

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

April 10, 2025

8:33 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Maxine Dibert, Chair  
Representative Ashley Carrick  
Representative Robyn Niayuq Burke  
Representative Andi Story  
Representative Rebecca Schwanke  
Representative Jubilee Underwood  
Representative Elexie Moore

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT**

Representative Alyse Galvin

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

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

- HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to record

**WITNESS REGISTER**

KENDRA KLOSTER, Co-director  
Missing, Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two Spirit Alaska  
Working Group  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented the presentation, titled  
"Understanding the Crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous  
People and Taking Action."

CHARLENE AQPIK APOK, PhD, Co-director  
Missing, Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two Spirit Alaska  
Working Group

Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented the presentation, titled "Understanding the Crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous People and Taking Action."

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

[8:33:12 AM](#)

**CHAIR MAXINE DIBERT** called the House Special Committee on Tribal Affairs meeting to order at 8:33 a.m. Representatives Moore, Underwood, Carrick, Burke, and Dibert were present at the call to order. Representatives Story and Schwanke arrived as the meeting was in progress.

**PRESENTATION: Missing, Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two Spirit Alaska Working Group**

[8:33:59 AM](#)

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

[8:35:10 AM](#)

KENDRA KLOSTER, Co-director, Missing, Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two Spirit Alaska Working Group (MMIWG2S), introduced herself and shared that she is Tlingit. She stated that she is one of the cofounders of MMIWG2S. She stated that she is also the Director of Government Relations for the Alaska Federation of Natives.

[8:36:09 AM](#)

CHARLENE AQPIK APOK, PhD, Co-director, Missing, Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two Spirit Alaska Working Group, co-presented the presentation, titled "Understanding the Crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous People and Taking Action" [hard copy included in the committee packet]. She introduced herself in Iñupiaq and translated this into English, stating that she is originally from Golovin. She stated that along with being one of the cofounders of MMIWG2S, she is also the Executive Director of Data for Indigenous Justice. She expressed gratitude to be able to share information about MMIWG2S.

DR. APOK began the presentation on slide 2, and she emphasized the strength collaboration brings to the working group. She added that all the working partners are nonprofit organizations. She overviewed the different organizations that are dedicated to the work, including Native Movement, Data for Indigenous Justice, Alaska Native Women's Resource Center, Alaska Native Justice Center, and Alaska Native Heritage Center. She discussed how these groups came together and pointed out that they meet weekly to work on the issue.

DR. APOK moved to slide 3 to discuss current statistics, and she noted that she would explain some of the acronyms used on the slide. She stated that the acronym MMIWG2S is used to call attention to gender-based violence. She also noted the acronyms for missing and murdered Indigenous relative (MMIR) and missing and murdered Indigenous persons (MMIP). She directed attention to several statistics on the slide and shared the reminder that these numbers represent real people, and the issue deeply affects communities. Directing attention to the first bullet on the slide, she noted that the report by Data for Indigenous Justice on MMIP was the first of its kind. The report showed 229 cases of missing, murdered Indigenous women, and girls (MMIWG) in Alaska, with 149 missing and 80 murdered. She stated that since this time over 1000 cases have been reported, and this number includes cases that were not previously tracked.

[8:42:48 AM](#)

DR. APOK, in response to a question from Representative Carrick, clarified that the report with 229 cases was first published in 2021.

DR. APOK directed attention to the second bullet on the slide, which showed that Alaska has the fourth highest MMIP cases in the nation. She directed attention to the last bullet, stating that there has been a long history of violence against Indigenous people in the state, as 82 percent of Indigenous men are victims of violence in their lifetime.

[8:44:33 AM](#)

DR. APOK, in response to a question from Representative Story, pointed out that data is shared, and this will be addressed on a later slide. She expressed the understanding that MMIP cases are disorganized because of the lack of centralized data sharing and the lack of shared definitions. She stated that in the beginning of this research data on MMIP could not be pulled by

law enforcement because it was not being tracked by race and ethnicity. She stated that since this time, the categories have been updated, but data collection is still complex. She pointed out that some systems have not been upgraded, and she added that there is also a lack of accountability for reporting.

[8:47:45 AM](#)

DR. APOK moved to slide 4 and emphasized the importance of the use of data to create a story of what is happening in the communities, and what is happening in agencies. She pointed out that, in creating solutions, data is the shared common language between agencies. She expressed the importance of using data to identify issues and to measure progress. In conclusion, she stated that data works both ways and it creates the story of what is happening in the state.

DR. APOK moved to slide 5 and discussed Alaska Native leadership's participation in MMIP work in both the state and nation. She pointed out that this includes being a part of the Not Invisible Act Commission. She directed attention to the quotes on the slide from the commission's report. She stated that the commission participants represent many different Indigenous communities from across the nation, including several individuals from Alaska. She stated that the commission came to Alaska, noting that she and Ms. Kloster were able to attend the meeting. She pointed out that the commission's report has been deleted off the federal government's website, per the new administration. She expressed the understanding that state and federal systems are not built to track Indigenous people and this issue, so Native organizations are tracking the data and what it represents. She noted that she has saved a copy of the commission's report because it gives excellent recommendations on moving forward. She stated that she would share this with any interested committee members. She asserted that this work would continue nationwide, regardless of the report. She emphasized that the report had taken years to make, and she stressed that the hard work was not wasted.

[8:53:47 AM](#)

DR. APOK, in response to a question from Representative Story, expressed the understanding that the removal of the report was related to the federal government's efforts to remove Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI). She stated that this effort has resulted in the erasure of data representing people of color. She expressed the opinion that one of the issues with the report

is that "American Indian" and "Alaska Native" have been misunderstood as being racial categories, as opposed to these being understood as sovereign peoples. She emphasized the importance of the data collected in Alaska because of the unique difficulties in the state. She expressed support for a letter to be sent requesting that the report be reposted on the federal website.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY recommended that the state post the report on its website.

[8:56:59 AM](#)

MS. KLOSTER stated that she has spoken to Alaska's Congressional Delegation, the United States Department of Justice, and others, and these entities are aware of the situation concerning the report.

MS. KLOSTER, co-presenting the presentation, moved to slide 6. She described the colonization of the Alaska Native peoples, and the relationship between Native boarding schools and MMIWG. She explained that when Native children were sent to the boarding schools, this had taken away their culture and language, destroying their identity. She pointed out that when Native Alaskans were colonized, their way of life was changed, and they no longer had a voice for self-determination. She expressed the understanding that this trauma has resulted in the high rates of violence, sexual assault, and MMIWG in Native Alaskan communities. She asserted that the root cause of these high rates can be recognized by understanding the many individuals who went through the boarding schools. She pointed out that these individuals were never taught how to be part of their Native communities, which affects the parenting of the next generation, and this history explains the negative statistics on Natives today, and the lasting effects on communities. She emphasized that now is a "beautiful" time for Alaska Natives, as the Native peoples are reclaiming their languages, dance, and culture, and this revitalization of Native culture has positively impacted the people.

MS. KLOSTER directed attention to slide 7, titled "Missing in Life Missing in Data Missing in Media," and she pointed out that this is the framework for MMIWG2S's work. She reiterated that this work is done in partnership with other entities, communities, and families who have been affected. She directed attention to the kuspuk made by Amber Webb shown on the slide, which has been painted with the faces of MMIWG. She noted that

the kuspuk has been displayed in the capitol building. In response to a committee question, she stated that she would follow up to the committee with Amber Webb's contact information so her work could be furthered displayed.

9:05:01 AM

MS. KLOSTER directed attention to slide 8, titled "Missing in Life." She reiterated that every MMIP statistic represents an individual person, who was a mother, grandmother, daughter, and more. She stated that MMIWG2S is working for these people, and it hosts a Heartbeat of the Drum ceremony every year in the spring to promote healing. On slide 9, she stated that while promoting a remembrance of those who are lost, MMIWG2S also promotes action, including an annual 5k Run for Justice, MMIW Awareness Day on May 5, a yearly self-defense class, and the distribution of resource guides. She discussed distributing resource guides in detail, as this would help those family members who are going through the process. She added that toolkits are distributed to communities to help when these situations arise. She directed attention to the annual Awareness Rally, which began in 2018. At the time of the first rally, she said there had not been a list of names of those Native Alaskans who were missing or murdered, and the families and community members writing down the names had started the list. She pointed out this was the beginning of Data for Indigenous Justice.

9:10:12 AM

CHAIR DIBERT commented on the usefulness of resource guides, and she shared a recent experience in Fairbanks.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY questioned the MMIWG2S's process once a person has been reported missing.

MS. KLOSTER, in response, stated that each situation would be different. She noted that MMIWG2S is not a direct-services organization; however, it does receive phone calls from families in need. She stated that MMIWG2S is discussing ways to fill this need. Currently it would reference people to direct services, such as the Alaska Native Justice Center and police departments. She stated that there are four MMIP investigators at the Department of Public Safety (DPS). She reiterated the importance of the resource guides, as these could help families make a direct connection for support. She pointed out the

importance of the media message informing people not to wait 24 hours before reporting a missing person.

DR. APOK added that a resource coordinator position was created because there are too many cases, and this coordinator will direct people to the best resource. She stated that MMIWG2S works to uplift the families who have campaigns for their loved ones.

MS. KLOSTER, in response to a follow-up question, stated that the first step would be to report a missing individual to the Village Public Safety Officer (VPSO) or to an Alaska State Trooper. She added that if a community does not have an officer, reports should go directly to DPS. She deferred the question to the commissioner of DPS who is scheduled for an upcoming committee meeting.

MS. KLOSTER moved to slide 10, titled "Missing in the Media." She stated that the media could be used to connect, influence, and educate the world. She emphasized that the stories coming out in the media would influence people. She pointed out that many cases involving MMIP are often not reported in the media, and she argued this is a way of erasing the issue. She maintained that there is a crisis in the state, but it is not seen in the media. Moving to slide 11, she expressed the importance of uplifting the issue and talking about it so it can be understood. She discussed the media interviews that MMIWG2S has done. She asserted that some reporting could misrepresent the issue, and this could cause harm to the communities involved. She recommended that there should be care when words are chosen to describe the situation and the people involved.

[9:22:03 AM](#)

DR. APOK asserted that the media needs to be coached on what is considered negative, such as displaying graphic pictures of people dying. She pointed out that the positive aspects of people's lives should be the focus. She stated that MMIWG2S has partnered with IllumiNative, which is involved in Indigenous communications nationally. This effort produced a guide to help media engage in positive ways, such as prioritizing Indigenous voices on the issue. She stated that the guide has been shared with the media in Alaska, and it has been received "really well." She stated that she would follow up to the committee with a copy of the guide.

DR. APOK, in response to a question from Chair Dibert, emphasized that in the moment of crisis for families, the media could be a powerful tool. She observed that once a case goes "cold," this becomes a problem, as it is difficult to reopen the case. She suggested that the use of media could help with this. She stated that MMIWG2S has acted as a bridge between law enforcement and families.

[9:26:34 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CARRICK questioned whether law enforcement should have different training, so these cases do not become cold cases.

MS. KLOSTER, in response, stated that Senate Bill 151 [passed during the Thirty-Third Alaska State Legislature] helped, as mandatory cultural training for law enforcement has been implemented. She expressed the understanding that the training has gone well, but it has not reached every entity. She discussed the training in detail, adding that this would not be "one and done," rather it is ongoing.

MS. KLOSTER, in response to a follow-up question, stated that all law enforcement must participate in the training, reiterating that it is ongoing. She noted that because this is a new requirement, it would take time to reach everyone. She deferred the questions to the commissioner of DPS who is scheduled for an upcoming committee meeting. In response to a follow-up question from Chair Dibert, she expressed the understanding that the police department in Fairbanks would train through DPS, while the police department in Anchorage has its own training programs.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY expressed her appreciation that the training is not a "one and done."

DR. APOK recognized Ingrid Goodyear, who is the federal MMIP coordinator. She stated that she works with Ms. Goodyear's working group on a weekly basis. She explained that this group helps organize law enforcement across the country, including many entities, such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation. She discussed the creation of the Tribal Response Plans, and the testing of these plans. She noted that law enforcement is also receiving this type of training.

MS. KLOSTER added that Fairbanks has been tested this response plan.

[9:35:09 AM](#)

DR. APOK moved to slide 12, titled "Missing in the Data." She reiterated that when MMIWG2S started this work, there was no real data for MMIP cases in Alaska. She explained that the first database was created from oral stories shared by family members and communities. She stated that since this began, social media has been useful in tracking names. She expressed the importance of the data, as it would allow communities to advocate for themselves. She noted that Senate Bill 151 has made it mandatory for cases to be reported to the federal database, as this was not happening before. She moved to slide 13 and pointed out the report containing data collected from Native Alaska communities, and she stated that the report is available on MMIWG2S's website. She explained that when these sensitive stories are shared, there is a responsibility to act, and this is the origins of the report. She noted that this is an effort for the Native community to track its own cases and create meaningful change. Even though the Native community is being stewards of the data, she emphasized that the state needs better systems to track this, as data systems are important.

DR. APOK moved to slide 14 and pointed out the areas that need improvement in the data systems, which include transparency and tracking through DPS. She pointed out that cold case files are now available. She reiterated that there is mandatory reporting; however, some of the data fields still need to be updated. She noted that under the "missing persons" category, there are now four different data fields, which can better represent what is happening in a case. She expressed the need for more work on centralizing the data systems, as the categories and data fields for each agency are not the same, so information is not shared correctly.

[9:43:44 AM](#)

DR. APOK, in response to a question from Representative Burke, stated that the updated data fields now include "environmental," "suspicious," and "nonsuspicious." She noted that the important data fields are "suspicious" and "nonsuspicious," with law enforcement making this determination. She stated that these categories had been previously covered by only one field.

DR. APOK, in response to a question from Representative Story, clarified that the "environmental" field would designate if an individual were out hiking or boating, for example. She

expressed uncertainty on the details of the "suspicious" and "nonsuspicious" fields. She expressed the opinion that these categories still would be considered imperfect. She deferred the question to the commissioner of DPS who is scheduled for an upcoming committee meeting.

MS. KLOSTER, in response to a question from Chair Dibert, stated that [NamUS] stands for the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System.

DR. APOK added that NamUS has categories and data fields different from those listed in the state system, and for better reporting, these need to match. She noted that families and law enforcement can add names to this database, and MMIWG2S is conducting training for families to be able to do this.

[9:48:54 AM](#)

MS. KLOSTER moved to slide 15 and drew attention to the successes of MMIWG2S, which include the passage of Senate Bill 151. She explained that this has helped to obtain two of the four MMIP investigators at DPS. She noted that, because of the large workload, the department could use more investigators. The bill also included mandatory cultural training, and it created a review commission. She discussed some of the other policies that would be created under Senate Bill 151, including bone testing in the state to help solve some of the cases. She clarified that she does not know the status of the grant for the bone testing system.

MS. KLOSTER pointed out that there are important things happening on both the federal and state level for public safety and having an increased presence of VPSOs. She pointed out the work on updating the 911 system in the state. She emphasized the length of time it could take for a case to go through the Department of Law, as this is another issue that is being addressed. In conclusion, she expressed appreciation to the committee.

DR. APOK, in closing, expressed appreciation to the committee. She noted that the network across the state is large and complex, as the issue matters to many people. She stated that tribal administrators and others are doing this work every day. She expressed gratitude for the success of Senate Bill 151; however, she pointed out the work is not finished.

[9:57:49 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BURKE expressed her gratitude to the presenters for helping people heal and their advocacy for public safety.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHWANKE expressed appreciation for the work the presenters are doing. She questioned whether the public could report on a missing person anonymously.

DR. APOK, in response, stated there are numerous lines for anonymous reporting to DPS.

REPRESENTATIVES CARRICK and MOORE both expressed appreciation for the work the presenters are doing.

CHAIR DIBERT offered the committee's support for the work the presenters are doing. She made closing comments.

[10:03:31 AM](#)

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Tribal Affairs meeting was adjourned at 10:03 a.m.