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UTAH STATE LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE ON MURDERED AND MISSING INDIGENOUS WOMEN, GIRLS, AND TWO-SPIRIT CONVENES INAUGURAL MEETING

Data from the Utah Department of Health reveal the homicide rate for Indigenous people in Utah increased by 25% over the last twenty years. Additionally, recent data from October 16, 2020 from the National Criminal Information Center revealed that Indigenous female and Indigenous males represent 14 and 15 percent, respectively, of all active missing cases in Utah. Indigenous people only comprise 1.5% of the total population.

Nationally, a 2016 USDOJ report that in some reservations, the homicide rate for Native American women can be more than ten times the national average. This data reveals that during the period from 1994 to 1998, the homicide rate for Native American women in Iron County was 36 times the rate for white women in the same county. Data on the nature and scope of this crisis remains scant.

The disproportionate violence is partially reflected in current data collection efforts from academic to government agencies. A critical feature in addressing this crisis is accurate multidisciplinary and multijurisdictional data reflecting the needs for creating healthy and healing Indigenous communities by mitigating the prevalence of gender-based violence.

The contours of the crisis reflect the need for multiple stakeholders from a variety of disciplines and expertise to address this collaborative policy need.

In response to this policy need, Utah State Representative Angela Romero and Utah State Senator David Hinkins co-sponsored House Bill 116: Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls Task Force in Winter of 2020. The bill passed the legislature and was signed by Governor Gary Herbert.

H.B. 116 establishes a task force to study the scope of the Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls crisis in Utah and to make “recommendations to the criminal and social service justice systems for preventing and addressing crimes involving missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Utah.”

In late September, Utah State Senate President Stuart Adams and House Speaker Brad Wilson appointed the following members to the task force:

REP. ANGELA ROMERO, CO-CHAIR OF THE TASK FORCE

SEN. DAVID HINKINS, CO-CHAIR OF THE TASK FORCE

TAMI BORCHARDT SLAYTON, CHAIR OF THE PAIUTE INDIAN TRIBE

REPRESENTING A UTAH NATIVE AMERICAN TRIBE

KRISTINA GROVES, LCSW, URBAN INDIAN CENTER

REPRESENTING A VICTIM ADVOCATE ORGANIZATION SERVING UTAH'S NATIVE AMERICAN POPULATION

MORONI BENALLY, COORDINATOR OF POLICY AND ADVOCACY FOR RESTORING ANCESTRAL WINDS, INC.

REPRESENTING A NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION PRIMARILY SERVING UTAH'S NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITY.

The following will also serve on the task force:

DUSTIN JANSEN, DIRECTOR OF THE UTAH DIVISION OF INDIAN AFFAIRS

ANN WILLIAMSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE UTAH DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

DANIEL STRONG, ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL AND SPECIAL ASSISTANT, UTAH ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE

BRIAN REDD, CHIEF SPECIAL AGENT FOR UTAH DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY

“The convening of this Task Force is a necessary first step to bringing various policy expertise to bear on this crisis, however, it needs a sustained commitment to Indian Country, not just a temporary commitment based on media coverage,” said Yolanda Francisco-Nez, the Executive Director of Restoring Ancestral Winds.

“President Trump signed two bills, Savannah’s Act and Not Invisible Act late last week,” Francisco-Nez continued, “Both of these bills address some of the structural gaps around data collection of homicides and missing person cases of Indigenous people.”

Savanna’s Act, sponsored by Alaska U.S. Senator Lisa Murkowski, directs the Department of Justice to review, revise, and develop law enforcement and justice protocols to address missing or murdered Native Americans.

Not Invisible Act, sponsored by Nevada U.S. Senator Catherine Cortez Masto, coordinates prevention efforts between the Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior and victim service organizations. Additionally, a Joint Advisory Commission will be created to make recommendations in reducing violent crimes against Native people.

“We are earnest and careful in our approach to this crisis because we balance the solemnity and sacredness of the stories of our sisters and brothers with the need to bring foreign interventions in to address a problem that is far bigger than just Indian Country,” said, Francisco-Nez, “This MMIWG Utah State Task Force, and these two U.S. bills reflect the critical need for addressing this long ignored silent crisis.

**The Task Force will meet virtually
on October 21, 2020
5pm to 7:30pm.**

The link for the meeting can be found here:

[https://le.utah.gov/asp/interim/Commit.asp?Year=2020&Com=TSKMWG.](https://le.utah.gov/asp/interim/Commit.asp?Year=2020&Com=TSKMWG)



Restoring Ancestral Winds, Inc. (RAW) is one of nineteen tribal coalitions across the country funded by the USDOJ Office of Violence Against Women. RAW's primary focus is to eliminate gender-based violence in Tribal Nations and Indigenous communities. RAW serves the eight federally recognized Tribal Nations in Utah and its Indigenous communities in urban areas. Over 71% of Native American now live in urban areas.

