



## RESOLUTION

### ACTION AND AWARENESS FOR MISSING & MURDERED INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

Re: League of Women Voters Public Policy Position on Violence Prevention

- **Whereas** data collection has proven that Indigenous people have been disproportionately impacted by violence in the United States; and,
- **Whereas** across the United States and Canada, families, and communities have advocated for missing and murdered Indigenous people through numerous community events. Additionally, organizations such as the Sovereign Bodies Institute, The Coalition to Stop Violence Against Native Women, and Not Our Native Daughters have formed to advocate effectively with grassroots knowledge at the state and national level; and,
- **Whereas** Indigenous people experience violence, homicide, and sexual assault and are reported missing at disproportionate rates relative to any other race/ethnicity in Wyoming, i.e., eight (8) times higher than White people; and,
- **Whereas** the complexity of reporting and determination of jurisdiction for victims and families lead to confusion and errors, and the confusion can extend trauma for the victim or family who may have to report to several departments before proper jurisdiction is determined and an investigation can begin and,
- **Whereas** within the news media coverage of murdered Indigenous women, there is a well-documented bias; therefore,

We Resolve:

- The League of Women Voters of the United States recognizes there is an immediate, ongoing, and urgent problem faced by our state and our nation of Missing and Murdered Indigenous People (MMIP); and
- The League of Women Voters of the United States recognizes the need for Congressional attention to this urgent problem and
- The League of Women Voters of the United States recognizes the leadership of agencies such as the U.S. Department of Interior Missing and Murdered Unit (MMIU).

## Background

In 2015 the MMIP grassroots movement gained momentum as an Indigenous-led social movement in the United States and Canada to raise awareness of the high rates that Indigenous women and girls go missing and are murdered.<sup>1</sup>

Across the United States and Canada, families, and communities have advocated for missing and murdered Indigenous persons through mass searches, marches and rallies, awareness-raising, media campaigns, databases and toolkits, coalition-building, community patrols, artwork and installations, dancing and drumming, healing ceremonies, literary activism, memorials and vigils, performances, fasts and feasts, talks and teach-ins, and journeys and walks.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, organizations such as Sovereign Bodies Institute, The Coalition to Stop Violence Against Native Women, and Not Our Native Daughters, have formed to advocate effectively with grassroots knowledge at the state and national level.

In 2019, Keepers of the Fire, a student organization committed to keeping the Native American culture alive and strong at the University of Wyoming, sponsored the March for Justice after which Governor Gordon formed the MMIP Task Force which reviewed the MMIP Statewide Report developed by the University of Wyoming's Wyoming Survey & Analysis Center.

In January 2021, the groundbreaking Missing & Murdered Indigenous People Statewide Report-Wyoming<sup>3</sup> was released. It was compiled by researchers from the Wyoming Survey and Analysis Center at the University of Wyoming using administrative and archival data, analysis of media coverage on missing persons and homicide victims, and interviews with stakeholders on the Wind River Indian Reservation. It was the first comprehensive Wyoming-specific report on this subject. The MMIP Task Force reviewed the report and played a role in formulating the recommendations. All data presented in this Study is from this report unless otherwise noted.

On May 5, 2021 hundreds of citizens marched in Riverton, Wyoming calling for accountability and accurate representation.<sup>4</sup> Many participants wore bold red shirts, skirts, and jackets. Red is believed to be the only color Spirits see. By wearing red, missing Spirits can be called back and laid to rest. Additionally, many participants painted a red hand across their mouths to symbolize the voices of women being silenced.<sup>5</sup>

Data specific to Wyoming homicides and missing persons is collected from 13 sources. However, Wyoming Survey & Analysis Center (WYSAC) identified only three databases, (Wyoming Department of Health Vital Statistics Services for homicide data and National Crime Information Center and National Missing and Unidentified Persons System for missing persons data), that provided complete information. Other databases were excluded because of the following issues:

---

<sup>1</sup> Wyoming Survey & Analysis Center. Missing & Murdered Indigenous People Statewide Report Wyoming, 2021. <https://wysac.uwyo.edu/wysac/reports/view/7713>

<sup>2</sup> Chartrand, Vickie. The conversation: Grassroots efforts bring #MMIW crisis to light, June 13, 2019. <https://www.indianz.com/news.2019/12/the-conversation-grassroots-efforts-brin.asp>

<sup>3</sup> Wyoming Survey & Analysis Center.

<sup>4</sup> Perez, Nate. Missing and Murdered Indigenous People Hundreds march in Riverton in support of missing and murdered Indigenous people movement. Casper Star-Tribune, May 5, 2021. [https://trib.com/news/state-and-regional/hundreds-march-in-Riverton-in-support-of-missing-and-murdered-Indigenous-people-movement/article\\_f8z81623-3e86-5359-blaa-b8b96c391e8.html](https://trib.com/news/state-and-regional/hundreds-march-in-Riverton-in-support-of-missing-and-murdered-Indigenous-people-movement/article_f8z81623-3e86-5359-blaa-b8b96c391e8.html)

<sup>5</sup> Wyoming Survey & Analysis Center

- Inconsistent data collection, e.g., omission of victim's race and/or ethnicity
- Data gaps, e.g., the nonexistence of data or the inconsistency of yearly data reporting
- Misclassification of Indigenous victims as White, Hispanic, Asian, other, or for other unknown reasons
- Under-reporting, e.g., only 5 of the 710 Indigenous victims reported missing in Wyoming were recorded in the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System, and only nine states are required to enter data into this database system
- Inability to cross-reference between database systems
- Limited sample size lead to suppression of data, e.g., Centers for Disease Control's estimates were too small, low numbers were suppressed, and population count was incorrect

Important datasets omitted: Fremont County Sheriff's Office, the Lander Police Department, and the Sovereign Bodies Institute, which maintains the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit People Database, considered the most comprehensive database, did not respond to requests for data by WYSAC.<sup>6</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The MMIP grassroots movement has had victories that have the momentum to change the landscape. It is important to understand the potential of these changes yet be on guard for lip service and lack of implementation, enforcement, or activation. The victories follow on the Federal, State, and County level but the resolution above would support additional milestones in this important fight.

### Federal

Savannah's Act, named for a murdered 22-year-old member of the Spirit Lake Sioux Tribe Savannah LaFontaine-Greywind, requires the Department of Justice to:

- Strengthen training, coordination, data collection, and other guidelines
- Clarify federal, state, tribal, and local law enforcement responsibilities
- Increase communication and coordination between federal, tribal, state, and local law enforcement agencies
- Improve tribal access to resources and information such as the federal criminal information databases
- Require standardized protocols for data collection
- Direct U.S. attorneys to develop regionally appropriate response and guidelines<sup>7</sup> Not Invisible Act
- Increase intergovernmental coordination to identify and combat violent crime within Indigenous lands and toward Natives
- Recommendations to the Departments of Interior and Justice on best practices to combat disappearances, murder, trafficking, and other violent crimes against Native Americans and Alaska Natives U.S. Department of Interior Missing and Murdered Unit
- Provide leadership and direction for cross-departmental and interagency work
- Harness the full weight of the federal government into investigating MMIP cases and Martial Law enforcement resources across agencies and throughout Indian country

---

<sup>6</sup> Data was submitted in the form of Excel spreadsheets. Intake or reporting forms were not requested, but inconsistency between forms could lead to data gaps.

<sup>7</sup> Indian Law Resource Center, Savanna's Act and the Not Invisible Act signed into Law.

### Operation Lady Justice

- Enhance the operation of the criminal justice system and address the legitimate concerns of the American Indian and Alaska Native communities regarding MMIP<sup>8</sup>
- Federal-only Task Force and does not include state, local or Tribal stakeholders. It is not a Federal Advisory Committee, where state/local/Tribal folks come together to hold hearings and make recommendations to the federal government on how to deal with an issue.
- Work concluded in Fall 2021, but the final report has not been released

### State:

#### Missing & Murdered Indigenous People Statewide Report Wyoming<sup>9</sup>

- Compiled by researchers from the Wyoming Survey and Analysis Center at the University of Wyoming using administrative and archival data, analysis of media coverage on missing persons and homicide victims, and interviews with stakeholders on the Wind River Indian Reservation
- First comprehensive Wyoming-specific report

National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Native Women and Girls: established May 5, 2017

Governor Gordon issued a Proclamation to declare May 5 as Missing & Murdered Awareness Women and Girls Day and “calls on all our citizens to highlight the need for ongoing grassroots advocacy and organization for change of laws, policies, protocols, and allocation of increased resources at the tribal, federal, and state levels to end these injustices, and create the sharing of information needed to understand the legal reforms and changes required.”<sup>10</sup>

### County:

Forensic testing: One challenge is that Fremont County has only one known forensic nurse trained to gather information from crimes. A forensic nurse is certified as a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) and is trained to follow scientific and legal procedures to appropriately collect evidence in a manner that ensures the quality of forensic evidence and proper care for the victims. This one single Fremont County nurse is employed by SageWest Hospital and serves the entire county. Another challenge is that the biological evidence collection kit, commonly referred to as a rape kit, is a general kit for all violent crimes—with no specificity towards sexual assault—and includes the same materials for an overwhelming variation of types of crimes. Currently, forensic evidence is shipped to the Wyoming State Crime Laboratory or out of Wyoming for analysis. Lander Labs is working to establish local forensic capacity which could include the development of a standardized rape kit, jurisdictional training of officers, and an accountability project to track the completion of the forensic testing. An additional challenge is that the overseeing police officer decides whether to pursue legal action from an assault victim—not the court system. During the pandemic, across Wyoming, there has been an extraordinarily high kit request rate. However, there has also been a disproportionately low level of legal filings. This final issue bears witness to the need for empirical data research regarding sexual assault in Wyoming.

<sup>8</sup> Operation Lady Justice. Executive order Established Task Force. February 2021. <https://operationladyjustice.usdoj.gov/about/executive4-order>

<sup>9</sup> Marina Puzyreva and John Loxley, Fast Facts: Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls The cost of doing nothing to prevent tragedy. October 2017. <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/commentary/fast-facts-missing-and-murdered-indigenous-women-and-girls>

<sup>10</sup> Gordon, Mark. Governor's Proclamation Missing & Murdered Women and Girls. May 2021. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ff9i7LDGPq3m6eM2alfxBoyQhmnidpHJ/view>

Not Our Native Daughters was founded to promote education about and awareness of MMIP. They continue to honor all victims, by continuing to stand for them.<sup>11</sup> Lynnette Grey Bull has indicated that solutions to the MMIP problem must include more than just Indigenous advocates. Society must not only believe the problem exists but also take it upon itself to advocate for change at the local, state, regional, and national levels.

Eastern Shoshone Victim Service Program located in Fort Washakie offers free resources for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault who need assistance under the Indian Health Services. Services include:

- Confidential personal advocacy and intervention; emergency transportation for victims and survivors of abuse and their children, who are in danger
- Advocacy for victims/survivors with other service providers (i.e., Dept. of Family Services, medical services, hospitals, legal services/attorneys, etc.)
- Legal advocacy, including but not limited to, assistance with filing for Domestic Violence Protection Orders, Stalking Protection Orders and/or Peace Bonds, orientation to the Victims Bill of Rights and assistance with filing for Crime Victims Compensation
- Court orientation and accompaniment to protection order hearings and any other court hearings related to an individual's case(s)
- Referral services to other local, tribal, state or interstate service providers to meet the individual needs of the victim/survivor
- Peer support groups

Red Paint Alliance next to the Hines Store in Fort Washakie, provides a safe, confidential place for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, stalking and human trafficking. Offers a 24/7 crisis line (307-349-9813), an onsite shelter, transportation to necessary appointments, support through court and help with relocation if the victimization requires any of those needs. Works in partnership with Wind River Cares for placements.

Wind River Cares operates under Wind River Community Health with clinics in Ethete and Riverton. Serves the Northern Arapaho and Eastern Shoshone Tribes. Formerly part of Indian Health Services. Employs two victims' advocates and a Tribal Sexual Assault Advocate. The FBI houses two victims' advocates who work with families that have had family members who have been murdered.

Fremont County Attorney's Office houses one victims' advocate for Lander and Riverton.

---

<sup>11</sup>Not Our Native Daughters. <https://www.facebook.com/notournative daughters/>