



House Community and Regional Affairs
Alaska State Capitol
Juneau, AK 99801

Re: HB 234 – Missing/Murdered Indigenous People; Report

February 26th, 2024

Dear Chair McCormick and Members of the House Community and Regional Affairs Committee,

Planned Parenthood Alliance Advocates – Alaska (“PPAA”) writes in strong support of HB 234, which would create state support for the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons Review Commission by placing it within the Department of Public Safety (DPS) with the aim to improve coordination and bolster investigative resources for identifying and reporting cases of missing and murdered Indigenous people..

Nationwide, the voices of Indigenous and Native people have united to raise awareness of MMIP. While violence against Native women occurs at higher rates than any other population in the United States, Alaska has some of the highest rates of domestic violence, sexual assault, and trafficking and the highest number of MMIP 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.¹

Despite the growing awareness of MMIP, data on the realities of this violence is scarce and grossly inadequate. The National Crime Information Center reports that, in 2016, there were 5,712 reports of missing American Indian and Alaska Native women and girls, though the US Department of Justice’s federal missing persons database, NamUs, only logged 116 cases.² However, these numbers are likely dramatic underestimations: lack of proper data collection, poor record-keeping protocols, lack of prosecution, underreporting by law enforcement, racial misclassifications, and a labyrinth of jurisdictional disputes all contribute to a lack of quality data on MMIP. These gaps in data include a dramatic lack of information about MMIP in Alaska’s communities, which is particularly concerning because Native Alaskans are disproportionately represented among sex trafficked and sexual abuse survivors.

The disproportionately high number of MMIP and the wide gaps in data are attributed to a lack of comprehensive law enforcement and services. Most Alaska Native communities lack regular access to police, courts, and related services since services are based in regional hubs that are usually remote

¹<https://www.aisc.ucla.edu/iloc/report/files/Roadmap%20For%20Making%20Native%20America%20Safer%20-%20Washington%20DC%20May%202015.pdf>

² Department of Justice (2018). NamUs. Retrieved from <https://www.namus.gov/MissingPersons/Search>



Alliance Advocates - Alaska

from the communities they serve. At least 75 communities lack any law enforcement presence at all.³ Furthermore, the complexities of federal Indian law have resulted in jurisdictional challenges, leaving Alaska Native villages exposed to potential harm from violent criminals. Particularly in Alaska, the intricate jurisdictional landscape often leaves communities without sufficient law enforcement or adequately trained police to effectively address severe crimes. The multi-layered process required for Alaskan Native victims to access justice and victim services frequently leads to unresolved crimes, providing a sense of impunity for criminals and allowing perpetrators to go unaccountable for their actions.

The severity of these issues demonstrates the importance of HB 234. This bill 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.

Our communities deserve to have more state resources dedicated to understanding and addressing the crisis of MMIP. To do this, Indigenous and Native groups must be a part of meaningful consultations to ensure proper data collection and increased coordination. Tribal nations and Indigenous and Native groups must have the ability to advocate for and access data collection about their citizens when they go missing or are killed. Improved coordination between law enforcement, Indigenous and Native groups, federal partners, and service providers when responding to MMIP and recording and sharing data is critical to addressing this crisis.

We appreciate this opportunity to support HB 234, which constitutes a critical first step towards addressing Native Alaskans going missing, being murdered, or being subjected to violence and abuse.

Sincerely,

Morgan Lim
Alaska Government Relations Manager
Planned Parenthood Alliance Advocates

³<https://www.aisc.ucla.edu/iloc/report/files/Roadmap%20For%20Making%20Native%20America%20Safer%20-%20Washington%20DC%20May%202015.pdf>



February 26, 2024

Representative CJ McCormick
State Capitol Room 416
Juneau, AK 99801

Re: ANTHC Support of House Bill 234

Representative McCormick,

On behalf of the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC), I write in support of House Bill (HB) 234. ANTHC is a statewide tribal health organization serving all 229 tribes and all Alaska Native and American Indian (AN/AI) people in Alaska. ANTHC provides a wide range of statewide public health, community health, environmental health, and other programs and services for Alaska Native people and their communities. ANTHC and Southcentral Foundation operate programs at the Alaska Native Medical Center, the statewide tertiary care hospital for all AN/AI people in Alaska, under the terms of Public Law 105-83.

Alaska has some of the highest rates of homicide, domestic violence, and sexual assault in the United States, with Alaska Native women making up a disproportionate number of victims in each of these categories. Despite these high rates of violence, relatively few resources are dedicated to addressing the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons (MMIP). From alarming gaps in data collection to woefully insufficient public safety personnel training, Alaska lacks the needed tools and expertise to confront this multifaceted challenge.

HB 234 raises needed awareness to issues specific to MMIP, while also providing long overdue resources to the Department of Public Safety that are critical to protecting Alaskans in a meaningful and sustainable way.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment. Please do not hesitate to contact me at mmartin@anthc.org or 907-365-9334 with any questions or if additional information can be provided.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Monique R. Martin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Monique R. Martin, Vice President
Intergovernmental Affairs

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2024 Winter Convention Portland, Oregon

RESOLUTION #24 – 13

“SUPPORT AND ADVOCACY FOR MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS PEOPLES LEGISLATIVE BILLS IN THE STATE OF ALASKA”

PREAMBLE

We, the members of the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians of the United States, invoking the divine blessing of the Creator upon our efforts and purposes, in order to preserve for ourselves and our descendants rights secured under Indian Treaties, Executive Orders and benefits to which we are entitled under the laws and constitution of the United States and several states, to enlighten the public toward a better understanding of the Indian people, to preserve Indian cultural values, and otherwise promote the welfare of the Indian people, do hereby establish and submit the following resolution:

WHEREAS, the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians (ATNI) are representatives of and advocates for national, regional, and specific tribal concerns; and

WHEREAS, ATNI is a regional organization comprised of American Indians/Alaska Natives and tribes in the states of Washington, Idaho, Oregon, Montana, Nevada, Northern California, and Alaska; and

WHEREAS, the health, safety, welfare, education, economic and employment opportunity, and preservation of cultural and natural resources are primary goals and objectives of ATNI; and

WHEREAS, the Alaska Native Brotherhood and Alaska Native Sisterhood are the oldest and most effective civil rights organizations in Alaska; and

WHEREAS, the Central Council Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska is the largest Tribe in the State of Alaska, representing 35,000 citizens in 22 Villages in Southeast Alaska, Anchorage, Washington, and California; and

WHEREAS, In January of 2024, the Alaska Native Women’s Resource Center shared the National Crime Information Center 2020 Report, which highlights 9,575 missing persons, 45% male and 55% female, in the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System, and reported 751 cases of missing Alaska Native/American Indians with 69% male and 31% female; and

WHEREAS, Alaska Natives are 15% of the state’s population of 730,000, and 47% of sexual assault victims are Alaska Native women; and


WHEREAS, there are 3 legislative bills before the Alaska State Legislature this session, Senate Bill 151 and House Bills 234 and 235, all concerning MMIPW, and these bills will codify and establish paid positions in the Department of Public Safety that will begin to address this crisis; now

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that ATNI urges the State of Alaska to adopt these policies and laws as identified in the three bills to address the crisis of MMIPW; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that this resolution shall be the policy of ATNI until it is withdrawn or modified by subsequent resolution.

CERTIFICATION

The foregoing resolution was adopted at the 2024 Winter Convention of the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians, held at the Hyatt Regency, Portland, OR, January 28 – February 31, 2024, with a quorum present.



Leonard Forsman, President



Norma Jean Louie, Secretary



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January 19, 2024

Representative CJ McCormick
Alaska State Legislature
Alaska State Capitol
Room 416
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Dear Representative McCormick,

We are grateful for your leadership in taking action to protect Alaska Native people through the introduction of House Bill 234 - Missing and Murdered Indigenous People (MMIP). This is an important step in addressing Alaska's high rate of MMIP.

The Missing, Murdered, Indigenous Women, Girls, Two Spirit (MMIWG2S) Alaska Working Group, which is an Indigenous-led group with the support of five organizations, fully supports this legislation and encourages the passage of this bill. The MMIWG2S AK Working Group has 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 numbers 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 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 cases among American Indian and Alaska Native cases, at 292, with Oklahoma second with 79-- these numbers are unacceptable.



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House Bill 234 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 casework, solidifying the important work and positions of our MMIP investigators, and requiring cultural training for law enforcement.

We have heard from communities and individuals across the state about barriers to communication with law enforcement. We know that law enforcement is not in every community at this time, and that they must travel throughout the state and encounter numerous cultures and people. Our Indigenous cultures also vary across the state from Southeast to North Slope to the Aleutian Islands. It is important that communication is improved and understanding our ways of life so there can be increased communication, respect, and cooperation between communities, Tribes, individuals, and law enforcement. We know that when we take the time to get to know our communities and people it will reduce miscommunication, enhance relationships that will steward working together more fully, build trust, and create a better public safety system for everyone.

In the last couple of years, we have seen the success and need for the MMIP Investigation Unit to be permanent at the Department of Public Safety (DPS). The number of cases, new and old, is staggering. We must codify the MMIP investigator positions in the Department of Public Safety in statute. 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. A number of Indigenous organizations have been working closely with Commissioner Cockrell and other DPS staff to create this new investigation unit, and through this process, DPS has 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 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.

The MMIP Review Commission set up in this bill 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.



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Lastly, 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 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 the current language, we respectfully encourage and suggest including 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.

Again, we are truly grateful for your leadership and for this important bill. We encourage all your colleagues to support HB234 and to pass this session. If you need anything from us we stand ready to assist.

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

Tamra Truett Jerue
Executive Director
Alaska Native Women's Resource Center

Alex Cleghorn
Chief Operating Officer
Alaska Native Justice Center

Emily Edenshaw
President/CEO
Alaska Native Heritage Center

Dr. Charlene Aqpiq Apok
Executive Director
Data for Indigenous Justice

Enei Begaye
Executive Director
Native Movement