

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE

April 4, 2023

1:30 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Forrest Dunbar, Chair
Senator Donald Olson, Vice Chair
Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson
Senator Cathy Giessel

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Jesse Bjorkman

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 103

"An Act relating to peer support counseling programs for law enforcement agencies, emergency service providers, and the Department of Corrections."

- MOVED SB 103 OUT OF COMMITTEE

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

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 103

SHORT TITLE: PEER SUPPORT COUNSELING PROGRAM

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(S) DUNBAR

03/15/23	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/15/23	(S)	CRA
03/28/23	(S)	CRA AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
03/28/23	(S)	Heard & Held
03/28/23	(S)	MINUTE(CRA)
04/04/23	(S)	CRA AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

WITNESS REGISTER

KENDRA KLOSTER, Co-Director

Law and Policy
Alaska Native Women's Resource Center
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Participated in the presentation and answered questions on the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit (MMIWG2S) Alaska Working Group.

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

POSITION STATEMENT: Participated in the presentation and answered questions on the MMIWG2S Alaska Working Group.

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

POSITION STATEMENT: Participated in the presentation on the MMIWG2S Alaska Working Group.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[1:30:33 PM](#)

CHAIR FORREST DUNBAR called the Senate Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Gray-Jackson, Giessel, and, Chair Dunbar. Senator Olson joined the meeting shortly thereafter.

SB 103-PEER SUPPORT COUNSELING PROGRAM

[1:31:22 PM](#)

CHAIR DUNBAR announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 103 "An Act relating to peer support counseling programs for law enforcement agencies, emergency service providers, and the Department of Corrections."

CHAIR DUNBAR said this is the second hearing of this bill. The intention is to solicit the will of the committee on this bill.

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SENATOR GIESSEL moved to report SB 103, work order 33-LS0565\A, from committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal note(s).

CHAIR DUNBAR found no objection and SB 103 was reported from the Senate Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee.

[1:32:15 PM](#)

At ease.

SENATOR OLSON joined the meeting.

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

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CHAIR DUNBAR reconvened the meeting and announced the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit (MMIWG2S) Alaska Working Group Presentation. He invited the Alaska Working Group presenters to put themselves on the record and begin.

[1:34:56 PM](#)

KENDRA KLOSTER, Co-Director, Law and Policy, Alaska Native Women's Resource Center, Anchorage, Alaska, advanced to slide 1, which listed five indigenous-led organizations that joined forces to form the MMIWG2S Alaska Working Group in 2018. These indigenous organizations are:

- The Alaska Native Heritage Center
- Alaska Native Justice Center - Voices for Justice
- Alaska Native Women's Resource Center (AKNWRC)
- Data for Indigenous Justice
- Native Movement

MS. KLOSTER said there is a crisis throughout Alaska, the nation, and the world around missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. The Alaska Working Group came together to figure out how to address this issue with tribes, indigenous organizations, and other organizations statewide. She emphasized that she does not want to pass this crisis on to the next generations; she called this effort "heart work."

[1:37:02 PM](#)

CHARLENE AQPIK APOK, Executive Director and Co-Founder, Data for Indigenous Justice, Anchorage, Alaska, introduced herself and participated in the slideshow presentation on the MMIWG2S Alaska Working Group. She honed an Alaska database for MMIWG2S persons and highlighted organizations she associates with on this issue. She does this work, first and foremost, for her family and as a mother trying to raise her family safely. She recounted that many family members believe her mother was murdered, though it was listed as suicide. She said that her aunt went missing in

California and was declared deceased after never being found, and her cousin was kidnapped and murdered in Anchorage.

[1:39:00 PM](#)

KELSEY POTDEVIN, Education and Outreach Manager, Alaska Native Justice Center, Anchorage, Alaska, introduced herself and participated in the slideshow presentation on the MMIWG2S Alaska Working Group.

[1:40:08 PM](#)

MS. KLOSTER summarized slides 2 and 3, which listed the Alaska Working Group members, their education, experience, and interests.

[1:40:45 PM](#)

MS. KLOSTER reviewed slide 4:

About MMIWG2S Working Group

The Missing, Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit (MMWIG2S) Alaska Working Group is an Indigenous Peoples-led statewide working group supported by partner organizations: Alaska Native Women's Resource Center, Alaska Native Justice Center, Alaska Native Heritage Center, Data for Indigenous Justice, and Native Movement. Members began meeting in 2018 and have continued to meet weekly in effort to have shared communications, strategy, actions, and community building to address this crisis in our state.

What We Do

The MMIWG2S Alaska Working Group works in collaboration to share initiatives that impacts MMIWG2S/MMIP work, share and create strategies for change, and host healing centered community events. With partnership from statewide organizations, we leverage our collective resources and skills to analyze local, state, and federal policies, have a unified voice on advocacy, and create meaningful out-facing events for the community. Across our organizations we are able to support this work group administratively, through a policy subcommittee, community organizers, cultural education, research and data, and communications. As Indigenous peoples leading the change we want to see, we are rooted in

our shared values and commitment to the safety and wellbeing of our people.

MS. KLOSTER mentioned that the Alaska Working Group met with the Department of Public Safety (DPS) commissioner, and he hired two investigators for the Missing or Murdered Indigenous People (MMIP) Unit. The MMIWG2S Alaska Working Group educates and provides resources that are key to addressing and ending this crisis.

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MS. KLOSTER reviewed slide 5:

MMIWG2S Working Group Advocacy

The Working Group provides education, gathers and shares information on MMIP/MMIWG2S to ensure policy makers understand different strategies to address this issue that affects so many Alaskan families.

In order to really address the crisis of MMIWG2S/MMIP we must ensure we are addressing the interconnected issues related to public safety reforms and find ways to reduce violence.

Through this presentation you will get a background of the crisis, we will share how, when and where we do our work to address MMIWG2S/MMIP, and provide specific recommendations which have come from our communities across the state and have been identified as gaps that need action now.

[1:44:41 PM](#)

MS. KLOSTER reviewed slide 6:

The MMIWG Red Hand

A red hand over the mouth has become the symbol of a growing movement, the MMIWG movement. It stands for all the missing sisters whose voices are not heard. It stands for the silence of the media and law enforcement in the midst of this crisis. It stands for the oppression and subjugation of Native women who are now rising up to say #NoMoreStolenSisters.

[1:45:27 PM](#)

MS. APOK advanced to slide 7, stating there are many intersectional factors common to the MMIWG2S crisis. The boarding school history of structural violence is one factor that carries forward its detrimental effects in many indigenous communities, internationally, in the Lower 48, and in Alaska. She reviewed slide 7:

Boarding Schools and MMIWG

Destruction of identity, inward and outward

- Boarding schools were meant to destroy the way Native peoples not only see ourselves, but how society sees us as "less than" or "sub human"

Sexual Abuse as Institutional

- Levels of civilization of Alaska Native children (societal worth) made sexual abuse permissible, leading to a high percentage of abuse within these schools
- Boarding schools were also a means for resource extraction, which led to a large amount of sexual abuse of Native women

Lasting Effects

- According to several studies, the children of a parent who has been sexually abused are more likely to be the target for abuse, becoming a cycle that has become a cycle genetically embedded
- The factors of continued negative societal identity and resource extraction within Native communities reveal how one of the many continued legacies of these institutions can be seen in the MMIWG crisis
- These factors can also explain why it has continued to be allowed by governmental entities that do not see Native peoples on the same level of personhood, leaving way for abuse to be unchecked.

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MS. POTDEVIN reviewed slide 8:

Disproportionality of Victimization

- Data tells a story -

- 80% of Alaska Native/American Indian (AN/AI) women will experience violence in their lifetimes - Rosay, 2016

- 55.6% of Alaska's sexual assault victims are AN/AI people - DPS 2018
- AN/AI people twice as likely to be victims of homicide - AJiC 2020
- An overwhelming number of sex offense cases reported in Alaska are not prosecuted - barely 50% accepted for prosecution from 2018-2019. - ACJC 2020
- Alaska Natives and American Indians (ANAI) represent around 19% of the state's population, yet statewide 60% of the children in foster care are ANAI.
- Suicide rate 4x the national average
- 40% Incarceration Rate - Alaska Native men and women are more likely to be arrested than any other race in Alaska. From a national perspective, AI/AN are more likely to be arrested than any other race.
- AN/AI Youth are over 2x more likely to experience physical dating violence in high school compared to white peers. AN/AI Youth are 5x more likely to be trafficked in Alaska among homeless youth.

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MS. POTDEVIN reviewed the chart on slide 9, which further illustrated the disproportionality of victimization for Alaska Native people:

MISSING & MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN & GIRLS
MMIWG

94 Percent	Had been raped or coerced in their lifetime.
42 Percent	Attempted suicide at some point if they had been raped or coerced.
53 Percent	Lacked permanent housing.
34 Percent	Binge drank on a weekly or daily basis after they were initially attacked.
8 Percent	Only 8 percent of cases of a rape victim's first attack ended in a conviction.

86 Percent Reported being affected by historical trauma.

[1:49:33 PM](#)

MS. POTDEVIN advanced to slide 10, stating the following statistics and reports relate to the MMIP crisis. She asked committee members to examine these statistics and see that this problem exists. There is a need for more data, better data, and cleaned-up data. Members of the Alaska Working Group have developed strategies to improve the data they work with so cases do not get lost. The legislature can help by finding ways to access good data. She suggested an offline discussion about report recommendations, like those in the 2021 Alaska Baseline Report "We are Calling to You." She reviewed slide 10:

MMIP/MMIWG2S Statistics

2021 Alaska Baseline Report - "We are Calling to You" from Data for Indigenous Justice

- 229 cases of MMIWG (149 missing/80 murdered)
- These are baseline numbers

2018 Urban Indian Health Institute (UIHI) Report

- Alaska had the 4th highest MMIP cases by state
- Anchorage had the 3rd highest MMIP cases by city
- Anchorage ranked in the top five cities with the highest number of cases not in law enforcement data.

MS. POTDEVIN said the 2018 Urban Indian Health Institute Report was a landmark document that helped people understand this issue.

National Missing and Unidentified Person System (NAMUS) Monthly MMIP Update

- <https://namus.nij.ojp.gov/missing-indigenous-persons>
- Counted 292 Unresolved Missing Indigenous Persons Cases in 2021
- Murder is the third leading cause of death among American Indian/Alaska Native Women, (UIHI)
- While women and girls are the primary victims of violence and human trafficking among Native Americans, they are not alone. People of all ages are victims of these horrific crimes, including men, boys, infants, and the elderly. In fact, 82% of

indigenous men are victims of violence in their lifetime and Native children are more likely to experience trauma and abuse than their non-Native peers. When educating yourself about the struggles of Native Americans, it's important to recognize and remember all victims of these crimes. (CRS MMIP Research and Native Hope)

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MS. APOK advanced to slide 11, stating that she wanted to acknowledge the human dimension of this work. While moving through data, it is easy to forget that the missing are loved and missed in their communities. She summarized slide 11:

Missing in Life

Mothers
Grandmothers
Daughters
Aunties
Fathers
Grandfathers
Uncles
Cousins
Relatives
Friends
Neighbors
Alaskans

She said the missing and murdered were individuals with hopes and dreams. They are missing from someone's life, and the loss of their brilliance and ideas are grieved.

[1:52:38 PM](#)

MS. APOK reviewed slide 12:

MURDER

The third-leading cause of death among American Indian and Alaska Native women and girls aged 10-24.

We have now gathered and reclaimed a total of 229 cases of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Womxn and Girls in Alaska.

149 as missing status.

80 as murdered.

[1:53:53 PM](#)

MS. APOK reviewed slide 13, pointing out that there is a lack of coverage in the media:

Missing in the Media

Our world revolves around media -

- connects us
- influences us
- educates us

We welcome it in many spaces of our lives - in our home, at work and play. It's on our phones, television, radio. Media has become the way we get our news, share important information, connect with our friends and family. It is also a way to send alerts when people go missing or law enforcement need help with collecting information. The media industry decides what to put out, deciding what the general public should see and shouldn't see.

95 PERCENT

A content analysis regarding MMIWG revealed that more than 95 percent of the 934 articles reviewed were never covered by any national or international media.

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MS. APOK advanced to slide 14, stating media is a powerful data source and an important way to build a narrative around this issue. She pointed out that media coverage is often portrayed graphically and victim-blames. The life and legacy of the victim is often missing, and just their death is covered. She said the MMIWG2S Alaska Working Group wants to change that narrative by owning and telling the story. Slide 14 reads:

Missing in the Media

Urban Indian Health Institute examined 934 articles, which collectively covered 129 cases out of the 506 represented in the study.

- One-quarter of the total number of cases were covered by local, regional, or national media.
- Less than one-fifth of the total number of cases were covered more than once (14%),

- less than one-tenth were covered more than three times (7%), and
- less than 5% of cases were covered more than five times.
- The top ten cases that received the most coverage comprised 62% of all coverage, and 47% of coverage was regarding just one case.
- Nearly all of the articles UIHI surveyed (91%) regarded a murder case, and 83% of the cases covered by media were murder cases. There were 27 articles printed in national or international media, covering 21 cases.

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MS. APOK advanced to slide 15, stating data is a significant part of conveying a story. It is an important piece in tracking, addressing, and determining how successes were achieved. It is challenging to implement changes if accurate information is not available. She said that the MMIWG2S Alaska Working Group has a lot of recommendations about data; she said that she gives whole presentations just on data. Slide 15 reads:

Missing in the Data

- A report by the Urban Indian Health Institute identifies 506 urban missing and murdered indigenous women & girls.
- Researchers also revealed significant challenges in collecting data on the total number of missing or murdered American Indians and Alaska Natives residing off-reservation and outside rural villages.

"We owe it to these women and girls to fully identify the scope of the problem," Lucchesi said. "What we found in our research was that in some cases law enforcement agencies didn't even have records on file to consult, they were simply going off what they could remember of past cases. This is unacceptable."

[1:56:21 PM](#)

MS. APOK advanced to slide 16, stating that what would be most useful is to have information and data systems that serve Alaska communities and agencies, including state and law enforcement agencies and the justice system. She said there are many ways to do this for better tracking. She summarized slide 16:

Missing in the Data

- The lack of tracking, quality data, and reporting means there is a scarce amount of available data for Tribes and Indigenous communities to advocate for and have access to resources.
- Through research methods outside of Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests (government missing persons databases, news reports, social media and advocacy sites, direct contact with families and community members who volunteered info), UIHI found 153 cases that were not in law enforcement records.

The 'Invisible 153' represent a sliver and a window into those who have gone missing from our communities and data for far too long.

5,712 cases of MMIWG were reported in 2016; only 116 of them were logged in the Department of Justice (DOJ) database.

[1:57:01 PM](#)

MS. APOK reviewed slide 17:

Missing in the Data

We Are Calling to You: Alaska's Missing and Murdered Indigenous Womxn and Girls Crisis was released by Data for Indigenous Justice (DIJ) in February 2021. This report specific to Alaska identified 229 MMIWG cases in Alaska through the research and collection of their own.

Additionally, DIJ identified various obstacles and barriers to collecting data including:

- **Jurisdiction** in Alaska is a multi-dimensional web that, instead of creating multiple layers of secure networks for families and tribes, results in people falling through endless gaps.
- **Protocol Variation** across the state, varying information on process, protocol, and services is unclear.

- **Lack of Centralization & Digitization of Data** leads to missing data but also means in many cases reports cannot even be generated at a community or agency level. The systems also do not connect or speak to each other.

[1:58:25 PM](#)

MS. KLOSTER reviewed slide 18:

MMIWG2S Successes

The work group advocates for policy changes - here are some recently approved actions:

State & Local Policies:

- Two new designated MMIP Investigators
- State of Alaska MMIP Council
- VPSO legislation and funding increased in 2022
- MMIP Awareness Day Proclamations

Awareness & Healing:

- Annual Heartbeat of the Drums and 5K Run/Walk
- Multiple Awareness Events & Presentations
- Self Defense Classes
- Trainings - including Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS) and NamUs

Federal Policies:

- Passage of Savanna's Act
- Passage of Not Invisible Act - Tami Jerue, Michelle Demmert, and Vivian Korthius sit on the NIA Commission
- Violent Against Women Act (VAWA) Reauthorization

[2:02:37 PM](#)

MS. KLOSTER reviewed slide 19:

MMIWG2S Advocacy for Policy

The MMIWG2S Working Group has been working with legislators over the years on MMIP Bills. The first bill was filed in 2020, and since then we have been drafting more comprehensive language.

House Bill 277 Missing/Murdered Indigenous Women; Report was introduced in 2020.

Senate Bill 211 Missing/Murdered Indigenous Women; Report was introduced in 2022.

We have also supported legislation that will increase safety for our communities including the VPSO bill and processing of rape kits that passed in 2022.

We continue to advocate for the need to overhaul our outdated 911 system, increase VPSOs in communities across the state, increase broadband capabilities in rural Alaska, increase cooperation with our Tribes and state agencies, and more.

[2:04:00 PM](#)

MS. KLOSTER reviewed slide 20, which listed the ways the legislature could help with funding:

Recommendations for Operating Budget

- MMIP Attorney at Dept. of Law
- Continued expansion of MMIP Investigation Unit
- Data system improvements
- Funding for data collection on criminal justice investigation and prosecution
- Grant funding for Tribal Governments to respond to MMIP
- Mandatory Cultural Training led by Indigenous organizations
- Precinct funding and support for VPSO program
- Funding to support updating outdated 911 system
- Increase support for DNA testing

[2:08:27 PM](#)

MS. POTDEVIN reviewed slide 21:

Recommendations for Legislative & Executive Branch Policies

- Require training from indigenous led organizations or contractors for all public safety officials (AST, local police, VPSO)
- Re-establish fatality review commission

- Establish annual non-competitive grant program for Tribes to address MMIP and Public Safety issues
- Require interagency cooperation
- Audits and reporting on law enforcement investigations
- Mandate NamUs Entry
- Review Dept. of Law procedures for prosecution of cases involving murdered Indigenous people
- Review of case management by law enforcement
- Review of prosecution investigation, charging decisions and access to necessary resources for homicides; and review of judicial outcomes for homicides
- Establish a Data Codebook Across Agencies to Ensure Consistency in Data Collection and Reporting.
- Improve Oversight of Investigations
- Provide Case Support for Families and Communities

[2:11:49 PM](#)

MS. POTDEVIN reviewed slide 22:

Advocate for Change in Your Community

Every Alaskan deserves to feel safe in their home and walking around in their community.

Everyone has something to contribute.

Every Voice Matters.

We cannot make change alone - it takes all of us to come together to protect all our people across Alaska.

We need federal, state and tribal governments, non-profits, individuals and communities to work across all affiliations to make real change in Alaska.

[2:13:08 PM](#)

MS. POTDEVIN advanced to slide 23, which pictured the "This is Why We Wear Red" toolkit for communities. She reviewed slide 23:

Resources for Your Community

The organizations that participate in the MMIWG2S Alaska come to this work from different areas of practice. Not all our organizations are direct services providers to individuals and their families. In order to provide further reach to individuals and families seeking services and resources, we have compiled this document which includes resources for crisis intervention, emergency shelter, direct victim-survivor service providers, and other kinds of services that may aid in healing. Note this is not a comprehensive list of all survivor services in Alaska.

MMIWG2S AK Working Group Resource List

This is Why We Wear Red - MMIWG An Action Plan For Native Communities

[2:14:19 PM](#)

MS. APOK advanced to slide 24, stating she invites everyone to this work. There is a place of belonging for everyone. Systemic state and institutional issues mean there is an opportunity for systemic solutions. She said that the MMIWG2S Alaska Working Group works on this crisis daily, and the endeavor takes a ton of heart work. Families have entrusted them to advocate on their behalf. She invited committee members to help pick up this work and do everything possible in their role as legislators to support the Alaska Working Group and their families. She reviewed slide 24:

Standing Together For Action

We recognize the work that organizations, communities, Tribes, and others all across Alaska, the country and the world.

We do not stand alone.

We do not do this work alone.

We need everyone at the table to keep people safe.

[2:15:32 PM](#)

MS. APOK summarized slide 25:

MMIWG2S Working Group

Visit our websites for more information.

www.alaskanative.net
www.anjc.org
www.aknwrc.org
www.dataforindigenousjustice.com
www.nativemovement.org

Follow MMIWG2S Alaska on Facebook and Instagram

[2:16:04 PM](#)

SENATOR OLSON asked what the MMIWG2S Alaska Working Group plans to accomplish with the requested funds in the next five years.

MS. APOK replied the Alaska Working Group wants justice on every front, which means:

- Prevention. Offer self-defense seminars, and distribute information and resources on prevention.
- Closure. Ensure families get closure and that their cases are actively worked on.
- Funding. Recommendations for budget line items are listed on slide 20.

MS. APOK said the Alaska Working Group comprises multiple organizations with many skill sets. It relies on other entities, like the legislature, to help identify areas where they can collaborate and help. This work needs everyone to lend a hand, from law enforcement, VPSOs, and advocates to prevention workers.

[2:19:03 PM](#)

CHAIR DUNBAR drew attention to boarding school abuse. He asked whether the working group could expound on this subject and the work done in this area.

MS. APOK replied that Emily Edenshaw and her team plan to have publications available soon.

MS. KLOSTER recommended the committee invite Emily Edenshaw to give a presentation focusing only on boarding schools. Boarding school abuse is an issue in Alaska. Native children statewide were taken from their communities, put in boarding schools, forbidden to speak their native languages, and mistreated. Alaska Natives and communities continue to experience the fallout from the abuse, and they continue to work on healing. She highly recommended an in-depth presentation because there is a lot to uncover.

MS. APOK said that the connection between boarding schools and the crisis of missing and murdered indigenous relatives is one of structural violence and its historical legacy in communities. She said the biggest part is recognizing that Alaska Natives still deal with the impacts of historical practices that have been institutionalized.

[2:22:04 PM](#)

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON brought up the ABC network series "Alaska Daily," asking whether the series is valuable to the MMIWG2S cause.

MS. APOK replied that indigenous writers from the series approached the Alaska Working Group for feedback. They wanted to be cognizant of how they told the story. She expressed pride in the Alaska Native writers who raised awareness of the issue to a higher level through the media. She said these writers provided talking points to the lead character so that person understood a lot of advocacy is being done in Alaska. She discussed data with the writers. She mentioned that it is important to be mindful of and think critically about using "white saviors" in the narrative. She expressed her belief that the series has positively impacted people, feeling like their stories and families are present in the larger media setting.

[2:24:17 PM](#)

CHAIR DUNBAR asked if the presenters wanted to offer any closing remarks.

MS. KLOSTER responded gunalchéesh - háw'aa. She thanked the committee and DPS commissioner for listening. She suggested committee members talk to Commissioner Cockrell about the MMIP investigators and their work. This is not a crisis to pass on to the next generation. The Alaska Working Group takes this work very seriously, and she urged the committee to move this work forward.

[2:26:50 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Dunbar adjourned the Senate Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting at 2:26 p.m.