement, and providing dedicated funding for coordinating investigations. The *Protection for Reservation Occupants against Trafficking and Evasive Communications Today Act of 2025 (HR 3773)* strengthens Tribal investigative and prosecutorial ability, allowing Tribal courts to execute warrants for electronic information and records as evidence from electronic service providers during criminal investigations. The Act would provide Tribal law enforcement agencies with access to necessary electronic information for MMIP investigations. The legislation would also expand special Tribal criminal jurisdiction over specific controlled substances and firearms offenses. These provisions would enhance Tribal authority over non-Natives and grant law enforcement officers and prosecutors better access to evidence.

The Federal Special Tribal Criminal Jurisdiction pilot program also addresses key jurisdictional issues that currently limit Tribal Law enforcement's efficacy in addressing MMIP cases. Expanded funding would continue to support training and collaboration with local agencies, and data collection to direct future efforts.

However, our people cannot afford to wait for this legislation. I applaud the Federal Bureau of

¹¹ Urban Indian Health Institute, *Sacred Responsibility: Protecting Our People: A National Snapshot of the Impact of Federal Funding Challenges on Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, Missing and Murdered People, and Other Violence-Related Services for American Indians and Alaska Natives*, July 2026, https://www.uihi.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/UIHI_Sacred-Responsibility-DV-Report_Final.pdf

Investigation (FBI) for launching Operation Not Forgotten, including the 2026 surge support for Tribal Law Enforcement and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)'s Office of Justice Services. As part of the surge, they have deployed agents to temporary assignments in 11 FBI field offices across Indian Country.¹² At the end of last year, the FBI released outcomes from a 6-month period of the surge, which included 1,260 individuals charged, 1,123 arrests made, and 458 child victims identified and located.¹³ These results highlight what can be accomplished when resources are directed to sustained investigative attention. Currently, this successful surge is scheduled to sunset in September despite its unparalleled success.

Recommendations

I urge you to join the bipartisan effort to provide resources for law enforcement response to MMIP.

- a. ***Advance the Parity for Tribal Law Enforcement Act (HR 4712) and Bridging Agency Data Gaps, Ensuring Safety (BADGES) for Native Communities Act (HR 1010) and Protection for Reservation Occupants against Trafficking and Evasive Communications Today Act of 2025 (HR 3773) for Committee markup without delay. They have been referred to the House Judiciary Committee.***
- b. ***Partner with Tribal Nations and advocates to introduce additional legislation to fulfill the trust and treaty responsibility for public safety. These pieces of legislation are only a start.***
- c. ***Call on your colleagues to increase funding for Tribal Nations' implementation of Special Tribal Criminal Jurisdiction.***
- d. ***Direct DOJ to establish a coordinator to work across agencies to implement the recommendations of the Not One More Report.***
- e. ***Direct DOJ, in partnership with DOI, provide an update on the status of the implementation of the recommendations from the Not One More Report.***
- f. ***Direct the DOJ and the FBI to make Operation Not Forgotten surges permanent, beyond September. Our people deserve more than a temporary fix; our lives depend on it.***

3. INSTITUTE A DEDICATED FCC NATIONAL EVENT CODE FOR MMIP

Rapid public notification for recovering missing AI/AN people is not only a communications issue but is crucial to facilitating investigations. I assisted in authoring legislation creating the nation's first Missing Indigenous Person Alert (MIPA) system, referred to as the Red Alert, which was implemented in Washington State in 2022. The following year, this legislation was utilized by the California state legislature for the creation of the Feather Alert, a missing AI/AN alert system. Today, four states operate Indigenous-specific alert systems and have demonstrated that they can be integrated into existing alert infrastructure with minimal fiscal impact.

In 2024, Following the successful implementation of these state-level systems, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) announced its intent to launch an Emergency Alert System (EAS) alert code for Indigenous populations. In its Notice of Proposed Rule Making for the alert, the FCC specifically noted the need to address violence against AI/AN communities, and the historic underreporting and misclassification of MMIP cases.¹⁴

However, the new alert code the FCC ultimately adopted—the Missing and Endangered Persons (MEP) alert—does not focus on Indigenous People. While the FCC relied substantially on the MMIP crisis to justify this new rule, it rejected calls for an Indigenous-specific code, instead expanding it to cover all

¹² Federal Bureau of Investigation, "FBI Surges Personnel to Support Operation Not Forgotten 2026, Expanding Investigative Resources Across Indian Country," press release, April 2, 2026, <https://www.fbi.gov/news/press-releases/fbi-surges-personnel-to-support-operation-not-forgotten-2026-expanding-investigative-resources-across-indian-country>.

¹³ U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Public Affairs, "Justice Department Surge to Indian Country to Investigate Unresolved Violent Crimes Yields Results," press release, November 24, 2025, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-surge-indian-country-investigate-unresolved-violent-crimes-yields-results>.

¹⁴ Federal Communications Commission, *The Emergency Alert System and Wireless Emergency Alerts; Missing and Endangered Persons Event Code*, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, FCC 24-30, PS Docket Nos. 15-91 and 15-94, March 15, 2024, <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/FCC-24-30A1.pdf>.

people not already covered by AMBER and Silver alerts. Both the Report and Order¹⁵ and Final Rule¹⁶ for the MEP alert still claim that it intends to address the “profound” MMIP crisis. They again described the disproportionate risk of violence and disappearance faced by AI/AN people, underreporting and misclassification, and called this new alert “a crucial federal step” toward addressing the crisis. Yet, we have not seen documented successful use of this alert since its implementation.

In my expert opinion, the stated goals cannot be accomplished unless the FCC establishes an MMIP-specific code. Though FCC stated in its final rulemaking that it would “monitor the implementation of the new event code to make sure” that it was “advancing the cause of aiding in the rescue of Native persons,” Indian Country has not been informed regarding the impact, if any, of the MEP on the recovery of AI/AN people.

UIHI has pursued every available administrative avenue to institute the alert code, including working with our Congressional partners, writing letters to the FCC, and collaborating with Tribes to push the issue forward, yet we have seen no changes. The Report and Order acknowledged our organization’s concerns about the un-targeted code, yet chose to move forward with it.¹⁷ In the last Tribal Consultation regarding the alert, the FCC left open the possibility that a new, separate event code could be created for AI/AN people, and the chair of the FCC spoke to the National Congress of American Indians on October 29th, 2024, saying that the alert “will save lives in Tribal communities and all across this country.” We are still waiting.

Recommendations

Though regulation of the FCC falls outside of this Subcommittee’s direct jurisdiction, the effectiveness of this alert system directly affects the federal, Tribal, state, and local law-enforcement response that is the subject of this hearing. I ask this Subcommittee to work with your colleagues to:

- a. ***Call on the FCC to conduct a report quantifying how many Indigenous people have been reported through the MEP alert and identifying the outcomes.***
- b. ***Support the creation of a dedicated AI/AN event code in the FCC’s Emergency Alert System, with an appropriate name signaling that it is responsive specifically to AI/AN people. The alert system would utilize already-established technical alert systems, thus having minimal fiscal impact with the potential for astronomical impact for AI/AN families and communities to find their loved ones. This may be accomplished by encouraging the FCC to initiate its own Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, or passing legislation that mandates it create this code.***

4. IMPROVE DATA INFRASTRUCTURE AND ACCOUNTABILITY TO ADDRESS THE MMIP CRISIS

On November 14, 2018, UIHI, in partnership with Senator Murkowski, released a groundbreaking report I co-authored titled *Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls: A snapshot of data from 71 urban cities in the United States*.¹⁸ In addition to sparking the first national wave of bipartisan action on this issue, our report also crucially revealed the lack of data being collected by law enforcement nationwide. We identified a basic problem: law enforcement was not entering race and ethnicity data into their databases. Even more concerning was the reason why, too often, there is no box to check to indicate AI/AN. Even more rare was the ability to enter tribal affiliation. By not collecting data, law enforcement was limiting its ability to prevent, intervene, and protect AI/AN people within its jurisdiction. DOJ databases lack consistency in the manner in which data variables are collected and defined, inhibiting the ability to conduct data linkages across systems. Our report

¹⁵ Federal Communications Commission, *The Emergency Alert System and Wireless Emergency Alerts; Missing and Endangered Persons Event Code*, Report and Order, FCC 24-83, PS Docket Nos. 15-91 and 15-94, August 8, 2024, <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/FCC-24-83A1.pdf>.

¹⁶ Federal Communications Commission, “The Emergency Alert System and Wireless Emergency Alerts,” final rule, 89 Fed. Reg. 72,724 (September 6, 2024), <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/09/06/2024-19530/the-emergency-alert-system-and-wireless-emergency-alerts>

¹⁷ Federal Communications Commission, *The Emergency Alert System and Wireless Emergency Alerts; Missing and Endangered Persons Event Code*, Report and Order, FCC 24-83, PS Docket Nos. 15-91 and 15-94, August 8, 2024, <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/FCC-24-83A1.pdf>.

¹⁸ Urban Indian Health Institute, *Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women & Girls: A Snapshot of Data from 71 Urban Cities in the United States*, November 2018, <https://www.uihi.org/resources/missing-and-murdered-indigenous-women-girls/>

also illuminated the potential of federal databases such as the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) to address the crisis. This database allows for the collection of DNA and other genetic materials for identifying remains. Yet, we know that many AI/AN individuals are not listed in this database.

These failures in data collection undermine the administration of justice that is this Subcommittee's focus. When federal databases contain incomplete or inconsistent information about AI/AN people, federal prosecutors and investigators cannot conduct their work, and enforcement resources cannot be allocated effectively.

Our hope was for this report to spark sweeping data reform across the Department of Justice (DOJ) and state and local law enforcement agencies after the passing of the Not Invisible Act and Savanna's Act, which could have assisted in a data-informed response to appropriately address this crisis. However, there has been minimal movement toward addressing the lack of data on the MMIP crisis nationwide. In 2021, the GAO provided data-specific recommendations to DOJ and DOI for meeting the legislative mandates of the Not Invisible Act and Savanna's Act. They recommended that DOJ and DOI 1) require the Attorney General (AG) to develop a plan for accomplishing ongoing data analyses of data in existing federal databases, 2) develop a strategy to educate the public on entering data into the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs), 3) and develop a plan to conduct specific outreach to Tribes, tribal organizations and urban Indian organizations (UIO) regarding their ability to publicly enter data into NamUs. And yet, five years later, little movement on these recommendations can be seen that directly impacts the ability of policymakers to make data-informed decisions on MMIP.

Five years ago, this GAO report underscored that the DOJ is responsible for this initiative, yet it has continued to not fulfill the minimum mandates of the Savanna's Act and the Not Invisible Act regarding data.

UIHI continues to step in to address these issues in the face of federal inaction. We launched a data-collection toolkit and training for law enforcement on how to collect this data appropriately. We have trained hundreds of officers across the country, often uncompensated, in an effort to improve MMIP data, but we have barely scratched the surface. We have partnered with numerous MMIP advocacy organizations to educate the community on public entry into NamUs, and my staff has assisted tribal members in entering missing persons as far back as 2009. This is the only federal database where members of the public can enter data that is then verified by NamUs.

The lack of data limits the ability to implement innovative technologies to improve response to the MMIP crisis. Opportunities to utilize AI and machine learning exist and need federal direction and investment. We know the quality of data is problematic, however AI and machine learning opens up the opportunity for investment into efforts such as probabilistic matching when identifying specific cases or incidents. This is a statistical approach used to determine the likelihood that two records represent the same entity, even when the data is incomplete, inconsistent, or contains errors, to connect reports that refer to the same person or incident across NCIC, NamUs, tribal RMS, and media tips. This approach and other AI innovations can account for spelling variants and incomplete data. As with any use of AI, it must have human oversight and consistent review, particularly by Tribes.

Recommendations

Given this Subcommittee's jurisdiction over the administration of justice, I urge you to:

- a. Direct DOJ to fully implement the Not Invisible Act and the Savanna's Act, specifically all mandates related to data improvements and interagency collaboration. At minimum, DOJ should catalog what information exists across state and federal databases, including FBI NCIC, NamUs, BIA MMU, USAO district reports, tribal police RMS/CAD, 911, EAS alerts like Feather/Turquoise Alerts, social services, shelters, and hospitals.**
- b. Direct DOJ to provide a yearly report to Indian Country and Congress on their progress**

on these mandates.

- c. Direct DOJ to issue a standardized data codebook for all federal databases to ensure consistent data collection and reporting in cases involving AI/AN.**

Given the Subcommittee's jurisdiction over all federal law-enforcement surveillance tools, it is well-positioned to:

- d. Investigate the appropriate use of AI and machine learning in MMIP investigations.**
This must include human oversight and consistent review.
- e. Ensure that the use of AI is carried out in collaboration with Tribes and tribal data experts, to ensure appropriate use that does not violate the sovereign rights of Tribes through meaningful Tribal consultation and urban confer.**

5. PRESERVE VAWA, TRIBAL DATA SOVEREIGNTY, AND IMPLEMENT JURISDICTION FIX

Practical solutions also require authority. Congress should preserve and expand VAWA tribal jurisdiction, protect tribal data sovereignty, and enact COLT's jurisdiction fix to close gaps that leave non-Indian offenders beyond direct tribal accountability. Congress fixed a Supreme Court-created gap before through the Duro fix. This proposal, expertly created by the Coalition of Large Tribes (COLT), would amend 25 U.S.C. § 1301 to recognize tribal criminal jurisdiction over all persons located in Indian Country, subject to due process protections under 25 U.S.C. § 1302(c). Technology can locate a phone, issue an alert, or map a search area. Jurisdiction determines who may investigate, arrest, prosecute, and prevent the next offense.

Recommendations

- a. Direct DOJ to establish formal MMIP coordination protocols among FBI field offices, U.S. Attorneys' Offices, BIA-OJS, tribal law enforcement, victim-service providers, and tribal governments.**
- b. Create DOJ-supported active-case and cold-case review teams for unresolved MMIP, homicide, and violent-crime investigations in Indian Country.**

Conclusion

The promise of public safety is intended to be universal, but for Native people, it is a promise that has never been met with resources or reality. Tribal Nations have a legal right to public safety resources as a part of the prepaid benefits included in numerous treaties signed with the United States. However, Tribes have never received the adequate resources they are owed and the impact is evident in the MMIP crisis. The violence comes with an astronomical cost as violent crimes accounted for 85% of the \$2.6 trillion in total costs associated with personal and property costs in the United States in 2017. Stopping this violence reduces monetary cost, but most importantly, improves the lives of all Americans, not just Native people. This Subcommittee can act directly by advancing pending Tribal law-enforcement legislation and holding the DOJ, the FBI, and federal prosecutors accountable for their responsibilities. It can also partner with appropriators, other authorizing committees, and the FCC to address gaps beyond its direct jurisdiction. Indigenous people are still missing in life and in the data, I urge you to consider these recommendations, the lives of my people depend on it.

SACRED RESPONSIBILITY

PROTECTING OUR *PEOPLE*



A national snapshot of the impact of federal funding challenges on domestic violence, sexual assault, missing and murdered people, and other violence-related services for American Indians and Alaska Natives.



We ask Congress and the Administration to protect and expand funding for Tribal and rural survivor services. We need stable, flexible, and culturally informed support. We need grant programs that recognize the realities of remote life, the legacy of colonization, and the strength of our Tribal Nations... We hope you will stand with us to ensure that future generations inherit not only the weight of our past, but the strength of our survival, and the full support of a nation that honors its trust and treaty responsibilities.

-Tribal Survey Participant



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Urban Indian Health Institute (UIHI) wants to acknowledge the partnership with National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), Alaska Native Women's Resource Center (ANWRC), National Indigenous Women's Resource Center (NIWRC), StrongHearts Native Helpline, NCAI Violence Against Women Task Force, and Alliance of Tribal Coalitions to End Violence (ATCEV) and their collective efforts and continued advocacy for this essential work.

UIHI and partners want to give tremendous gratitude to the advocates and organizations working to protect and support survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, missing and murdered Indigenous people, and other types of violence across the nation.

Names have been changed to protect the anonymity of survivors and providers.

Language Note

The authors use the terms “Native,” “Indian,” “Indigenous,” and “American Indian and Alaska Native” interchangeably throughout this report. The demographic terminology included in source material is referenced when appropriate.¹

Recommended Citation

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PURPOSE

This report examines the impacts of new and ongoing federal funding cuts to violence-related programs and services for American Indians and Alaska Natives, including those serving survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and missing and murdered Indigenous people (MMIP).

201 Tribes and organizations serving Native survivors of violence responded to the survey, including Tribes, Tribal coalitions, Native nonprofits, and Urban Indian Organizations (UIOs).

The analyses and recommendations presented in this report can be used to inform partners and legislators about the impact of federal funding cuts to violence-related services for American Indians and Alaska Natives.

Program Types

Tribe - A sovereign nation with inherent self-government rights.

Tribal Organization - A Tribal governing body or a Native organization that is either established by a Tribal government or elected by community members, with Indians actively involved in all aspects of its work.

Tribal Coalition - A formal alliance or nonprofit organization formed by Indigenous groups, Tribes, and Native domestic violence and sexual assault organizations to pool resources, advocate for shared goals, and provide culturally specific services to American Indians and Alaska Natives, including nonprofit Tribal Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Coalitions funded by the Violence Against Women Act.

Urban Indian Organization - A nonprofit corporate body situated in an urban center governed by a board of directors of whom at least 51 percent are American Indians/Alaska Natives, for establishing and administering an IHS urban Indian health program and related activities.

Native Nonprofit - A not-for-profit whose leadership and board are made up of a majority of American Indian/Alaska Native, and whose mission is to provide services to the Native population.





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Definitions

Survivor Services: Promotes safety, healing, and justice for victims and survivors of crime by meeting their individualized needs, upholding victims' rights, and enhancing community and national responses to harm. ^[17]

Advocacy Services: Support that promotes survivors' rights, safety, access to resources, and self-determination. ^[18]

Key Findings

- 64% of respondents reported being substantially impacted by funding cuts to grants that were not due to expire since January 2025.
- 44% of current survivor services have or will be reduced due to funding cuts.
- Federal funding covered over 50% of the budgets for 84% of survey respondents.
- The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) was the largest funder of survey respondents (46%), followed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (36%).
- 25,074 Native survivors received services from participating organizations in a 12-month period. Of those, 28% of survivors were Native children (under 18) and 8% were pregnant or postpartum.
- Safe housing was the most utilized service accounting for 58% of all services.
- Supportive services, including transportation, court accompaniment, and counseling accounted for 42% of all services.

- 1,582 Native people were referred to StrongHearts Native Helpline over the previous twelve-month timespan.
- 419 training sessions related to violence prevention and intervention were provided to 12,541 members of the public over the previous 12 months.
- Respondents provided an aggregate of 227 types of advocacy services. Of these services, 41% have been or will be reduced due to funding cuts.
- Respondents provided an aggregate of 146 types of advocacy services for children/youth. Of these services, 36% have been or will be reduced due to funding cuts.
- Respondents provided an aggregate of 198 types of healthcare services. Of these services, 36% have been or will be reduced due to funding cuts.
- Respondents provided an aggregate of 83 types of financial services. Of these services, 40% have been or will be reduced due to funding cuts.
- Respondents provided an aggregate of 52 types of legal services. Of these services, 40% have been or will be reduced due to funding cuts.
- Respondents provided an aggregate of 142 supportive services, including prevention and educational programs. Of these services, 53% have been or will be reduced due to funding cuts.
- 20% of services provided to Active Duty or Veteran Victims were reduced due to funding cuts.
- 1,156 requests from victims served by respondents were NOT able to be met due to funding constraints. Of these, 263 requests were for children.
- 60% of unmet need requests were for safe housing support.
- 53% of respondents offered culturally specific services. Of these, 16 organizations said that funding for these services had been reduced or eliminated since January 2025.
- Essential service reductions included translation/interpretation services (53%), housing/landlord support (50%), transitional and other housing support (50%), direct cash assistance (50%), and technology use support (47%).
- 49% reported they struggle with the recruitment of Tribal law enforcement officers.
- 43% reported they struggle with retention of Tribal law enforcement after training.

Recommendations

1. Federal agencies must include consistent and sustainable noncompetitive funding for Tribal Nations for all public safety and victim services needs in their annual budget requests. Congress should direct appropriate funding levels for noncompetitive funding that meets expressed need.
2. Congressionally allocated grant programs established for American Indian and Alaska Natives should be exempt from any federal administration elimination of programs deemed DEI as these programs are the fulfillment of treaty and trust obligations for public safety.
3. Tribal consultation and urban confer should be initiated by the federal administration prior to the elimination of grants that recognizes the web of federal funding that supplements drastically underfunded Tribal set-asides and funding.
4. DOJ should request from Congress and the federal administration the total amount of funding authorized for Tribal programs in VAWA, especially for the Special Tribal Criminal Jurisdiction grant program and reimbursement.
5. DOJ and DOI should request Congress increase funding for Tribal Nations' implementation of Special Tribal Criminal Jurisdiction for DOJ, DHHS, and the BIA.
6. Congress should pass legislation such as Bridging Agency Data Gaps and Ensuring Safety (BADGES) for Native Communities Act (HR 1010/S 390) and the Parity for Tribal Law Enforcement Act (HR 3712/S 2452) that establish grant programs, provide resources and training, and provide support for increasing appropriately trained and compensated Tribal law enforcement.
7. Congress should support the Native American Housing Assistance and Self Determination Modernization Act of 2026.
8. Congress should support a permanent Tribal set-aside fix to the authorizing legislation of the Victims of Crime Act Tribal funding stream that reflects actual Tribal needs and continues to support the flexible use of funding.
9. Congress should pass a FVPSA reauthorization that: 1) adjusts the funding distribution to increase the amount that Tribes receive from 10% to 12.5%; 2) dedicates formula funding for Tribal coalitions to provide culturally appropriate technical assistance to Tribes; 3) provides permanent funding for the national Indian domestic violence hotline; 4) provides permanent funding for the Alaska Tribal Resource Center on Domestic Violence to reduce disparities facing Native victims; and 5) provides permanent funding for the Native Hawaiian Resource Center on Domestic Violence to reduce disparities facing Native Hawaiian victims.
10. BIA should continue requesting additional federal funding to provide public safety and justice resources to Tribal Nations in P.L. 280 states.

See appendices for more information.



BACKGROUND

American Indians and Alaska Natives suffer from some of the highest rates of violence in the United States.² Finding the appropriate solutions to combat this crisis has plagued policymakers and Indian Country alike as the human and monetary costs decimate urban and rural Native communities. Women are missing, children are suffering, and after Black men, Native men are more likely to be murdered than anyone else in the nation.³

The promise of public safety is intended to be universal, but for Native people it is a promise that has never been met with resources or reality. Tribal Nations have a legal right to public safety resources as a part of the prepaid benefits included in numerous treaties signed with the United States. However, Tribes have never received the adequate resources they are owed.⁴ The violence comes with an astronomical cost as violent crimes accounted for 85% of the \$2.6 trillion in total costs associated with personal and property costs in the United States in 2017.⁵ Stopping this violence reduces monetary cost, but most importantly improves the lives of all Americans. For Indigenous communities, research has shown us what works to build thriving safe communities—sustained investment in culturally based programming⁶ and Tribal law enforcement.

Through the efforts of Tribes, Urban Indian Organizations (UIOs), Tribal organizations, and Indigenous leadership, a web of federal funding has been established over the decades, establishing programming across Indian Country, both rural and urban. However, this funding has never fully met the documented need and falls drastically short of the treaty and trust obligations owed by the U.S. government for public safety. This budget shortfall has created the necessity for programs to expand the web of funding to numerous federal agencies outside of the U.S. Department of Justice, who holds the responsibility for appropriate disbursement of federally mandated Tribal set-asides for public safety. For urban Indian communities, the funding maze holds further complications as they are often not directly eligible for Tribal set-aside dollars (unless eligibility allows for Tribal governmental designation), making them more dependent on local, state, and other federal grant opportunities. Through the ingenuity of Native leadership, the web of funding has built thriving

organizations despite these ongoing obstacles.

The current federal and state funding environment is threatening the ability of Native communities to continue to provide services for the prevention, intervention, and ending of violence in Indian Country.

These threats include funding revoked overnight, the potential elimination of the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) within the DOJ, and removal of the Not Invisible Act Commission report from the DOJ website. As a result, Tribes and other service providers are scrambling to serve the most vulnerable within our communities, amplifying the need to ensure that the federal government fulfills treaty and trust obligations via resource allocation for public safety and victim services.

This report provides a snapshot of how federal funding and administrative cuts are affecting direct service providers across Indian Country, including Tribes, Urban Indian Organizations (UIOs), and national organizations, over a 12-month reporting period. Additionally, it provides specific recommendations to ensure fulfillment of treaty and trust obligations for public safety and victim services.

“The urgency cannot be ignored, and the voices of victims cannot be silenced. All of Indian Country is watching the actions of policymakers and agencies. We will fight for the safety of our relatives. This report points the path forward—we urge you to take it.” -Abigail Echo-Hawk (Pawnee), Director of Urban Indian Health Institute

ABOUT THE SURVEY

A total of 201 programs and organizations nationwide responded to the survey, including Tribes, Tribal organizations or coalitions, Native nonprofits, and Urban Indian Organizations (UIOs). This report provides a snapshot of services provided by these organizations and cannot be generalized across all programs serving American Indians/Alaska Natives survivors.

Respondents were asked a series of questions focused on funding mechanisms, services provided in the past 12 months, unmet service requests, and Tribal law enforcement.

Figure 1. Participating Programs/Organizations (N=201)

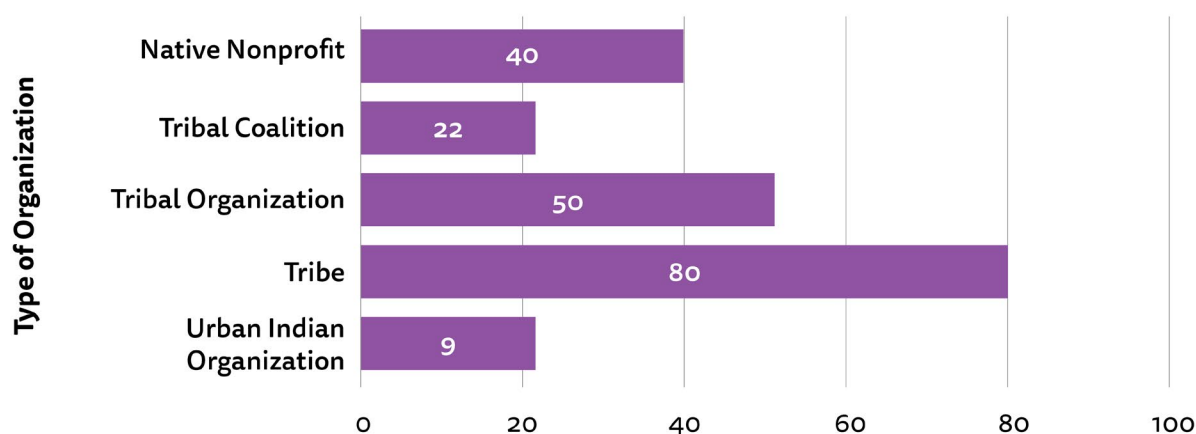
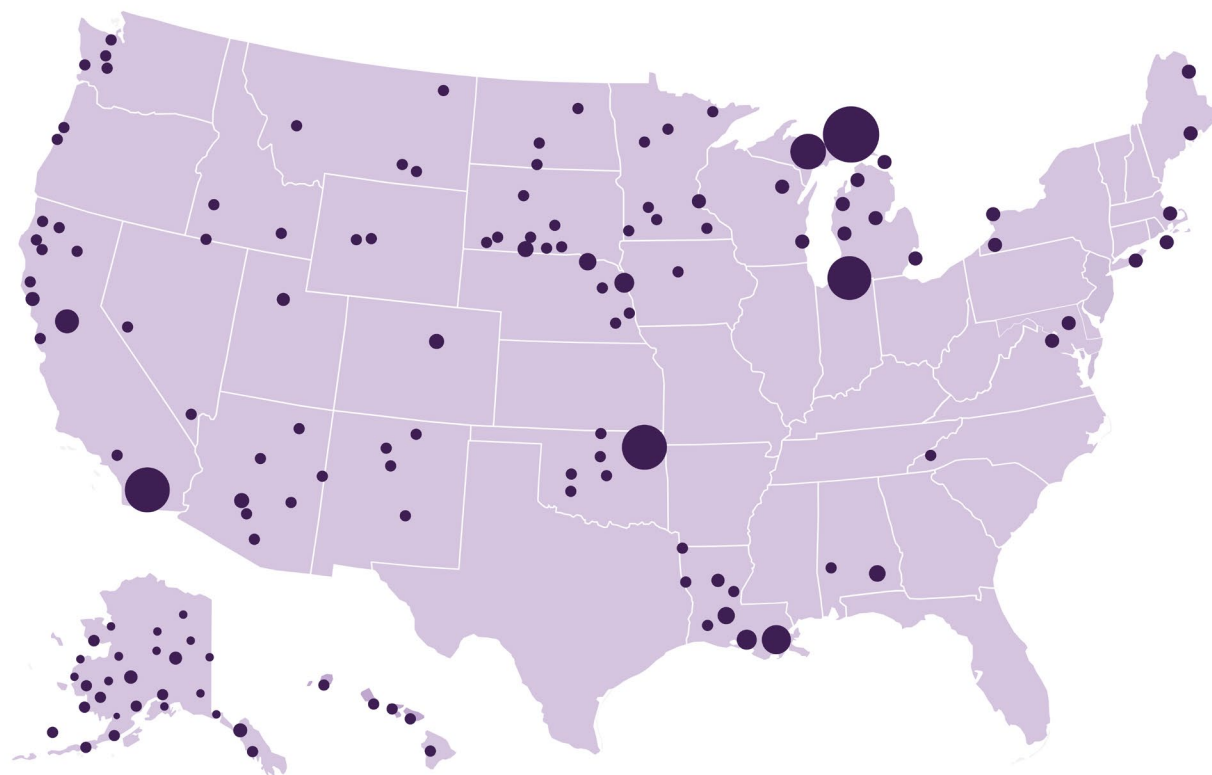


Figure 2. Survey Participants Spanned Indian Country



FINDINGS

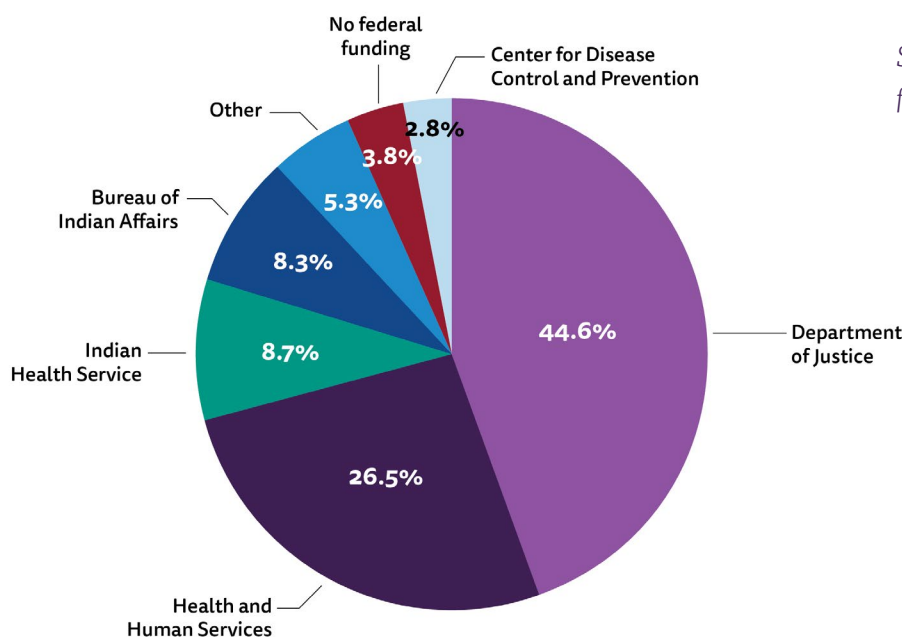
Funding Landscape

Federal funding challenges have significantly impacted American Indian/Alaska Native programs and organizations. 64% of respondents reported being substantially impacted by cuts to federal funding that were not due to expire. Some of these may have been reinstated by the Administration after this survey was completed. However, the impact remains via funding uncertainty, staff layoffs, and hesitancy to reinstate programs that could be cut without notice.

84% of respondents said that federal funding covered over half of the overall budget of their programs, indicating a reliance on federal funds to sustain program services.

The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) was the largest funder for participating programs and organizations. This is consistent with the legal obligation of the DOJ to administer Tribal set-asides for Tribal public safety.

Figure 3. U.S. Funding Sources for Violence-Related Programs



See Appendix A for further funding disaggregation

Violence-Related Services Being Accessed

In the previous 12 months, respondents served 25,074 American Indian/Alaska Native survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, or MMIP nationwide, providing resources, advocacy, and other forms of assistance (Appendix B). 55% received multiple services.

8% of survivors were pregnant or postpartum.

28% of survivors were children.

58% of all services received by adults and children were housing-related, which included emergency shelters, transitional housing, hotels, motels, or Tribal-specific or culturally based housing provided by local programs.

Unmet Needs

While housing-related services were the most accessed, respondents reported 690 unmet requests related to housing and 466 unmet requests related to supportive services. Of these unmet requests, 23% were for children.

42% of all services received by adults and children were for supportive services, including transportation, court accompaniment, and counseling.

47 participating organizations referred 1,582 individuals to the StrongHearts Native Helpline.



StrongHearts Native Helpline is federally funded free, 24/7, confidential and anonymous domestic violence and sexual violence helpline for Native Americans and Alaska Natives.⁷

419 training sessions were provided by programs to 12,541 members of the public, addressing topics like domestic violence prevention and early intervention.

Alaska's Unique Challenges to Address Violence Against Native People

While making up only 19% of Alaska's population, Alaska Native people account for 47% of reported rape survivors.⁸ Of the 15 Alaska organizations that responded to the survey, all had been impacted by funding cuts with 73% reporting being substantially impacted. This was higher compared to the overall average of respondents (~64%). The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Reauthorization of 2022 responds to this disparity with provisions tailored specifically for Alaska. These changes address longstanding challenges created by the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) of 1971, and other federal laws and policies, which disrupted traditional Tribal governance. Unlike Tribes in the Lower 48, whose sovereignty is upheld by treaties, ANCSA and other federal laws and policies limited Tribal authority in ways that weakened their ability to respond to violence.⁹

How does VAWA 2022 help?

- Establishes a Special Tribal Criminal Jurisdiction (STCJ) pilot program, allowing up to five Alaska Tribes each year to hold non-Native offenders accountable.¹⁰
- Provides technical assistance through the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) to build Tribal justice capacity.¹⁰

Why does this matter?

Alaska is home to 229 federally recognized Tribes, nearly 40% of all U.S. Tribes. Many are located in remote areas, where law enforcement is limited or entirely absent. Over 40% of villages have no full-time officers, and vast distances mean response times are often delayed.

What's still needed?

While VAWA's reforms are critical, they are just a starting point. Continued attention and investment are essential to:

- Expand shelter and housing options.
- Improve access to legal services and advocacy.¹¹
- Support Tribal justice infrastructure.¹¹



Widespread Reductions Across Critical Services

Reductions were noted across every single service area. The largest reductions were observed in third party translation/interpretation services (53%), housing/landlord support (50%), transitional/other housing support (50%), direct cash assistance (50%), and technology use support (47%).

Culturally Specific Services

53 organizations surveyed reported offering some kind of culturally specific service for American Indian/Alaska Native survivors of violence with beading as the most offered service. Other services included regalia-making, drumming, sweats, ceremony, and access to traditional healers or medicine people. Of respondents that offered culturally specific services, 16 said that funding had been reduced or eliminated since January 2025.

“Our healing circles have become an increasingly important space for survivors to connect with one another and reclaim strength through culture... One participant shared that the healing circle has become ‘a place where I can breathe and remember who I am.’” -Tribal Survey Participant

Housing-Related Services

120 housing services were offered across 46 reporting organizations. Of these services, 44% have been or will be reduced due to funding cuts. This includes emergency shelter, hotel/motel stay, support/advocacy related to housing/landlord, and transitional or other housing.

Language Services

Many American Indian/Alaska Native survivors are faced with additional difficulties such as language and cultural concerns, which can make it difficult to understand their rights and find services. In a 12-month period, an aggregate of 22 language services were offered across organizations with 41% reducing services.

Advocacy Services

227 advocacy services were offered across 47 reporting organizations. 41% have been or will be reduced due to funding cuts. This includes services for victims with disability issues, Two-Spirit/LGBTQ+, elder abuse, teen/young adult dating abuse, trafficking, third-party translation/interpretation, and stalking.

Children/Youth Services

An aggregate 146 services supporting children/youth were offered across 43 reporting organizations. Of these services, respondents indicated 36% have been or will be reduced. This includes childcare, children's support/advocacy, safe exchange/visitation, therapy/counseling, and child welfare/protective services support with the highest impact observed for 43% reduction for children's support/advocacy.

Substance Misuse & Mental Health Services

198 healthcare services were reported as being offered across 44 reporting organizations. Of these services, 36% have been or will be reduced due to funding cuts, including support for substance misuse (39% reduction) and support/advocacy for mental health (38% reduction).

Financial Services

83 financial services were offered across organizations. Of these services, 40% have been or will be reduced due to funding cuts, including support to access public benefits (42% reduction).

Legal Services

Respondents indicated 52 legal services were offered, and of these services, 40% have been or will be reduced.

Active Duty & Veterans Services

Notably, 20% of services provided to Active Duty or Veteran Victims in the U.S. Armed Forces were reduced due to funding cuts.



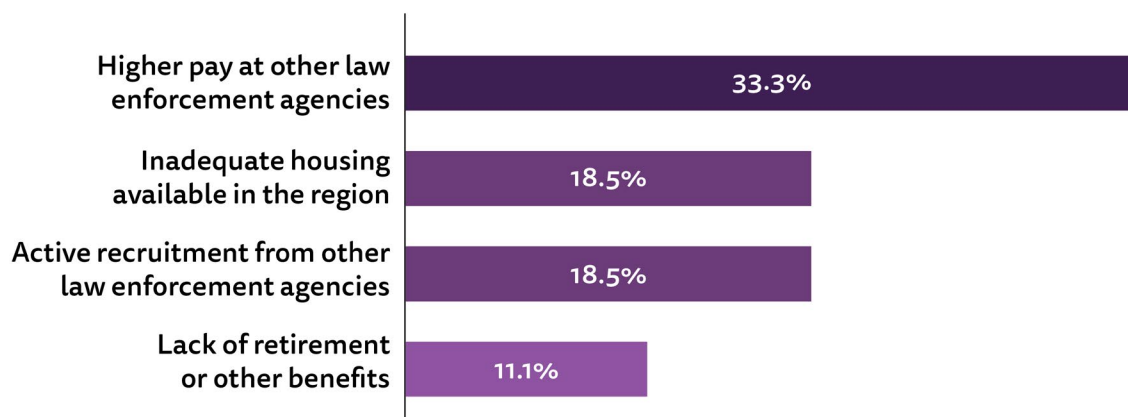
Law Enforcement

Of the 35 organizations who responded to Tribal law enforcement questions, 49% reported they struggle with the recruitment of Tribal law enforcement officers and 43% reported they struggle with retention after their training. Of the 35 respondents, 51% were Tribes and 49% were Tribal organizations.

Stated issues with retention were associated to higher pay at other law enforcement agencies, inadequate housing available in the region, active recruitment from other law enforcement agencies, and lack of retirement or other benefits. Respondants specified that remote living, stressful nature of the role, high turnover, and understaffing also significantly contribute to their struggle with retention.

Despite these struggles, 50% of programs reported that law enforcement in their local service areas are trained to be culturally attuned to the needs of Native victims, survivors, and their families, indicating the positive impact of culturally based training and community engagement.

Figure 4. Issues with Retention of Tribal Law Enforcement Officers





DISCUSSION

“Our program is 95% reliant on federal funding. Decreases would decimate services.” -Tribal Survey Participant

AN OBLIGATION TO INDIAN COUNTRY

This report reveals the urgent consequences of federal funding cuts on Native-run programs that serve American Indian/Alaska Native survivors of violence. Since January 2025, federal funding challenges have impacted organizations who responded to the survey with 64% reporting being substantially impacted by these funding cuts. These programs—already operating with limited resources—face devastating setbacks as proposed reductions threaten the primary funding streams that sustain them. The federal government has a legal obligation for public safety of American Indian and Alaska Natives. Cutting funding to these programs not only undermines essential services, but also represents a failure to uphold the federal government’s responsibility to Tribal communities. Protecting and expanding funding to these programs is a matter of justice, accountability, and upholding treaty and trust obligations owed to Native people.

Supporting survivors in rural and urban Native communities is essential to reduce the human and monetary costs of violence. This survey illustrates the impact of the current policy and funding environment that exasperates the already strained safety net for the most vulnerable in Native communities. Organizations repeatedly cited housing, whether emergency, transitional, or long-term, as their most frequent unmet need with housing assistance being constrained by restrictions outlined in funding awards, annual spending caps, or the complete absence of federal or state funding. Long-term housing is persistently unattainable due to a lack of affordable and accessible housing units.

There is also a lack of vacancies available at shelters and transitional housing projects. Moreover, housing needs are not fully met because shelters and programs have policies that impose maximum stay limits. A respondent emphasized that *“when clients have exhausted their stay at the Tribal Domestic Violence Shelter, there is no housing for them.”*

SYSTEM UNDER STRAIN

One organization described four instances where they could not offer shelter to clients because the clients required specialized services and referred them to a crisis response team. Another organization listed reentry support as a critically needed, yet unavailable specialized service requested by survivors who are trying to establish safe housing.

These findings paint a clear picture of a system under strain. Many programs are forced to triage care, refer survivors elsewhere, or turn people away. Increased investment in culturally responsive, survivor-centered, and geographically appropriate infrastructure is urgently needed.

Individual counseling and therapy are another area organizations currently struggle with when trying to meet client needs. Organizations described extensive waitlists for clients seeking individual services due to a shortage of mental health professionals, especially those providing culturally grounded services. One respondent shared, *“Due to our clinical team being overextended with these requests, many are placed on our waiting list.”*

Organizations indicated that survivor legal services were sorely lacking and reduced funding will increase this disparity. Legal services are key to assisting survivors to obtain restraining orders, determine child custody, and other legal issues. For rural communities, the situation is even more dire. One organization explained legal professionals seldom travel to their service area. Another said, *“legal advocacy and representation remain a challenge. Many survivors are hesitant to engage with attorneys they’ve never met in person... Building the trust necessary for effective legal support is difficult when legal professionals are unable to travel to our community.”*

A WIDENING GAP

As a result of the changes and restructuring of federal agencies, organizations are experiencing significant disruptions to their funding. These include delayed or total loss of grant dollars, pending Notices of Funding Opportunities (NOFOs), grant eliminations, suspended communication with federal agencies, and loss of program officers. Organizations are left with no option but to take drastic cost-saving measures, including freezes on hiring, travel and overtime, staff layoffs and salary cuts, and reductions to facility space and hours of operation. Survey respondents reported an increased sense of uncertainty in planning and budgeting for projects and services. These imposed approaches to decreasing expenses hinder organizations’ ability to maintain their current operations and result in program reductions, affecting victims who depend on their essential services.

“Since January 2025, we have been forced to close our doors on Fridays due to an inability to cover staff salaries on those days, reducing our full-time workforce by 20%. [W]e also drastically reduced our comprehensive mental health services from 23 programs down to just 6. Our physical space has been reduced by 50%.”
-Native Nonprofit Survey Participant

Table 1. Federal Funding Challenges

	Funding Challenges	Impacts
1	Delayed disbursement of grant dollars	Freeze on hiring, travel and overtime
2	Total Loss of grants	Staff layoffs and salary cuts
3	Notice of funding opportunities (NOFOs) are pending rather than released	Reduced facility space and hours of operation
4	Grant elimination after grant closure	Delay of program expansion along with total elimination of programs
5	Freeze in communication with federal funders	Loss of rapport, trust, and institutional knowledge with funders
6	Grant program officer layoffs	Critical information missing

Respondents emphasized that the combination of basic needs support, emotional healing, and personal agency helped rebuild lives, strengthen families, and reinforce cultural identity. Ongoing investment in these programs is critical to sustain this momentum and expand the reach of healing-centered, Native-led support. Safe, stable housing was a cornerstone of nearly every story. However, survivors benefited from comprehensive services beyond shelter, including cultural healing service, legal advocacy, transportation, childcare, food, clothing, and employment support.

This snapshot illustrates the impact of federal funding uncertainty. However, it also brings to light the ingenuity and dedication of those serving Indigenous victims of violence. Despite this uncertainty, survey respondents continue to dedicate themselves to creating a healing environment for Native survivors.



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Congress must include consistent and sustainable noncompetitive funding for Tribal Nations for all public safety and victim services needs in their annual budget requests.

Ensuring the safety of Tribal communities and upholding Tribes' sovereign rights requires noncompetitive, sustainable, and ongoing investment. Tribal citizens have a legal right to a well-functioning criminal justice system and responsive public safety services. However, many Tribal Nations struggle with insufficient funding for these essential services, making it difficult to address community needs effectively. Federal agencies serving public safety and victim services in Tribal Nations must provide the necessary funding for programs to uphold treaty and trust obligations and ensure safe thriving Native communities.

2. Congressionally allocated grant programs established for American Indians and Alaska Natives should be exempt from any federal administration elimination of programs deemed DEI as these programs are the fulfillment of treaty and trust obligations for public safety.¹⁹

It is crucial that the Administration ensure Congressionally allocated grant programs for American Indian and Alaska Native communities remain intact despite DEI program cuts. Under federal law, American Indian/Alaska Native communities are not a racial or ethnic group, but a political class. These programs fulfill federal trust and treaty obligations and are vital for public safety. Tribal communities depend on these grants as lifelines, and their removal would significantly harm the livelihoods of Tribal citizens and their justice systems. Without consistent funding, the implementation of restored criminal jurisdiction could be jeopardized, threatening public safety. Preserving these grant programs is essential to uphold Tribal sovereignty and Tribal citizens' rights to public safety. As Congress recognized in Section 901 of the Tribal Title of the Violence Against Women Act of 2000, "the unique legal relationship of the United States to Indian tribes creates a Federal trust responsibility to assist tribal governments in safeguarding the lives of Indian women.

3. Tribal consultation and urban confer should be initiated by the federal administration prior to the elimination of any federal grants that recognize the web of federal funding supplementing drastically underfunded Tribal set-asides and directed funding.²⁰

Due to drastic underfunding, most Native programs are forced to utilize a web of funding across federal agencies in order to maintain basic services and programming for victims. This includes grant programs that are not Tribally specific and instead are open to the general population. However, Tribal Nations and the United States have a distinctive political and legal relationship rooted in inherent sovereignty, which is essential for protecting the rights and interests of Tribal citizens and communities. Engaging in Tribal consultation and urban confer leads to better-informed decisions that benefit all parties involved, especially when funding mechanisms are being considered for elimination. Commitment to ongoing and meaningful dialogue with federal agencies whenever sovereign rights or the fulfillment of the United States' trust and treaty obligations may be at stake is critical to our government-to-government relationships. This applies to any changes to federal programs that impact Tribal Nations, not just Tribally specific programs.

4. DOJ should request from Congress and the federal administration the total amount of funding authorized for Tribal programs in VAWA, especially for the Special Tribal Criminal Jurisdiction grant program and reimbursement.

Tribal Nations face significant challenges in implementing the provisions of VAWA 2022 due to a lack of flexible, consistent, and sustainable funding for their justice systems. Tribal Nations invest substantial efforts to prepare their justice programs, but funding shortfalls hinder their ability to fully implement VAWA's restored criminal jurisdiction. Without adequate resources, they cannot meaningfully exercise restored jurisdiction or enhance public safety in their Tribal Nations.

5. DOJ and DOI should request Congress to increase funding for Tribal Nations' implementation of Special Tribal Criminal Jurisdiction for the DOJ, DHHS, and BIA.

Adequate resources are essential for strengthening Tribal justice systems and victim service programs, which are critical for community safety. Special Tribal Criminal Jurisdiction funding will support law enforcement training and collaboration with federal and local agencies. Tribal communities need culturally relevant services to meet the needs of their citizens. Additionally, funding for data collection and research is necessary to demonstrate the effectiveness of these initiatives and advocate for ongoing support. This investment would increase the capacity of Tribal communities to uphold justice and enhance public safety.

6. Congress should pass legislation such as Bridging Agency Data Gaps and Ensuring Safety (BADGES) for Native Communities Act (HR 1010/S 390) and the Parity for Tribal Law Enforcement Act (HR 3712/S 2452) that establish grant programs, provide resources and training, and provide support for increasing appropriately trained and compensated Tribal law enforcement.

Legislation that supports Tribal law enforcement's ability to keep our communities safe is an essential step. The BADGES Act would improve responses to Missing Murdered Indigenous Women and People (MMIWP) cases by expanding Tribal access to missing persons data systems, increasing training for Tribal law enforcement, and providing dedicated funding for coordinating investigations. The Tribal Law Enforcement Parity Act would allow qualifying Tribal law enforcement to enforce federal law within Tribal jurisdictions, reducing red tape. It would also improve recruitment and retention by extending to Tribal law enforcement the same benefits that federal officers already receive. While this legislation is a start, if passed, it should be seen as an incremental step to full funding and safety for Native communities. We encourage members of Congress to partner with Tribal Nations and Tribal advocates to introduce additional legislation to fully respect the nation's treaty and trust obligations.

7. Congress should support the Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Modernization Act of 2026 (NAHASDA).

This act is a bipartisan effort with strong Tribal support with the goal to strengthen and modernize the foundation of Tribal housing policy. It aims to modernize outdated policies that have not been updated since 1996, strengthen Tribal self-determination in housing development, expand access to rental housing units and pathways to homeownership, improve infrastructure development in rural and Tribal communities, and unlock economic growth through housing investment. As indicated by the findings in this report, housing was the most requested service by survivors of violence. However, it was also the most likely to be unmet. This Act has the opportunity to strengthen Tribal housing to meet the needs of the community, including survivors.

8. Congress should introduce and pass a permanent Tribal set-aside fix to the authorizing legislation of the Victims of Crime Act Tribal funding stream that reflects actual Tribal needs and continues to support the flexible use of funding.

The Tribal Victim Services Set-Aside within DOJ has served as a critical and flexible source of funding that allows Tribes to administer appropriate crime victim services in their communities. However, this crucial funding source remains vulnerable to changing federal priorities. A permanent legislative fix in the Victims of Crime Act would provide long-term stability for funding for Native communities.

- 9. Congress should pass a FVPSA reauthorization that: 1) adjusts the funding distribution to increase the amount that Tribes receive from 10% to 12.5%; 2) dedicates formula funding for Tribal coalitions to provide culturally appropriate technical assistance to Tribes; 3) provides permanent funding for the national Indian domestic violence hotline; 4) provides permanent funding for the Alaska Tribal Resource Center on Domestic Violence to reduce disparities facing Native victims; and 5) provides permanent funding for the Native Hawaiian Resource Center on Domestic Violence to reduce disparities facing Native Hawaiian victims.**

The Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA) has been a critical resource in combating the lack of shelter and supportive services for victims of domestic violence, serving as the only dedicated federal funding source for domestic violence shelters across the nation. However, the authorization for FVPSA expired in 2015. Tribal leaders have expressed concerns about the limited availability of shelter and supportive services for Tribal Nations. The reauthorization of FVPSA is essential for addressing these issues and enhancing public safety within Tribal communities.

- 10. Congress should direct additional federal funding to the BIA to provide public safety and justice resources to Federally Recognized Tribes in P.L. 280 states.**

In P.L. 280 states, the state government holds jurisdiction over crimes in Indian Country that in other states is under the jurisdiction of the federal government. However, P.L. 280 state governments fail to uphold their responsibilities to Native communities, and have low prosecution rates in cases of violence against Native women. Tribal law enforcement in these states need additional funding from the BIA to fill these gaps left by their state governments to ensure the safety of Native people.

NOTES

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: FUNDING TYPES

Other types of funding sources that were listed by respondents are listed below.

Funding Source
National Institutes of Health
NYS
National Children's Alliance
Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) through state
Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) Tribal Civil and Criminal Legal Assistance (TCCLA) for Tribal court criminal and civil representation, LSC
Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA)
Child Care Development Fund
Victims of Crime Act (VOCA)
Department of Children and Families
California Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC) Grant
Bureau of Indian Affairs District VI
Tribal Governments
Office for Victims of Crime (OVC)
Office on Violence Against Women (OVW)
American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)
Corporation for Public Broadcasting
Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)
Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)
Medicaid reimbursements, TOR grant

State funding
Rural, STOP, VAWA DV/SASP
State funds- DPH
United States Department of Agriculture, Environmental Protection Agency
SIP TVSA VAWA OSHF
In-kind

APPENDIX B: SERVICES OFFERED

Services offered by organizations and the impact due to funding cuts.

■ **Survivor**
■ **Advocacy**
■ **Both**
**Color indicates type of service offered*

Service		No. of Programs Offering Service in the Past 12 months	% of programs offering service that have been or will be reduced due to funding
Housing	Emergency Shelter	33	36.4%
	Hotel/Motel Stay	35	42.9%
	Support/Advocacy Related to Housing/Landlord	32	50.0%
	Transitional or Other Housing	20	50.0%
Language Services	Bilingual Advocacy	11	45.5%
	Advocacy in Tribal Language	11	36.4%

Survivors	Disability Issues	35	40.0%
	Two-Spirit and LGBTQ+	32	46.9%
	Elder Victims	36	41.7%
	Teen/YA	42	35.7%
	Victims of Trafficking	30	40.0%
	Third Party Translation/ Interpretation	15	53.3%
	Victims of Stalking	37	37.8%
Children	Childcare/Daycare	9	33.3%
	Children's Support/ Advocacy	28	42.9%
	Safe Exchange/ Visitation	12	33.3%
	Therapy/Counseling	25	36.0%
	Traditional Indian Medicine practitioners	15	26.7%
	Support/ Advocacy Related to Child Welfare/Protective Services	32	31.3%
	Support/ Advocacy Related to Ensuring Access to Indian Child Welfare programs	25	40.0%

Health Care	HIV/AIDS Information and/or Support	19	26.3%
	Onsite Medical Services	14	28.6%
	Support/Advocacy Related to Health Care or Health Care Systems	29	44.8%
	Support/Advocacy for Mental Health	37	37.8%
	Support/Advocacy for Substance Use	33	39.4%
	Therapy/Counseling for Adults	27	33.3%
	Traditional Indian Medicine Practitioners for Adults	17	35.3%
	Referral and/or Accompaniment to Sexual Assault Forensic Examination	22	31.8%
Financial	Direct cash assistance	12	50.0%
	Financial Literacy/ Budgeting	20	35.0%
	Job training/ Employment assistance	18	38.9%
	Matched Savings Programs and/or Microloans	2	0.0%
	Public benefits/ TANF/Welfare	31	41.9%

Legal	Alternatives to the Criminal Legal System (Transformative, Restorative Justice)	13	38.5%
	Court Accompaniment or Legal advocacy	31	41.9%
	Legal Representation by an Attorney	15	40.0%
Other / Non-Residential Supportive Services	Prevention and/or educational programs	37	35.1%
	Support/Advocacy Related to Technology Use	19	47.4%
	Support/Advocacy to Active Duty or Veteran Victims in U.S. Armed Forces	10	20.0%
	Transportation	38	31.6%
	Safety Planning and Peer Support	38	39.5%

APPENDIX C: METHODOLOGY

The Urban Indian Health Institute (UIHI) contacted Tribal, urban Indian, and partner organizations to complete the Sacred Responsibility, Supporting the Sacred survey. The snowballing¹² method — where existing participants help recruit future participants from among their acquaintances — was used to broaden respondent base from other organizations, Tribes, and programs. The survey was administered in an online format through REDCap 15.4.5, a secure web platform for building and managing online databases and surveys, from May 5, 2025 to June 28, 2025.

Organizations meeting the following criteria were eligible to participate in the survey: (i) Must identify as one of the following: Tribe/ Tribal Organization/ Tribal Coalition/ Urban Indian Organization/ Native non-profit; (ii) Must provide resources, services, advocacy, or other types of assistance to American Indian/Alaska Native survivors of violence. This included domestic and/or family violence, sexual assault, human trafficking, missing or murdered Indigenous victims, or other victims.

Multiple survey questions were adapted from the existing Domestic Violence (DV) Counts Survey⁸ conducted annually by the National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV), which is a one-day, unduplicated count of DV services requested and received across the nation. Adaptations were reviewed by the NCAI Violence Against Women Task Force, ensuring that the questions were relevant to our population and were culturally appropriate for participants. The survey gave respondents the option to not answer all questions.

All survey data was recorded, cleaned and analyzed using UIHI's Indigenous Evaluation Framework¹⁴. Qualitative data was cleaned in alignment with quantitative data and skip logic was reviewed. For both qualitative and quantitative data, responses were aggregated across the Tribal organizations for multiple funding sources, program types, and all types of services including culturally specific services.

Qualitative data were analyzed using an iterative thematic analysis process.¹⁰ Themes were evaluated through coding using Microsoft Excel for qualitative content analysis. Response rates and descriptive statistics were performed in Microsoft Excel for Microsoft 365 MSO (Version 2506) 64-bit and maps were created in Tableau 2024.3. Surveys that were submitted but did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded from the analysis.

To simplify data analysis and interpretation, responses from five-point Likert scale questions were consolidated into a two-point Likert scale. Specifically, the original response categories of 'Extremely Impacted', 'Very Impacted' and 'Moderately Impacted' were combined into 'Substantially Impacted' category, while 'slightly impacted' and 'not at all impacted' were combined into 'Minimally impacted' category. This recording approach¹⁶ was adopted to reduce response variability and enhance clarity in reporting trends.

Survey Response Rate:

The survey response rate was 89%. This rate was calculated based on the number of surveys that met the inclusion criteria, including both complete and partial responses.

Note: The response rate should be interpreted with caution. Determining the true population size using a snowball sample is difficult due to the unknown number of referrals made by initial respondents.

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