

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON TRIBAL AFFAIRS**

March 22, 2023

3:34 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative CJ McCormick, Chair
Representative Ben Carpenter
Representative Maxine Dibert
Representative Jennie Armstrong

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Sarah Vance
Representative Josiah Patkotak
Representative Jamie Allard

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION(S): MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN~ GIRLS~
AND TWO SPIRIT ALASKA WORKING GROUP

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

EMILY EDENSHAW, President and CEO
Alaska Native Heritage Center
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Participated in the Missing and Murdered
Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two Spirit presentation.

DEBRA O'GARA, Assistant Professor
Tribal Governance Department
University of Alaska Fairbanks
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Participated in the Missing and Murdered
Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two Spirit presentation.

KELSEY POTDEVIN, Manager
Education and Outreach
Alaska Native Justice Center
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Participated in the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two Spirit presentation.

CHARLENE AQPIK APOK, PhD, Executive Director and Co-Founder
Data for Indigenous Justice
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Participated in the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two Spirit presentation.

KENDRA KLOSTER, Co-Director
Law and Policy
Alaska Native Women's Resource Center
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Participated in the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two Spirit presentation.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:34:41 PM](#)

CHAIR CJ MCCORMICK called the House Special Committee on Tribal Affairs meeting to order at 3:34 p.m. Representatives Carpenter, Dibert, Armstrong and McCormick were present at the call to order.

PRESENTATION(S): Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two Spirit Alaska Working Group

[3:35:38 PM](#)

CHAIR MCCORMICK announced that the only order of business would be the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two Spirit Alaska Working Group presentation.

[3:37:24 PM](#)

EMILY EDENSHAW, President and CEO, Alaska Native Heritage Center, commenced the presentation with an introduction to the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two Spirit Alaska (MMIWG2S) Working Group. She said that MMIWG2S people is a crisis in Alaska and shared her personal experience of having lost her mother, who was murdered and whose killer has never been convicted. She said that the rate for MMIWG2S people is 10 times as high as the rest of the country; Anchorage ranks third in the nation for such a statistic.

[3:40:54 PM](#)

MS. EDENSHAW began a PowerPoint [hardcopy included in the committee packet], on slide 3, which detailed the MMIWG2S Working Group's goals and objectives as an organization. She elaborated on her previous comments and shared further details and statistics related to MMIWG2S people and emphasized the importance of justice being reached for those it has been lost upon.

[3:45:19 PM](#)

DEBRA O'GARA, Assistant Professor, Tribal Governance Department, University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF), introduced herself to the committee as a traveling court judge and practicing lawyer and explained her connections to the MMIWG2S Working Group.

[3:46:11 PM](#)

KELSEY POTDEVIN, Education and Outreach Manager for Alaska Native Justice Center, introduced herself to the committee and explained her connections to and experiences with the MMIWG2S Working Group.

[3:46:29 PM](#)

CHARLENE AQPIK APOK, PhD, Executive Director and Co-Founder of Data for Indigenous Justice, introduced herself to the committee and shared that her grandfather's death was wrongly classified as a suicide. She said that her aunt went missing and was never found and shared that she is the cousin of the woman who was kidnapped and murdered in Anchorage, Alaska, years ago.

[3:47:41 PM](#)

KENDRA KLOSTER, Co-Director, Law and Policy, Alaska Native Women's Resource Center, introduced herself to the committee as a mother of three and said that she wants communities to be safe and for kids to be safe at home and on the streets.

[3:48:50 PM](#)

MS. EDENSHAW resumed the presentation on slide 4, which detailed the advocacy that the MMIWG2S Working Group engages in on behalf of MMIWG2S people. She continued to slide 5, which explained what the red painted hand symbol meant and its significance to the MMIWG2S movement. Slide 7 described the history of indigenous boarding schools and cultural trauma in Alaska and

explained how its lasting effects have led to crisis both in Alaska and around the country.

[3:53:17 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 3:57 p.m. to 3:59 p.m.

[3:59:33 PM](#)

MS. O'GARA resumed the presentation on slide 8, which described and emphasized the disproportionality of victimization of Alaska Native/American Indian women with regard to violence by listing a number of points and statistics supporting the claim.

[4:03:40 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CARPENTER asked whether the 50 percent of sex offense cases in Alaska being accepted for prosecution in 2018-2019 included cases brought up by a grand jury.

MS. O'GARA answered that the main reason cases are not actually brought before a prosecutor is because the cases are not being investigated. She said that the lack of investigations is more indicative of a systemic issue of the court system and said that new consent laws would make charges easier to bring up against an assailant.

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REPRESENTATIVE CARPENTER asked Ms. O'Gara if she was aware of any statutes related to a community's or law enforcement agency's ability to bring about charges against someone.

MS. O'GARA said that she couldn't reference any statutes in front of her currently and elaborated on her previous comments related to the unfair numbers of prosecution with MMIWG2S people.

[4:10:08 PM](#)

MS. O'GARA resumed the presentation on slide 9, which displayed a graphic that expounded on the previously mentioned statistics mentioned on slide 8. She continued to slide 10, which further elaborated on specific statistics and cases surrounding MMIWG2S people.

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DR. AQPIK moved to slide 11, which highlighted that MMIWG2S people are real people, not just statistics, whether they be mothers, daughters, fathers, or uncles. She continued to slide 12, which emphasized that murder is the third leading cause of death among Alaska Native/American Indian women and girls ages 10-24.

[4:17:45 PM](#)

DR. AQPIK moved to slide 13, which highlighted that only 116 of the 5,712 reported cases of MMIWG2S people were logged in the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) database. She continued to slide 14, which emphasized that common consumer media does not ever mention cases of MMIWG2S people, which in turn reduces the public's awareness of the issue. She moved to slides 15 and 16, which gave specific analysis and attention to common consumer media's articles and coverage surrounding MMIWG2S people.

[4:22:08 PM](#)

DR. AQPIK continued to slide 17, which outlined the statistics not often highlighted in data groups cited in regard to MMIWG2S people. She moved to slide 18, which explained how those certain statistics are lost in the process of data collection.

[4:25:17 PM](#)

DR. AQPIK continued to slide 19, which further elaborated on lost statistics in regard to MMIWG2S people by explaining specific obstacles and barriers to collecting data that are encountered with MMIWG2S people's cases. She continued to slide 20, which highlighted seven key items to be addressed to improve MMIWG2S people's data collection practices.

[4:29:57 PM](#)

MS. KLOSTER continued to slide 21, which highlighted the MMIWG2S Working Group's successes by listing a number of state/federal policies that had been passed by the group and also described leaps made in the awareness and healing of MMIWG2S people.

[4:35:03 PM](#)

MS. KLOSTER moved to slide 22, which described the MMIWG2S Working Group's advocacy within the Alaska State Legislature by listing a series of bills that had been passed and committee

hearings in the name of MMIWG2S people. Slide 23 listed a series of the MMIWG2S Working Group's recommendations and proposals of changes to be made to Alaska's operating budget.

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MS. O'GARA picked up the presentation on slide 24, which listed a series of the MMIWG2S Working Group's recommendations of policies for the legislative and executive branches to adopt.

[4:46:15 PM](#)

MS. O'GARA elaborated on slide 24 by explaining that the MMIWG2S Working Group's policies would require interagency cooperation and said that providing the tools to achieve clarity with regard to prosecution and jurisdiction are prudent in the issue of MMIWG2S people.

[4:52:19 PM](#)

MS. O'GARA continued to slide 25, which emphasized that every person, no matter their origin, deserves to feel safe in their home and in their community. Slide 26 described a series of resources that communities could utilize to help stop the issue of MMIWG2S people from occurring and provide resources to the individuals and families affected by the issue.

[4:58:04 PM](#)

MS. EDENSHAW concluded the presentation on slide 27, which listed a series of statements to acknowledge the issue of MMIWG2S people and acknowledge that there are things that can be done to solve this crisis.

[4:59:31 PM](#)

CHAIR MCCORMICK thanked the invited company for their presentation and acknowledged that it touched on a number of topics seldom discussed. He commented that there was a former orphanage close to where he grew up and asked if the MMIWG2S Working Group could research the history of that orphanage, given the recent discoveries of the atrocities at other boarding schools and orphanages that had occurred across North America.

[5:01:04 PM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Tribal Affairs meeting was adjourned at 5:01 p.m.