



National Indigenous Women's Resource Center

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NIWRC Press Release Re: Senator Elizabeth Warren and President Donald Trump

Lame Deer, MT- "We will continue to do this lifesaving work with or without the President's donation," said National Indigenous Women's Resource Center (NIWRC) Board Chairwoman Cherrah Giles, in response to Senator Elizabeth Warren's challenge to President Donald Trump to donate \$1 million to the charity of her choice. Senator Warren identified the NIWRC, saying "Join us in helping safeguard the lives of Native women."

The NIWRC is a non-partisan organization- committed to ending all forms of gender-based violence against American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, and Indigenous peoples. We remain dedicated to restoring safety to Native women by upholding the sovereignty of Indian and Alaska Native tribes.

We appreciate Senator Warren's push to bring awareness to violence against American Indian and Alaska Native women and families, who all too often are invisible to most Americans. As marginalized communities, we often struggle to bring tribal interests to the center of the debate. It is important to have allies who recognize the importance of our collective work, which includes the courageous work of many grassroots advocates, tribal coalitions, tribal leaders, and other tribal organizations. We are grateful to Senator Warren for elevating our work within the national arena.

While the conversation today has centered around claims of ancestry, we wish to remind the general public of the actual experience of being American Indian and Alaska Native and the

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urgent safety issues that our communities contend with daily. American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/AN) face disproportionate and alarming rates of domestic and sexual violence each day. The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) through the USDOJ released a study in May 2016 that highlighted statistical information on violence against AI/AN individuals.ⁱ This study found American Indian and Alaska Native women have experienced severe rates of violence in their lifetimes, including:

56.1% who have experienced sexual violence; 55.5% who have experienced physical violence by an intimate partner; 48.4% who have experienced stalking; and 66.4% who have experienced psychological aggression by an intimate partner.ⁱⁱ

“The majority of American Indian and Alaska Native victims have experienced violence at the hands of at least one interracial perpetrator in their lifetime — 97 percent of female victims and 90 percent of male victims.”ⁱⁱⁱ These are not just statistics. These numbers represent the lived experiences of many Native women.

Continued systemic change is needed if we are to address this violence in a meaningful and sustainable way for American Indian and Alaska Native women. It is in these numbers that we see the effect of the devastatingly complex legal framework and various intersections that Native survivors of this violence must confront. It is also in these numbers that we see a continued need for reform, especially around the Violence Against Women Act and the need for a reauthorization that includes meaningful and substantive changes for our communities and our relatives. Our priorities, *which reflect vetted priorities from tribal leadership*, include the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2018 (H.R. 6545), the Survive Act (S. 1870 and H.R. 4608), The Native Youth and Tribal Officer Protection Act (S.2233 and H.R. 6728), The Justice for Native Survivors of Sexual Violence Act (S.3216), Savanna’s Act (S.1942 and H.R. 4485), and the End Trafficking of Native Americans Act of 2018 (S.3280). Please see the attached NIWRC’s most recent legislative update for more information.

“Tribal Leaders and Advocates have been calling for important changes to address the gaps in the VAWA 2013 special domestic violence criminal jurisdiction provisions. The NIWRC remains committed to the framework that it is only through enhanced tribal sovereignty that we will be able to enhance the safety of American Indians and Alaska Natives,” says Lucy Simpson, Executive Director for NIWRC. “We will rise to meet the challenge of now reauthorizing a VAWA that recognizes the inherent sovereignty of all of our tribal nations.”

We genuinely appreciate the donations from various individuals and organizations that have been generously gifted to the NIWRC to benefit tribal survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault, especially as a result of this story. At this particular time in history, our work feels particularly urgent and your donations are vital to our organization’s long-term sustainability and to the policy goals that our Resource Center continues to elevate. For more information

about our strategic reform efforts, please see the attached recent testimony submitted to the Senate Judiciary Committee for their hearing, “The Need to Reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act.”

With the opportunity presented as of this morning, we wish to remind Congress that the federal government is obliged under the doctrine of trust responsibility to tribal Nations – where it “has charged itself with moral obligations of the highest responsibility and trust... to the fulfillment of which **the national honor has been committed.**”^{iv} (*emphasis added*). This trust relationship originates from the near 400 treaties that the United States government signed with tribal Nations.^v This responsibility applies to the response to gender- based violence in tribal communities. VAWA’s section 901 includes critical findings that affirm this: “Congress finds that...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.”^{vi}

The NIWRC will continue to call for bipartisan efforts to implement provisions that will support sovereignty and therefore safety for Native women. As a non-partisan organization, we remain committed to working with both sides of the aisle and each administration in furthering both the sovereignty of our tribal nations and the safety and security of Indigenous women, as the two are undistinguishably tethered.

Resources for the Safety of Native Women:

- CALL: StrongHearts Native Helpline www.strongheartshelpline.org
- EXPLORE: Alaska Native Women’s Resource Center www.aknwrc.org
- EXPLORE: NativeLove Youth Project of the NIWRC <http://nativelove.niwrc.org>
- DONATE: “Donate to NIWRC” www.niwrc.org/donate-niwrc
- SUSCRIBE: To NIWRC’s Restoration Magazine www.niwrc.org/restoration-magazine
- JOIN: NIWRC’s Mailing List www.niwrc.org/mailling-list
- DOWNLOAD: From NIWRC’s Online Resource Library www.niwrc.org/resources
- TWEET: with NIWRC on Twitter @niwrc or <https://twitter.com/niwrc>
- FACEBOOK: with NIWRC on Facebook @niwrc or www.facebook.com/niwrc
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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

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ⁱ DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, NAT'L INST. OF JUSTICE, VIOLENCE AGAINST AMERICAN INDIAN AND ALASKA NATIVE WOMEN AND MEN: 2010 FINDINGS FROM THE NATIONAL INTIMATE PARTNER AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE SURVEY 26 (May 2016), <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/249736.pdf>.

ⁱⁱ *Id.*

ⁱⁱⁱ *Id.*

^{iv} *United States v. Jicarilla Apache Tribe*, 131 S. Ct. at 2324, citing *Seminole Nation v. United States*, 316, U.S. 286, 296-97 (1942) and *Heckman v. United States*, 224 U.S. 413, 437 (1912).

^v *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, 30 U.S. 1 (1831), *Worcester v. Georgia*, 31 U.S. 515 (1832).

^{vi} 2005 VAWA § 901 Findings