Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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WASHINGTON – Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs Tara Katuk Sweeney today hosted the fourth in a series of *Reclaiming Our Native Communities* roundtables in Rapid City, S.D. The purpose of the roundtables is to hear from tribal leaders, public safety and domestic violence prevention advocates, law enforcement, and health care providers on what the federal government in general and Indian Affairs, in particular, need to do to seriously address the issue of missing and murdered American Indian and Alaska Native women, children and men. Indian Affairs is looking at approaches that seek the reduction of violent crime, tackling the opioid crisis, human trafficking, solving cold cases, and resolving jurisdictional issues across Indian Country.

"Our public safety problems are complex and vary by community, which is why this collaboration is critical to our ability to successfully aid tribes in reclaiming their communities from the scourge of violent crime and domestic violence that threaten Native people and families," Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs Tara Sweeney said. "We need to continue to refine our strategies and maximize partnerships to deliver services with limited resources. That is why these roundtables are such valuable opportunities for us to hear directly from tribal leaders, and community professionals and advocates on these matters."

Joining the Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs in speaking to the attendees will be Charles Addington, Deputy Bureau Director - Office of Justice Services, Bureau of Indian Affairs, in Washington, D.C., and Timothy LaPointe, Regional Director of the BIA Great Plains Regional Office in Aberdeen, S.D. Other speakers include officials from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the U.S. Department of Justice officials, the Great Plains Tribal Chairmen's Association, the North Dakota Indian Affairs Commission, the Nebraska Commission on Indian Affairs, and the Great Plains Tribal Epidemiology Center.
The challenges that perpetuate the pattern of structural violence are a defining characteristic of life in many tribal communities, such as jurisdictional conflicts, a lack of emergency services, and limited law enforcement resources. The statistics are a stark reminder of the extent of the problem:

- Sixty-one percent of American Indian and Alaska Native women (or three out of five) have been assaulted in their lifetimes, 34 percent of Native women are raped in their lifetimes, and 39 percent are victims of domestic violence. (NCAI Policy Research Center)
- American Indians and Alaska Natives are two-and-a-half times as likely to experience violent crimes – and at least two times more likely to experience rape or sexual assault crimes – compared to all other races. (NCAI Policy Research Center)
- According to a 2010 Government Accountability Office study, United States Attorneys declined to prosecute nearly 52 percent of violent crimes that occur in Indian Country. They also declined to prosecute 67 percent of sexual abuse and related matters that occur in Indian Country. (Report: U.S. Department of Justice Declinations of Indian Country Criminal Matters)
- According to the U.S. Department of Justice's National Institute of Justice, nearly 83 percent of Native Americans have experienced some form of violence in their lifetime. That is nearly 3 million people who have experienced aggressive physical or sexual violence.
- Native American female victims are more likely to need services, but are less likely to have access

to those services. More than one-third of Native women were unable to receive necessary services at all. (Report: U.S. Department of Justice Declinations of Indian Country Criminal Matters)

Since June of this year, Assistant Secretary Sweeney has been involved with three listening sessions within Indian Country, including Alaska. The first was hosted by the Gila River Indian Community in Sacaton, Ariz., where Trump Administration officials met face-to-face with tribal leaders from across the U.S. to discuss improving public safety in Indian Country and highlight Interior's commitment to that goal. That engagement, which was well-received, was followed by two more roundtables held in Bethel and Nome, Alaska, in August.

The Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs oversees the BIA, the oldest bureau in the Department of the Interior. The BIA director is responsible for managing the bureau's day-to-day operations through four offices – Indian Services, Justice Services, Trust Services, and Field Operations. These offices directly administer and operate, or fund tribally operated, BIA infrastructure, economic development, law enforcement and justice, social services (including child welfare), tribal governance, and trust land and natural and energy resources management programs for 573 federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native tribes through 12 regional offices and 81 agencies.
