

Media Contacts:
Princella RedCorn
Communications Officer, NIWRC
predcorn@niwrc.org

Candy Keown
Communications Coordinator AKNWRC
candy.keown@aknwrc.org

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AKWRNC & NIWRC Call for Continued Support for Sophie Sergie's Family and Alaska State Response to Missing and Murdered Native Women and Girls

Fairbanks, AK- The Alaska Native Women's Resource Center (AKWRNC) and the National Indigenous Women's Resource Center (NIWRC) release this statement to offer prayers and support to the family of Sophie Sergie and encourage a state-wide call to action to address the issue of Missing and Murdered Native women and Girls.

Because of mounting pressure from grassroots advocacy by Native women's families, tribes, advocates and coalitions, justice systems focus on bringing resolution to cold cases like Sophie's and help uplift the need for healing and honoring of these women's and girls' lives.

"Our prayers are with Sophie's family at this time. This heartbreaking situation has required us to pause for prayer as parents, aunties, and grandmas," said Tami Truett Jerue, Executive Director of the AKNWRC. "We stand together against such violence and will continue advocating for federal and state support for local, tribal responses."

Sophie Sergie, a former student at University of Alaska at Fairbanks, was murdered in April of 1993 in a dorm bathroom. She was found sexually assaulted, stabbed in the face and shot in the back of the head. Recent DNA genealogical mapping helped locate her murderer after almost 26 years, Steven Downs, with plans to extradite him to Alaska from Maine, to face charges. Downs is charged with sexual assault, murder and being a fugitive of justice according to the Alaska State Troopers.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, homicide is the third leading cause of death among American Indian and Alaska Native women between 10 and 24 years of age and the fifth leading cause of death for American Indian and Alaska Native women between 25 and 34 years of age. The murder rate of Native women is more than ten times the national average in some tribal communities. Often, these disappearances or murders are connected to crimes of domestic and dating violence, sexual assault, stalking and sex trafficking. The intersection of gender-based violence and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women is heavily intertwined.

"Our mothers and grandmothers took care of us with compassion and love. Now as grandmothers we must raise our voices to help those missing, to stop the murders of our

women, and find justice for those who did not survive.” Said Lenora Hootch, a Board Member of NIWRC and AKNWRC, and Executive Director of the Yup’ik Women’s Coalition. “I don’t want to see any more women die, to see children watch their mothers killed, to meet our women coming home to our village in body bags.”

“Our deepest condolences from the NIWRC to our relatives and the families of all the women and girls from Alaska Native Villages who have gone missing, murdered and especially whose cases have still to be resolved,” said Lucy Simpson, Executive Director of NIWRC, “We have too many cold cases of missing and murdered Native women. Tribes, Native peoples and our allies demand justice and deserve to know what happened to their family members. If we continue to work together, we can bring healing to our families and honor our women and girls.”

Resources for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls:

- **EXPLORE:** NIWRC’s Policy Team’s post, "[Organizing a Groundswell to End the Injustice of Murdered and Disappeared Native Women and Girls,](#)" in the *Advocate! Beyond the Shelter Doors* e-newsletter.
- **DOWNLOAD:** "[Tribal Community Response When a Woman is Missing: A Toolkit for Action](#)" from the NIWRC Resource Library.
- **DATABASE:** The Sovereign Bodies Institute [Missing and Murdered Women’s Database](#).
- **DATABASE:** NamUS-[National Missing and Unidentified Persons System](#).
- **EXPLORE:** [NIWRC’s Online Resource Library](#) for past webinars, reports, etc

About the National Indigenous Women’s Resource Center

The National Indigenous Women’s Resource Center, Inc. (NIWRC) is a nonprofit organization that is dedicated to restoring the sovereignty of Native nations and safeguarding Native women and their children. The NIWRC supports culturally grounded, grassroots advocacy and provides national leadership to ending gender-based violence in indigenous communities through the development of educational materials and programs, direct technical assistance and the development of local and national policy that builds the capacity of Indigenous communities and strengthens the exercise of tribal sovereignty. www.niwrc.org

About the Alaska Native Women’s Resource Center

The Alaska Native Women’s Resource Center (AKNWRC) is dedicated to strengthening local, tribal government’s responses through community organizing efforts advocating for the safety of women and children in their communities and homes, especially against domestic and sexual abuse and violence. Through the voices, languages, and teachings of tribes, survivors and advocates, and in partnership with our allies and other stakeholders, the AKNWRC provides a voice at the local, statewide, national and international levels for life-saving changes needed in laws, policies, and social norms. www.aknwrc.org/