



COALITION to STOP
VIOLENCE AGAINST
NATIVE WOMEN

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Congress of the United States
Committee on Oversight and Reform
Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties
The Honorable Jamie Raskins
2157 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-6143

February 28, 2022

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Angel Charley. I am from the Pueblo of Laguna Pueblo and I serve as the executive director for the Coalition to Stop Violence Against Native Women in New Mexico. Today I thank you all for the opportunity to speak before you on an issue that is currently impacting too many lives in Indigenous communities across our country—the Missing & Murdered Indigenous Women crisis or MMIW.

Our goal at the Coalition is to build healthy families and healthy communities. We do this is by enacting social change grounded in the principles of kinship, healing, accountability, and love. Based on these principles, I am here to share what we believe is the root of inaction that our families face when seeking justice or closure to the murder or disappearance of their loved ones. It is a system rooted in the devaluation of Indigenous lives since the onset of colonization.

The truth is that while some progress has been made in attempting to address this crisis, what continues to obstruct our ability to fully access the resources and appropriate support, is the embedded bureaucracy and red tape found within these well intended solutions. I bring with me stories from the families who are untangling the web of bureaucracy:

- Families across Indian Country remain burdened with the financial costs of search, rescue and investigation; the system responses created to date, have left these families unresourced, without direction, and lost within the intricacies of tribal, state, and federal governments
- Last week I spoke with a mother from Farmington, NM, at a rally who was told by the investigating detective to not speak publicly about her daughter's case, but the only media coverage that keeps her daughter a priority requires that she tells her story; her case remains unsolved;

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- During the Operation Lady Justice listening sessions, a family from Shiprock, NM did not share their story; they were forced into silence because they did not have internet access, transportation to a hotspot, nor the ability to leave their community during lock down orders; their case remains unsolved;
- Right now, here in Washington, DC, exists an unknown number of backlogged, untested and unprosecuted rape kits from across Indian Country; these are untraceable by tribal leadership, families and victims; these cases remain unsolved;

These examples are too common throughout our communities and it is a failure on part of the justice system. It is the repeated deferred responsibility of those who have sworn to protect, declaring the complications of jurisdiction or a lack of resources. This is keeping our families from attaining justice and more importantly, it is keeping them from healing.

We know it is not “if” a Native woman will experience violence in her lifetime, it is “when”; more than 85% of our women will experience it, and more than half of that will be sexual violence. Yet prosecution is declined in more than a third of cases by the United States Attorney’s Office. It is the complexity of jurisdiction, the historic lack of prioritizing adequate and necessary funding, and systemic racism that continues to fuel the crisis of MMIW.

The disparate treatment of Indigenous women by law enforcement and media goes unchecked and our communities experience multiple disappearances. A disappearance from family, community, then again in the system and by the media. Our women are 10 times more likely to be murdered, and so we continue to ask: Where is our justice? Why are our lives not valued? Why do we remain invisible?

What is clear, our justice is caught in the limbo of bureaucracy. This is not an epidemic, it is a crisis, ongoing through time. Congress, the Department of Justice, and decision-makers throughout Indian Country have the reports outlining the violence we face:

- Yet, year after year, at the close of Tribal Consultations, we fail to follow through with increased funding, expansion of service areas, and multi-year commitments to address the root causes of these issues;
- The reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act remains unauthorized, where a list of tribal provisions within Title XIII expand oversight and thereby protection for our women and children; and,
- Recommendations from Government Oversight Committees linger, unfulfilled.

In closing, I would ask the committee to remember this: that it is our communities who are left

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filling in the gaps of our systems. It is the families and advocates who continue to show up, against all odds, to tell their stories, create urgency, and ensure that justice remembers their loved ones.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Angel Charley'.

Angel Charley
Executive Director
Coalition to Stop Violence Against Native Women

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