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January 19, 2024

Senator Donny Olson
Alaska State Legislature
Alaska State Capitol
Room 508
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Dear Senator Olson,

We are grateful for your leadership in taking action to protect Alaska Native people through the introduction of Senate Bill 151 - Missing and Murdered Indigenous People (MMIP). This is an important step in addressing Alaska's high rate of MMIP. The MMIWG2S Alaska Working Group fully supports this legislation and stands ready to help in any way possible.

The MMIWG2S Alaska Working Group is an Indigenous-led group with the support of five Alaska Native non-profits including the Alaska Native Justice Center, Alaska Native Women's Resource Center, Alaska Native Heritage Center, Data for Indigenous Justice and Native Movement. We have been working together for six years to address priorities and collective efforts to end the crisis of MMIWG2S/MMIP. We work on all fronts with our communities, Tribes, nonprofits and families, advocating for changes in our state policies, creating healing and wellness spaces, bringing awareness, collecting data and working with agencies to improve data collection, partnering with communities and Tribes on protocols and public safety measures, and much more. We know in order to end the crisis of MMIP, we must work on all fronts and we must work together.

As you know, all across our state, we have been experiencing high rates of domestic violence, sexual assault, and trafficking and continue to have some of the highest number of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls across the country. The Urban Indian Health Institute released a national report citing Alaska as fourth in the Nation with the highest MMIP cases and Anchorage with the third highest number of MMIP cases among cities nationwide. This is



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unacceptable and the State of Alaska must step forward to do better to protect Alaska Native people and fulfill their constitutional obligation to provide public safety.

The National Crime Information Center reports that in 2016, there were 5,712 reports of missing American Indian and Alaska Native women and girls, despite the US Department of Justice's Federal missing persons database (NamUs) only showing 116 cases. We know that these numbers are incomplete and that Alaska rural communities haven't been fully represented in this research. As of August 2021, NamUs listed Alaska with the most unsolved missing person's cases among American Indian and Alaska Native cases, at 292, with Oklahoma second with 79-- these numbers are unacceptable.

Senate Bill 151 contains important steps in addressing MMIP in Alaska, including improving cooperation between agencies, reviewing and informing ways to set up specific standards for MMIP cases, protocols regarding research and the review of cases to learn and help families close outstanding case work, and solidifying the important work of our MMIP investigators.

Section 1 of the bill codifies two MMIP investigator positions in the Department of Public Safety (DPS). This is important because at this time we are reliant on current DPS internal policy and operations, which can change based on DPS administration. By having MMIP investigators in statute, we will not have to worry about these important positions being on the chopping block at the change of each administration. Additionally, it provides stability to the investigators and their work. Addressing Alaska's MMIP crisis should not be a political talking point. We need consistency in DPS to ensure the MMIP crisis will continue to be a priority and addressed as so.

Our working group has been working closely with Commissioner Cockrell on the necessary steps to address the MMIP crisis, one of which includes the MMIP Investigator Unit. After the investigators began their work, staff at DPS stated the MMIP crisis is larger than originally expected and even two investigators are not enough to address the number of cases that are still outstanding and the new cases. Currently, DPS employs four MMIP Investigators – the number of investigators started at one, quickly realizing that was not sufficient the Commissioner increased to two positions, and then to four. We recommend a conversation



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and consideration on whether the number of investigators should be increased to four in the bill to accurately reflect the need and the current positions at DPS.

Section two of the bill will create the MMIP Review Commission. This is an important step to review the unsolved MMIP cases across the state, examine the trends and patterns of these cases that can lead to better policies and practices to keep our people safe, and help bring closure to families who have been looking for their loved ones, some for many years.

Lastly, section 3 of the bill directs DPS to conduct a report on investigative resources. This is an important piece that came from the expression and learned gaps in the system from multiple communities and families where MMIP cases have been treated differently in communities across the state. It is important that each person who has gone missing or has been murdered is treated with the same care and devotion each and every time. Having set procedures and the ability to share and learn with each other, we can make this happen. At this time, many of our communities have been on their own for search efforts of missing tribal citizens and resources from the state have not been consistent. This in depth review, developing procedures for information sharing and government to government relationships with our Tribes is a necessary step to improve public safety across the state.

In addition to current language, we also encourage and suggest two additional points to build a more robust and protective legislation: 1) include language that will create a review of the commission and reports before sunseting these two programs to ensure that there has been an adequate amount of time to address all the needs, ideas and solutions. 2) include mandatory cultural training provided by an Indigenous organization, tribe or contractor for all law enforcement. This is important to the public safety of all Native people and will greatly enhance communications and working together with our Tribes and tribal citizens. We have heard an overwhelming amount of stories from across communities, all over the state, who have shed light on this great need. We know our law enforcement wants to provide the best service to all our people and all our communities, and to do this we need to understand each other and understand that each region of Alaska is vastly different. We know that when we take the time to get to know our communities and people it will reduce mis-communication, enhance relationships that will steward working together more fully, build trust, and create a



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better public safety system for everyone. We are glad to elaborate more on these suggestions and greatly appreciate your consideration.

Again, we are truly grateful for your leadership and for this important bill. We encourage all your colleagues to support this bill and urge the passage of SB151 this session. If you need anything from us we stand ready to assist.

Gunalchéesh/Háw'aa/Quyana/Mahsi' Choo/Baasee'/Maasee'/Dogedinh/Thank you,

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