



**OF NATIVE  
SOVEREIGNTY AND  
SAFETY FOR NATIVE  
WOMEN**

February 2025 | Volume 22 | Issue 1



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## **Restoration of Native Sovereignty and Safety for Native Women Magazine, 2003-2025**

During the reauthorization process of the Violence Against Women Act in 2005, several national organizations came together to take a stand for the safety of Native women: Sacred Circle National Resource Center to End Violence Against Native Women, Clan Star, Inc., the National Congress of American Indians, and the National Task Force to End Sexual and Domestic Violence. It was recognized that to fully participate in the national movement to create the changes needed to increase safety for Native women, broad communication was essential. *Restoration of Native Sovereignty and Safety for Native Women* emerged to fulfill this task.

*Restoration* is a publication dedicated to informing Tribal leadership and communities of emerging issues impacting the safety of American Indian and Alaska Native women. The name of the magazine reflects the grassroots strategy of the Task Force that by strengthening the sovereignty of Indian Nations to hold perpetrators accountable the safety of Native women will be restored. The magazine is a joint project of the National Congress of American Indians Task Force on Violence Against Women and the National Indigenous Women's Resource Center. It is produced and made available during national NCAI conventions and the annual USDOJ Tribal Consultation on VAWA.

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WOMEN**

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*Advocates, partners, and leadership gathered on the White House lawn to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), celebrating decades of progress and reaffirming the commitment to ending gender-based violence.*

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# *Deepening Our Commitment:* **NIWRC's 2025 Vision**



*"As the world around us evolves, we, too, must evolve—not by departing from our values but by deepening our understanding of how to express them in ways that serve all our relatives."*

## **To our relatives and partners,**

In 2024, the National Indigenous Women's Resource Center (NIWRC) continued our work to restore safety for Native women and communities by championing Tribal sovereignty, strengthening culturally grounded advocacy, and fostering impactful partnerships across Indian Country. Significant strides were made in raising awareness about the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Relatives (MMIWR), highlighted by the list of recommendations from the Not Invisible Act Commission report. NIWRC's Technical Assistance team supported hundreds of requests from Tribal programs, while our policy team worked tirelessly to ensure adequate funding for victim service programs and safeguard Tribal sovereignty.

These accomplishments were made possible through the strength of our partnerships, which remained at the heart of NIWRC's work. Through collaborations with federal agencies, grassroots advocates, and Tribal Nations, we built capacity through webinars, training sessions, and resource development. During pivotal moments like the National Week of Action for MMIWR, Tillie Black Bear Women Are Sacred Day, and Domestic Violence Awareness Month, our campaigns amplified Native voices and perspectives, sending a powerful message: Native women are sacred, and their safety is essential to the wellbeing of our communities.

Most importantly, 2024 reaffirmed what we have always known: our strength is rooted in the teachings of our ancestors and the resilience of our communities. As Tribal programs grow, survivors heal, and communities reclaim their sacred traditions, we are reminded daily of the countless hands and hearts guiding this movement.

As we step into a new year together, NIWRC reflects on our shared journey and the work still ahead. This

year, we reaffirm our commitment—not as a new chapter but as a deeper expression of the values that have guided us from the beginning. Our 2025 commitments reflect growth grounded in listening to our communities, building on our strong foundation, and honoring the wisdom of those who came before us.

## Continuing Our Commitment to Inclusion

Restoring safety for Native women and Tribal communities requires us to embrace the full spectrum of identity within our communities. Our commitment extends to Two-spirit, non-binary, LGBTQ+, and trans relatives—honoring the rich diversity of Indigenous cultures. We recognize and celebrate the ways Tribal Nations have always affirmed and uplifted these identities, ensuring everyone is included in our vision for safety and justice.

## Prioritizing Collective Wellness

The work of ending violence against Native women is not easy. It requires us to pour our hearts, minds, and spirits into advocacy. That's why we're deepening our focus on wellness in 2025—not just as an organizational value but as a necessity for sustaining our work. Caring for ourselves and each other ensures that our movement remains strong and balanced, rooted in the teachings of our ancestors about the importance of harmony.

## Building on Our Enduring Foundations

As we grow, our foundational principles remain unchanged:

- We center survivors, honoring their voices and experiences to guide our work.

- We uphold Tribal sovereignty, advocating for the rights of Tribal Nations to address violence in their communities.
- We draw strength from Indigenous cultures and traditional teachings, grounding our work in practices that reflect our values.
- We continue to strengthen grassroots advocacy, recognizing that real change begins in our communities.
- We carry the lessons of our ancestors as we move forward, and our commitment to survivors, advocates, and Tribal Nations remains constant. Together, we grow stronger, honoring our traditions while embracing opportunities to better serve our communities.

As we embrace 2025, we invite you—our relatives, advocates, and allies—to join us in continuing this journey. Together, we will build a future where every Native woman and relative can live in safety and dignity, free from violence.

For a deeper look at our 2025 commitments and how we're implementing them, visit [niwrc.org](https://niwrc.org) and follow us across social media platforms.



*Ahéhee,*

*Lucy*

**Lucy Simpson, Diné**

Executive Director

National Indigenous Women's Resource Center

**Subscribe to *Restoration*  
of Native Sovereignty and  
Safety for Native Women**

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[niwrc.org/restoration](https://niwrc.org/restoration)**

# DOJ Tribal Consultation on Legislative Proposal to Address the Supreme Court's Decision in *Oklahoma v. Castro-Huerta*

## Help Preserve Tribal Sovereignty

By Kerri Colfer, *Tlingit*, Director of Policy, NIWRC

In response to the United States Supreme Court's 2022 decision in *Oklahoma v. Castro-Huerta*, which permitted states to exercise concurrent jurisdiction alongside Tribal Nations and the federal government over certain crimes committed in Indian country, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) has announced a virtual government-to-government Tribal consultation on whether the DOJ should support a legislative proposal to restore the balance of jurisdiction that was in place before the *Castro-Huerta* decision.

The virtual consultation sessions will take place on:

- **January 10, 2025, from 3-5 p.m. EST**
- **February 5, 2025, from 3-5 p.m. EST**
- **February 6, 2025, from 3-5 p.m. EST**

Written comments are due by March 6, 2025, which can be submitted either by email to [OTJ@usdoj.gov](mailto:OTJ@usdoj.gov) or by mail to Office of Tribal Justice, U.S. Department of Justice, 950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20530-0001.

More information about the consultation and legislative proposals can be found in the Dear Tribal Leader Letter and Framing Paper, on [justice.gov](https://justice.gov) (or [bit.ly/40AMoiS](https://bit.ly/40AMoiS)), and on NIWRC's Consultation Support Hub ([bit.ly/4jtB8gZ](https://bit.ly/4jtB8gZ)).



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# SAVE THE DATE

**2025 WOMEN ARE SACRED CONFERENCE**  
MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN • BAIRD CONVENTION CENTER

» **JULY 29 - JULY 31, 2025** «

[niwrc.org](http://niwrc.org)

# *NIWRC's Tribal Resource Directory:* **Bridging Barriers, Empowering Tribal Communities, and Supporting Survivors**

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**By Tamar DeWilde, *Huslia Village*, Data Specialist, NIWRC**

The Tribal Resource Directory (TRD) is a vital tool developed by NIWRC to bridge the gap between Tribal communities and essential resources. Designed to support Native survivors of violence, the directory offers a centralized platform where survivors, service providers, advocates, and Tribal programs can find the organizations and services that best meet their needs. By consolidating these resources in one accessible location, NIWRC simplifies the process of connecting Tribal communities with life-saving support and services.

Originally developed to address the need for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and mobile testing units during the COVID-19 pandemic, the TRD has grown into a comprehensive resource tool. The tool is supported by the NIWRC COVID-19 ARP funding and provides locations, contact information, and websites for COVID-19 services. Beyond pandemic-related resources, the directory also includes broader services that align with NIWRC's core mission of supporting Native survivors of violence. These additional resources are categorized by general support, victim rights advocacy (non-direct), safety planning, support groups/talking circles, counseling/mental health/emotional assistance, children/youth/family services, domestic violence response, sexual assault/rape crisis response, legal/justice system assistance, and traditional healing and referrals.

To ensure the directory includes reliable, relevant resources, NIWRC employed a multi-faceted approach. Resources were gathered through direct outreach to organizations, identifying relevant websites and keywords, and utilizing NIWRC's databases of Tribal programs and organizations. This inclusive approach allowed us to feature organizations that may not have been directly

engaged with NIWRC but offer valuable services to survivors. Each resource was carefully vetted for relevance as a Tribal resource and up-to-date contact, location, and website information.

The TRD is a vital part of NIWRC's broader commitment to promoting the well-being of Tribal communities by supporting survivors and encouraging collaboration among organizations with shared values. By breaking down barriers and connecting survivors with service providers, it serves both as a practical tool and a symbol of solidarity. NIWRC hopes this tool will create safer and healthier environments for Native women, their families, and communities.

As we continue to strengthen this resource, we aim to empower Tribal communities, inspire resilience, and foster collaboration in the ongoing journey toward safety, justice, and healing. Together, we can build a future where every individual has access to the resources and support they need to thrive.



891 resource locations found

United States

Mexico

Search interface:

- Near an address:
- Within:
- Categories:
- Search by name:
- Buttons: Search, Reset, List view

Map data ©2025 Google, INEGI Terms

Go to [www.niwrc.org/arp/tribal-resource-directory](http://www.niwrc.org/arp/tribal-resource-directory).



**STRONGHEARTS**

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February Is

# Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month



## INSPIRE LOVE

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Set HEALTHY BOUNDARIES and maintain SAFETY and  
SOVEREIGNTY, Honor CULTURE and spiritual practices.  
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**Safe | Confidential | Anonymous | 24/7**



## PRESS RELEASE

# Indian Law Resource Center Announces New *Executive Director*

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By the Indian Law Resource Center (ILRC)

The Indian Law Resource Center Board of Directors is pleased to announce the appointment of Christopher T. Foley as the Center's new Executive Director.

Chris Foley has served at the Indian Law Resource Center for twelve years, gaining expertise in the projects and legal fields at the heart of the Center's work, including federal Indian law, international Indigenous rights, and international human rights. Most recently, Foley served as Senior Attorney working on the Center's flagship project, Safe Women, Strong Nations. In 2022, Foley joined Amnesty International USA's Board of Directors and currently serves as Treasurer.

For more than 46 years, the Indian Law Resource Center has significantly helped shape modern Indigenous rights advocacy. Foley

is the first Executive Director to follow in the footsteps of the Center's founding Director, Robert "Tim" Coulter. Coulter, who is widely recognized for helping Indigenous communities across the globe negotiate and win the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, has retired after 47 years leading the Center. Under Coulter's leadership, the organization led some of the first successful legal efforts linking Indigenous human rights with environmental protection, including winning several landmark rulings by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. These rulings have led to the expansion of Indigenous land rights protections and other rights of self-determination and sovereignty.

"Having worked shoulder-to-shoulder with Chris for over a decade, I have full confidence that the Center is in excellent hands.

*Chris Foley is an enrolled citizen of the Cherokee Nation. He received his Bachelor of Arts with Honors from Swarthmore College and his J.D. from Temple University in Philadelphia.*



Photos courtesy of the Indian Law Resource Center.



*I could not be more pleased to be handing the reigns of the organization over to Chris' thoughtful leadership.*



Chris is smart, dedicated, hard-working, and has a deep passion for this work. I could not be more pleased to be handing the reigns of the organization over to Chris' thoughtful leadership," said Coulter.

In October 2022, the Center was awarded a \$20 million grant by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation for its Indigenous Lands Initiative project, which aims to expand and strengthen Indigenous land ownership rights in Mexico, Central and South America. When completed, this project will assist as many as 100 Indigenous

communities in obtaining legal titles to their communal lands.

"The Center is at an exciting and critically important moment of growth. Because of Tim's vision and leadership, the Center now has the capacity and resources to build an expansive, holistic program across the Americas. Our work will continue to be focused on Indigenous women's rights, Indigenous people's collective rights to their lands and resources, to self-determination and self-government, and climate justice. I am committed to advancing the vitally important work of the Center and working with our board, staff and

partners to expand and enhance its impact and influence."

Melanie Benjamin, Chair of the Board of Directors, stated, "The Board is thrilled to welcome Chris Foley as the Center's new Executive Director. We are confident that with his extensive experience contributing to all aspects of the Center's work, his passion for the mission, and his deep knowledge of its history and culture, Chris will provide the leadership necessary to continue our vitally important work for Indigenous peoples across the Americas."



# Missing and Murdered **INDIGENOUS WOMEN**

# Recommendations From Our Family Advisor Workgroup to Address the Impacts of *Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Relatives (MMIWR)*

By the NIWRC Family Advisor Workgroup

The crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women and relatives (MMIWR) continues to devastate Tribal communities across the United States. While progress has been made in raising awareness and developing resources, the scale and urgency of the crisis remain profound. In response, the National Indigenous Women's Resource Center's (NIWRC) Family Advisor Workgroup has developed policy recommendations to enhance safety measures, improve prevention strategies, and provide critical support for survivors, victims' families, and Tribal communities.

These recommendations are informed by ongoing dialogue with families and designed to align with pre-existing resources and frameworks. We aim to advocate for culturally relevant, trauma-informed interventions that address immediate needs and foster long-term systemic change. It is essential to simultaneously acknowledge that the priorities may shift over time to meet the needs and responses of Tribal Nations and communities.

## Community Action

Creating spaces for Native families and communities to come together and

support each other is critical in addressing the MMIWR crisis. Community support and action are essential for the healing and justice work needed to address MMIWR and violence against Native women. The Family Advisor Workgroup proposed the following actions:

- **Community Gatherings.** Establish dedicated MMIWR family spaces where individuals can gather, share stories, and connect with others who understand their experiences. These spaces will also serve as places for community support and mutual healing.
- **Housing Programs.** Develop emergency, transitional, and long-term housing programs for families of missing or murdered Indigenous women and survivors. These programs will ensure families have safe places to live during difficult times and after the loss of a loved one.
- **Family Wellness.** Offer families access to culturally relevant activities that promote physical, mental, and emotional health. Efforts to help connect families to resources and practices that foster safety and well-being.



## Economic Support

In the aftermath of violence and loss, families of MMIWR often face financial burdens that hinder their ability to heal and seek justice. Policy changes in this area are essential in providing economic support and safety:

- ***Paid Safe Leave.*** Implement paid safe leave policies for families of missing and murdered Indigenous women and victims/survivors. This policy enables families to take time off work without the risk of losing income, allowing them to focus on urgent matters such as search efforts, legal proceedings, and personal healing.
- ***Financial Support for Families.*** Provide direct financial support to MMIWR families to cover search costs and other essential expenses during investigations and awareness efforts.
- ***Travel Funding.*** Funding for families to travel to locations where they must give testimony or participate in investigations or legal proceedings, ensuring that financial constraints do not limit their ability to pursue justice.
- ***Funding for Community Action Programs.*** Increase funding for Tribes to implement and expand community action programs that address the root causes of violence and support victims and their families.



## Justice System Reform

A just and responsive legal system is essential to addressing the MMIWR crisis. However, significant reforms are needed to ensure that justice systems are accessible, transparent, and culturally relevant for Indigenous families. The following policy recommendations focus on improving communication, support for families, and coordination among various jurisdictions and agencies:

- ***Implement DOI/DOJ NIAC Recommendations.*** Ensure the Not Invisible Act Commission recommendations to the Departments of the Interior (DOI) and Justice (DOJ) are fully implemented and funded.
- ***Enhanced Communication with Families.*** Expand communication efforts to promptly provide families with clear and detailed information regarding the reasons for the declination of cases, ongoing investigations, and post-investigation follow-ups.

- ***Legal Support and Advocacy.*** Provide families with access to trained legal support, advocates, and liaisons who are equipped to navigate the complexities of the justice system and are sensitive to the unique needs of Indigenous communities. Legal aid programs should also be available to survivors and their families, regardless of the legal status of their case.

## Training, Services, and Programs

Culturally relevant and trauma-informed services help to prevent violence, support survivors, and assist families. These practices and services should be incorporated into both community-based programs and formal systems, including law enforcement and judicial systems:

- ***Culturally Relevant, Trauma-Informed Prevention Programs.*** Develop and implement prevention and education initiatives tailored to Indigenous communities. These programs should raise awareness about MMIWR and provide tools to prevent and respond to violence. Community meals and shared cultural activities should be integrated

into these programs, including Tribal-specific ceremonies to strengthen community ties and healing, which require funding.

- ***Family and Community Training.*** Update communities on agency roles. Educate families and communities on the roles and responsibilities of various agencies (law enforcement, social services, etc.) to ensure more streamlined communication and collaboration. Provide translation where necessary.
- ***Media and Social Media Training.*** Equip families with the skills needed to engage with the press and navigate social media platforms to raise awareness about their loved ones' cases and share important updates if they choose to do so.
- ***Youth Prevention Programs.*** Provide long-term prevention programs for Indigenous youth, especially those exposed to violence. These programs should focus on healthy relationships, mutual respect, consent, and personal and community resilience development.
- ***Reintegration Programs for Families and Survivors.*** Develop programs to support the reintegration of families and survivors into their communities, helping them navigate the emotional, social, and practical challenges of

returning to the community after experiencing trauma.

- ***Culturally Relevant Early Childhood Development Programs.*** Establish and fund early childhood programs grounded in Indigenous cultural practices, promoting healthy emotional and psychological development for young children and their families.
- ***Health Perspective on MMIWR/Trafficking.*** Train healthcare professionals and community members on MMIWR and trafficking, emphasizing prevention, early intervention, and holistic care from a public health perspective.
- ***Holistic Wrap-Around Services for Families/ Survivors.*** Provide ongoing, comprehensive supportive services for families and survivors, including trauma-informed health services, counseling, and case management. These services should address the full spectrum of physical, emotional, and psychological needs.
- ***Nationwide Education on Trauma-Informed Support.*** Provide education from the national to local levels on what trauma-informed support looks like when assisting families. This includes training for judges, lawyers, law enforcement, community members, and schools on identifying and responding to trauma.

The crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women and relatives is an urgent national issue that requires a collaborative response. These policy recommendations represent a crucial step toward enhancing the safety, dignity, and well-being of Native women, relatives, families, and communities.

By focusing on community action, economic support, justice system reform, and culturally relevant services, we can address the systemic issues contributing to MMIWR. Implementing these recommendations will provide immediate relief for families and survivors while laying the groundwork for long-term, sustainable change.



# MMIWR UPDATE

By Tia Bahozhoni, *Diné*, Policy Specialist, National Indigenous Women's Resource Center

The National Indigenous Women's Resource Center (NIWRC) regularly updates a database for state legislation relating to missing and murdered Indigenous women and relatives (MMIWR). This database includes summaries, the latest actions, sponsors, and other pertinent information on state-level legislation regarding the prevention and advocacy around MMIWR. The MMIWR State Legislative Tracker does not advocate for any legislation, nor does it provide any analysis. It is a tool that allows advocates, legislators, allies, community members, and grassroots organizers to navigate current state legislation easily.

## Recently Acted Upon Legislation

**California AB1863: "An act to amend Section 8594.13 of the Government Code, and to amend Section 1 of Chapter 476 of the Statutes of 2022, relating to the California Emergency Services Act"**

- Approved by the Governor & Chaptered by Secretary of State - Chapter 659, Statutes of 2024 on September 27, 2024.
- "Existing law, the California Emergency Services Act, authorizes use of the Emergency Alert System to inform the public of local, state, and national emergencies. Existing law authorizes a law enforcement agency to request the Department of the California Highway Patrol to activate a "Feather Alert," as defined if the law enforcement agency determines that specified criteria are satisfied with respect to an endangered Indigenous person who has been reported missing under unexplained or suspicious circumstances.

## FORMAT INTERPRETATION

- **Measure: "Bill Title"**
  - Date & Last Act
  - A Portion of the Bill Summary

## LEGISLATIVE TRACKER

**Scan the QR code below or go to**  
[niwrc.org/mmiw-state-legislative-tracker](http://niwrc.org/mmiw-state-legislative-tracker).



- This bill would require the department, in consultation with specified groups, including Tribal Nations, to develop policies and procedures providing instructions specifying how a law enforcement agency and certain entities involved in emergency warnings are required to proceed after a missing person has been reported to a law enforcement agency, as defined, and prescribed conditions are met. The bill would require those policies and procedures to include, among other things, procedures for the transfer of information regarding the missing person and the circumstances surrounding the missing person's disappearance, as specified."

**California AB2138: “An act to add and repeal Sections 830.83 and 832.55 of, and to add and repeal Article 2.45 (commencing with Section 11073) of Chapter 1 of Title 1 of Part 4 of, the Penal Code, relating to peace officers”**

- Vetoed by the Governor on September 28, 2024.
- Existing law defines those persons who are peace officers in the state, grants certain authority to those individuals and their employing entities, and places certain requirements on those individuals and their employing entities. Existing law also grants specified limited arrest authority to certain other persons, including federal criminal investigators, park rangers, and peace officers from adjoining jurisdictions.

- This bill would, from July 1, 2025, until July 1, 2028, establish a pilot program under the Department of Justice and the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training granting peace officer authority to certain Tribal police officers on Indian lands and elsewhere in the state under specified circumstances. The bill would authorize the department to select three Tribal entities to participate, would set certain minimum qualifications and certification and training requirements for a Tribal officer to act pursuant to this authority, and would place certain requirements on the employing Tribe, including a limited waiver of sovereign immunity, and the adoption of a Tribal law or resolution authorizing that exercise of authority and providing for public access to certain records.



You may sort current MMIWR legislation by state, date introduced, Bill #, or status.

*Note: Language has been edited for publication from the original Bill summaries for clarity and readability.*

For more information, the full Bill summaries can be found at **legiscan.com**.



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# 2025 NATIONAL WEEK OF ACTION FOR MMIWR

MAY 2025

May 5-9





# Legislative **REFORMS**

## REVIEW OF THE 118TH CONGRESS

# *Legislative* UPDATE

By Kerri Colfer, *Tlingit*, Director of Legislative Affairs, NIWRC



As we begin a new legislative session, we stand at a pivotal moment to strengthen Tribal sovereignty and promote the safety of American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian women and communities.

In this update, we will review the status of our key legislative priorities from the 118th Congress to determine what is outstanding at the start of the 119th session. We look forward to continuing collaboration with Tribal Nations, programs, survivors, policymakers, and grassroots advocates on our priorities in the new session.

## *Public* SAFETY



### **Bridging Agency Data Gaps for Native Communities (BADGES) Act** (S. 465 / H.R. 1292)

#### Status:



S. 465: Passed the Senate.



H.R. 1292: Introduced in the House.

The bill would promote recruitment and retention of federal law enforcement, address inefficiencies in federal missing persons data systems, increase Tribal access to the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs), and establish a grant program to improve coordination efforts between states, Tribal Nations, and Tribal organizations on cases of missing and murdered persons.

### **What Are the Implications for Native Women, Survivors, and Communities?**

BADGES would increase coordination, retention, and effectiveness of federal missing persons resources and give Tribal Nations resources to better address the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women and relatives.

## Parity for Tribal Law Enforcement Act

(S. 2695 / H.R. 4524)

### Status:

- S. 2695: Marked up in the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs and ordered to be reported.
- H.R. 4524: Reported (Amended) by the Committee on Natural Resources.

The bill would improve public safety in Indian country by promoting the recruitment and retention of Tribal law enforcement. More specifically, the bill would:

- Authorize the law enforcement officers of any Indian Tribe that has contracted or compacted any or all federal law enforcement functions through a contract or compact entered into pursuant to the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act to enforce federal law within the Tribe's jurisdiction if those officers meet specific qualifications. These qualifications include completing training and passing an adjudicated background investigation.
- Deem a Tribal law enforcement officer acting under an authorized contract or

compact as a federal law enforcement officer for specific federal laws, including for injury and death, retirement, and pension benefits.

- Require the Department of the Interior to (1) develop procedures for credentialing Tribal officers to confirm they meet minimum certification standards and training requirements for Indian country peace officers and (2) issue guidance to implement this bill.
- Require the Department of Justice to coordinate and oversee its functions and programs to ensure a coordinated approach to public safety in Indian communities.

### What Are the Implications for Native Women, Survivors, and Communities?

The Parity for Tribal Law Enforcement Act would address the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women and relatives and enhance Tribal public safety by improving recruitment and retention of Tribal law enforcement officers. Indigenous women and relatives.

## Strengthening Protections for Domestic Violence and Stalking Survivors Act of 2023 (S. 321 / H.R. 905)

### Status:

- S. 321: Introduced in the Senate
- H.R. 905: Introduced in the House.

The bipartisan, bicameral bill would close what is known as the “dating loophole” or “boyfriend loophole” by preventing convicted stalkers and former dating partners convicted of domestic violence from purchasing or owning firearms. Current law prohibits spouses, former spouses, those cohabitating together, and those who have a child in common from owning a firearm if there is a protective order against them. The bill would add convicted stalkers and dating partners

convicted of domestic violence to this list to close those gaps that embolden abusers and put women in danger.

### What Are the Implications for Native Women, Survivors, and Communities?

American Indian and Alaska Native women are more than two times more likely than White women to be fatally shot by an intimate partner. Closing the dating loophole would create additional protections for Native victims of domestic violence by preventing stalkers and all forms of dating partners convicted of a domestic violence offense from buying or owning firearms.

## Honoring Promises for Native Nations Act

### Status:

✕ Died in a previous Congress.

A bill to ensure progress toward the fulfillment by the Federal Government of its trust and treaty obligations to Native Americans and Tribal governments and to ensure funding for programs for Native Americans and Tribal governments.

### What Are the Implications for Native Women, Survivors, and Communities?

The bill would reaffirm the nation-to-nation relationship between the federal government and Tribal Nations and improve federal programs that support Indian Country, including funding for public safety and programs that serve American Indian and Alaska Native victims of crime.

# *Economic* SECURITY



## The Security and Financial Empowerment (SAFE) for Survivors Act (S. 5132 / H.R. 9693)

### Status:

🇺🇸 S. 5132: Introduced in the Senate.  
🇺🇸 H.R. 9693: Introduced in the House.

The SAFE for Survivors Act allows victims to take time off from work—40 days of leave, ten of which must be paid—without penalty to contend with the consequences of gender-based violence, prohibits discriminatory employment practices in connection with survivors of domestic violence or sexual violence, allows victims in every state access to unemployment benefits if they are fired or forced to leave their job because of abuse, and prohibits denial or restriction of insurance coverage based on the status of the applicant or insured regarding abuse or abuse related claims.

### What Are the Implications for Native Women, Survivors, and Communities?

This bill would support economic security for survivors of gender-based violence, including those who experience disproportionate rates of violence, such as American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian people. The SAFE for Survivors Act would prevent survivors from having to choose between their job and their safety when attempting to leave an abusive relationship or contend with the consequences of violence.

# Shelter and Victim SERVICES



## Crime Victims Fund Stabilization Act

(S. 4514 / H.R. 8061)

### Status:



S. 4514: Introduced in the Senate.



H.R.8061: Introduced in the House.

The bill would temporarily increase deposits to help stabilize the Crime Victims Fund (CVF) by redirecting some of the funds collected from the False Claims Act to the CVF through 2029.

### What Are the Implications for Native Women, Survivors, and Communities?

The Crime Victims Fund (CVF) provides non-taxpayer funding to thousands of victim assistance programs throughout the United States. In recent years, the deposits into the CVF have declined, resulting in cuts to the annual release of funds available for essential services and support for survivors. This bill would ensure that vital victim services remain available, including in Indian Country, by temporarily adding additional funding to the CVF.

## Family Violence Prevention and Services Improvement Act of 2023 (FVPSA) (S. 2693 / H.R. 2604)

### Status:



S. 2693: Introduced in the Senate.



H.R. 2604: Introduced in the House.

The bill, which would reauthorize FVPSA through FY2028, would provide critical funding for shelter and supportive services for domestic violence victims. FVPSA is the primary source of funding for these services for Tribal Nations.

### What Are the Implications for Native Women, Survivors, and Communities?

FVPSA would expand grant programs and make many needed improvements so that more survivors have access to support and safety, including:

- Adjustment of the funding distribution formula to increase the amount that Tribal Nations receive from 10% to 12.5%.
- Dedicated funding for Tribal coalitions to provide technical assistance to Tribal Nations
- Permanent funding for the national Indian domestic violence hotline.
- Permanent funding for the Alaska Tribal Resource Center on Domestic Violence.
- Permanent funding for the Native Hawaiian Resource Center on Domestic Violence.

# *NIWRC Attends White House Event Celebrating 30 Years of VAWA*

By NIWRC

NIWRC joined allies in Washington, D.C., on September 13, 2024, for a remarkable commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). This event brought NIWRC's dedicated board members, staff, and former leaders together with Tribal coalitions, partners, and allies to honor three decades of progress in advancing the safety, sovereignty, and rights of Native women and communities.

"This milestone reflects the strength of our collective efforts," said Lucy R. Simpson, Executive Director, NIWRC. "We look forward to building on VAWA's successes and expanding protections for survivors in the years to come. NIWRC remains dedicated to advancing the rights and safety of women by supporting grassroots advocacy and strengthening Tribal sovereignty."

NIWRC proudly sent board members to Washington, D.C., including Carmen O'Leary and Board Chair tai simpson, whose leadership continues to guide NIWRC's mission. In addition, NIWRC Director of Policy Kerri Colfer, Director of Technology Tang Cheam, and Director of Communications Miranda Raney attended the event.

*NIWRC staff, alongside cherished partners, sister organizations, and dedicated advocates, gather in solidarity to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Violence Against Women Act.*

As the day unfolded with cheers and smiles, a reverent silence soon followed, reminding everyone of the collective pain and trauma that led to VAWA's passage. Celebrating this milestone means remembering the advocates who paved the way, like Tillie Black Bear, whose courageous testimony before Congress in 1994 underscored the urgent need for this legislation. It also means honoring the lives lost to violence and the survivors whose voices shaped each reauthorization.

Achieving our goal is only possible through the heart work and dedication of our relatives, partners, and allies over the decades. We deeply respect and thank the countless survivors, grassroots advocates, and families whose tireless efforts and powerful stories made this legislation a reality.

With each new iteration of VAWA, Tribal Nations are better able to protect their citizens and provide resources for victims of violence. However, ongoing barriers to safety and justice still remain, with 84% of Native women experiencing violence in their lifetime. A renewed commitment from policymakers, communities, and advocates helps ensure the availability of VAWA's resources and protections for every Tribal community and survivor throughout Indian country.

In the years ahead, we hope new allies will join the fight to end violence against Native women and communities. We look forward to forming new partnerships and strengthening our communities to ensure future generations' safety.

"Of all the things I've been engaged in, I'm most proud of doing this," said President Biden in a conversation with attendees. "It has changed so many people's lives."

*Various NIWRC staff and sister organizations attending the Washington D.C. event, coming together as advocates to honor a landmark law that has transformed the fight to end violence against Native women.*



# STTARS Partners on Collaborative Report on National Roundtable Discussion Regarding *Safe Housing Solutions* for Survivors of Domestic and Sexual Violence

Policy Recommendations to Increase Safe Housing for Survivors: Learning From & Leveraging Public-Private Partnerships

View the report:  
[bit.ly/4jnGKcN](https://bit.ly/4jnGKcN)



By Caroline LaPorte, J.D., *Immediate Descendant Little River Band of Ottawa Indians*

In October 2023, the STTARS Indigenous Safe Housing Center (STTARS) and the Office of Family Violence Prevention Services hosted a roundtable discussion on safe housing solutions for survivors of domestic and sexual violence. STTARS had the opportunity to bring together members of its National Workgroup on Safe Housing for American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) Survivors of Gender-Based Violence to Washington, D.C., for this convening.

This ambitious event was convened through the collaborative efforts of STTARS, the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, and the National Network to End Domestic Violence, who have a longstanding partnership in gender-based violence and housing insecurity. This convening was transformative because it centered and uplifted the voices of individuals with lived experience. This roundtable discussion brought together survivors, advocates, domestic violence and sexual violence coalitions, national and regional housing experts, federal partners, Tribal leaders, and partners from public and private industries from across the country.

Though the meeting took place in October 2023, the report was recently approved for dissemination and can be accessed [here](#). The report shares key insights and recommendations that emerged from the roundtable but focused originally on addressing an integral question: How can we leverage public and private partnerships to increase safe housing options for survivors of gender-based violence.

## Framing the Problem in Indian Country

The need for safe, accessible, affordable, and sustainable housing is a grave concern for AI/AN gender-based violence survivors. This is especially true considering that domestic violence and sexual assault are leading causes of homelessness in most communities within the US. The shelter and housing “crisis” in Indian country for AI/AN and other Indigenous peoples is nothing new. Access to land, safe housing, and shelter issues have been present since Indigenous lifeways and Tribal Nations were violated by colonization and dispossession. The basic lack of housing for AI/AN people is factually the result of massive land theft, systemic removal, relocation, and other intentional acts across the timeline of the United States’ history. Thus, the housing crisis in Indian Country must be viewed first as a historical injustice, one that has been utilized as a tool in the ongoing genocide of Indigenous populations. The same is true for the high incidence of gender-based violence in AI/AN populations. The housing crisis and the high rates of violence, lack of adequate resources, and criminal justice response to violence across Tribal Nations and in communities where AI/AN people reside cannot

be viewed as randomized or even consequential occurrences but rather as manifestations of a larger goal: The eradication of Indigenous people from their lands.<sup>1</sup> Though Native women experience violence at incredibly disparate rates, it is just as alarming that 38% of those women reported they were unable to access necessary services (there are currently less than 50 Tribal domestic violence shelters).

The 574 federally recognized Tribes are distinct sovereigns within the United States, yet they lack a key function of inherent sovereignty: The ability to tax. Therefore, many Tribes cannot fund the infrastructure that would allow them to convert existing physical space for shelter or transitional housing programs. Without the ability to use funds for construction (or even rehabbing existing space), Tribes looking to start a domestic violence shelter or transitional housing program run into a near-impossible hurdle. In Indian country, the primary housing funding source is Indian Housing Block Grants, which are authorized under the Native American Housing Assistance and Self Determination Act (NAHASDA), which is currently unauthorized. Public-private partnerships are non-existent for the vast majority of the 229 Tribes in Alaska and for the Tribes in the lower 48. For Alaska specifically, per HUD’s Office of Native American Programs (ONAP), it costs approximately \$1 million to run a mile of infrastructure in the villages, and the required infrastructure to utilize some of the available public dollars does not exist. Homelessness in Alaska often looks like it does for a lot of Indian Country: Doubled up and overcrowded.

## Advancing Solutions Through Policy Change and Resources

We encourage you to access the full report but highlight key policy recommendations that were uplifted during the convening:

1. Refrain from the criminalization of homelessness at every governmental level of lawmaking.
2. Create low barrier access by incentivizing processes to screen in rather than screen out.
3. Support meeting peoples’ basic needs, starting with Universal Basic Income.

4. Adequately fund Tribal domestic violence shelters and identify and increase funds for the development of physical space.
5. Abide by the Federal Trust Responsibility with Tribes, uphold and respect self-determination principles and never implement rules or regulations absent meaningful, robust, and consistent consultation as required by federal and treaty law.
6. Invest \$5 million in creating a federal research program under the Administration for Children and Families, Office on Family Violence Prevention and Services (OFVPS), that identifies, analyzes, and reports on existing services and programs most effective at supporting survivors from historically marginalized communities in exiting homelessness and maintaining housing.
7. Re-tool existing resources and create greater flexibility, within existing funding streams, toward use in building or rehabbing affordable permanent housing.
8. Ensure survivors have access to legal assistance.
9. Establish the Office of Gender-Based Violence Prevention at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in the office of the Secretary at HUD.
10. Create an interagency survivor housing program housed at the Office on Family Violence Prevention and Services Office (OFVPS) at HHS (\$50 million).

## Conclusion

Please read the full report for more information. If you are interested in joining STTARS' National Workgroup or would like to receive training and technical assistance at this critical intersection of our shared work, please contact us at [housing@niwrc.org](mailto:housing@niwrc.org).

<sup>1</sup> LaPorte, Caroline B., The Violence Against Women Act Housing Provisions and Impacts to Indigenous Survivors of Domestic and Sexual Violence (2022) (accessed from <https://www.niwrc.org/sites/default/files/VAWA%20Policy%20Paper.pdf>).

<sup>2</sup> LaPorte, Caroline B., Intimate Partner Violence in Tribal Communities: Sovereignty, Self-Determination, and Framing (2021).

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*Alaska Tribal leaders and advocates with the Alaska Native Women's Resource Center. / Photo courtesy of Paula Julian.*



*Tracy Charles-Smith,  
President, Native  
Village of Dot Lake.  
Photo courtesy of  
Paula Julian.*

## 19th Annual Violence Against Women Government- To-Government Consultation

### Tribes Exercising Sovereignty to Increase Women's Safety

By Paula Julian, *Filipina*, Senior  
Advisor, Alaska Native Women's  
Resource Center

Tribal leaders, authorized representatives, advocates, Tribal Coalitions, and Tribal organizations, including the National Congress of American Indians, the Alaska Native Women's Resource Center, and the National Indigenous Women's Resource Center, participated in the 19th Annual Violence Against Women Government-to-Government Consultation November 19-21, 2024, at the Pueblo of Pojoaque's Hilton Santa Fe Buffalo Thunder.

Testimony provided by Tribal Nations addressed systemic barriers and recommendations to strengthen Tribal, federal, and state responses to violence against Native women, including:

- Administering Tribal funds and programs.
- Enhancing the safety of Indian women from domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, homicide, stalking, and sex trafficking.
- Strengthening the federal response to such crimes.
- Improving access to local, regional, state, and federal crime information databases and criminal justice information systems.



*"We need to intentionally balance power between the federal and Tribal governments to avoid the imbalance between survivors and those who harm them."—Tiffany Webb, Chief, Curyung Tribe./ Photo courtesy of Paula Julian.*

"Every day in our Tribal communities, lives are being lost. Our people face criminal victimization at staggering rates, and generations carry the weight of unaddressed trauma. Our Alaska Native and American Indian people are being denied their **fundamental right to safety and justice.**"

—TAMI TRUETT JERUE, AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE, ANVIK TRIBE.

*Tami Truett Jerue speaking at the 19th Annual Violence Against Women Government-to-Government Consultation. / Photo courtesy of Paula Julian.*



# *Breaking New Ground:* Alaska's First Tribal Criminal Law Makes History

## The Chickaloon Native Village Passes the First Tribal Criminal Law in Alaska

By Rick A. Haskins-Garcia, Esquire, Director of Law and Policy, Alaska Native Women's Resource Center



*Eklutna Veteran Elders standing alongside Chickaloon Village Tribal Police Officers at the 2024 Eklutna Powwow. Photo courtesy of Philip Ling, Chickaloon Tribal Court Director*

In a landmark development for Indigenous justice in Alaska, the Chickaloon Native Village (Chickaloon) recently passed Alaska's first comprehensive Tribal criminal law, marking a historic shift in how Alaska Native Tribal governments can address crime and maintain public safety within their Village. This groundbreaking achievement provides Chickaloon with the framework and authority to enforce its own criminal laws for the first time, setting a precedent that could transform Tribal justice across our state. As this new system takes shape, Alaska's 228 other federally recognized Tribes are watching closely, recognizing the potential to reclaim a fundamental aspect of Tribal sovereignty.

"Our ancestors have always known how to keep peace in our communities," says Philip Ling,

Chickaloon Tribal Court Director. "What makes this so important is that for the first time, our Tribe can officially handle criminal cases in ways that match our cultural values."

The 2022 reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) created the pathway for Chickaloon and its passage of the first Tribal criminal law in Alaska possible. VAWA 2022 reaffirmed the inherent authority of Alaska Tribes to criminally charge, prosecute, and adjudicate criminal cases involving Native people in their village through their own Tribal criminal courts.

Tami Truett Jerue, Executive Director of the Alaska Native Women's Resource Center (AKNWRC), explains why this matters. "For years, our Tribes didn't

have the legal clarification and reaffirmation provided in VAWA 2022 regarding our ability to address crime and public safety within our communities. Now, we can handle criminal issues in our own forums, using both our traditional values and modern legal tools to keep our people safe.”

What makes Chickaloon’s approach particularly innovative is its integration of traditional knowledge with modern legal frameworks. The new law implements culturally appropriate justice measures while establishing robust community safety and accountability systems. This isn’t just about punishment—it’s about healing, restoration, and preserving cultural values that sustained Alaska Native communities for countless generations.

The success of this initiative also highlights the power of collaboration. The partnership between Chickaloon, the Alaska Native Women’s Resource Center, the University of Alaska Fairbanks, and Judge David Avraham Voluck demonstrates how different organizations can collectively advance Tribal sovereignty while creating practical, workable solutions to long-standing challenges.

This moment arrives at a critical time for Alaska Native Tribal governments. As they face evolving challenges in maintaining peace and security in their villages, the ability to implement culturally appropriate justice systems becomes increasingly vital. Chickaloon’s achievement shows that it’s possible to create effective, culturally grounded criminal justice systems while exercising inherent sovereign rights.

For Alaska’s other 228 federally recognized Tribes, Chickaloon’s achievement offers both inspiration and a practical roadmap. The law provides a template for how Tribes can exercise criminal jurisdiction while respecting both traditional and contemporary legal frameworks. It shows how communities can develop justice systems that strengthen safety while honoring cultural values and promoting healing for all involved.

Looking ahead, the implications are profound. For Tribal governments considering similar initiatives,

the path forward requires careful consideration and consultation with community members and leadership, documentation, incorporation of traditional and modern justice practices, and capacity development for law enforcement and judicial proceedings. State and federal partners, too, have important roles to play in supporting cross-jurisdictional cooperation and working to ensure smooth cooperation between Tribal courts and other law enforcement agencies. Most importantly, our state and federal partners must respect Tribes’ right to handle their affairs while helping facilitate information sharing between communities.

The path forward requires a sustained commitment from all stakeholders—Tribal governments, state and federal partners, and supporting organizations. But as Alaska moves into this new era of Tribal criminal justice, the experience of Chickaloon Native Village offers both practical guidance and inspiration. It suggests that the future of criminal justice for Alaska Native communities will be increasingly shaped by Tribal governments exercising their sovereign authority to protect their citizens through systems that honor traditional wisdom and contemporary legal requirements.

For the Chickaloon Native Village, this new law represents a return to traditional ways of maintaining justice and a bold step into the future. As other Tribes across Alaska watch and learn from their experience, the potential for a transformation in how justice is served in our Alaska Native communities grows stronger. This isn’t just about creating new laws—it’s about reinvigorating traditional wisdom and applying it to contemporary challenges in ways that strengthen communities and honor Tribal sovereignty.

# UN Commission on the Status of *Women* 2025

**By Christopher Foley, *Cherokee*, Senior Attorney, Indian Law Resource Center**

The United Nations has been engaged in the issue of gender equality since its foundation. The UN Charter, adopted in 1945, states in its Preamble that “We the peoples of the United Nations determined to...reaffirm faith...in the equal rights of men and women...have resolved to combine our efforts to accomplish these aims.”

The UN has used various mechanisms to advance women’s rights and gender equality, including organizing a series of World Conferences on Women. The last was held in Beijing in 1995, and the UN has since settled on a practice of conducting five-year reviews on the decisions and an outcome document created in Beijing. That document, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was adopted by 189 countries, all of the UN Member States at the time. It represents an enormously progressive vision of women’s rights and the political work needed to advance them.

Importantly for our work, the Platform recognizes that Indigenous women often face barriers both as women and because they are Indigenous, and it encourages the greater involvement of Indigenous women in all levels of decision-making. The Platform also contains a substantial chapter on violence against women. Among many important points, it finds that violence against women “both violates and impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by women of their human rights and

fundamental freedoms,” and it further affirms that this violence is a matter of international concern, that it is “a matter of concern to all States and should be addressed.”

In order to improve the international response and promote action on the policy recommendations in the Platform, the UN Commission on the Status of Women has taken on the role of implementing and monitoring body of the Platform. Every five years, the Commission dedicates its annual session to reviewing progress on women’s rights since Beijing 1995, and this year, the CSW will focus on Beijing+30.



*Indian Law Resource Center Staff at UN Headquarters Geneva, September 2024 (Miranda Carman, Christopher T. Foley, Gianella Sanchez). / Photo courtesy of ILRC.*

This year’s panel will discuss the priorities of their Indigenous Nations to advance their individual and collective rights, including Indigenous peoples’ rights to their lands and resources and their right to self-government. Securing these collective Indigenous rights strengthens Indigenous governments, and strong Indigenous governments are best able to support Indigenous women’s leadership in all forms of rights-based political advocacy, especially concerning violence against women.

Our virtual panel will be free, open to all, and take place on March 10-14. Details, when available, will be posted at [www.indianlaw.org](http://www.indianlaw.org).

**Further information about the CSW is available at [bit.ly/4aDGbrm](https://bit.ly/4aDGbrm).**

# Help us make a difference in the lives of Native women and communities.

Each gift made to the National Indigenous Women's Resource Center (NIWRC) strengthens our mission to end violence against Native women and vision of restoring sovereignty for Tribes to hold perpetrators accountable.

We are committed to providing national leadership in this work by lifting up the collective voices of grassroots advocates in Tribal communities.

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**—CHEYENNE PROVERB**



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