Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

Second of seven locations follows first opening in Bloomington, Minnesota on July 27

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For Immediate Release: August 4, 2020
Print PDF

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, officials from the U.S. Departments of the Interior and Health and Human Services announced the opening of the second of seven cold case offices established through an initiative of Operation Lady Justice to investigate cold cases involving missing and murdered American Indians and Alaska Natives.

Advisor to the President Ivanka Trump joined Secretary of the Interior David L. Bernhardt for the launch of the first cold case office in Bloomington, Minnesota, last week highlighting President Trump's commitment to forgotten men and women across our country and actions taken to end the violence against American Indians and Alaska Natives.

Interior Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy and Economic Development – Indian Affairs Mark Cruz, a member of the Klamath Tribes in Oregon, and Administration for Native Americans Commissioner and member of the Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe, Jeannie Hovland, were joined by representatives of the U.S. Attorney's Office for South Dakota and tribal government and law enforcement officials at the opening.

"Under the Trump Administration, tribal governments are not alone in fighting the epidemic of pervasive violence against American Indian and Alaska Native people," said **Deputy Assistant Secretary Cruz**. "I want to thank the tribal leaders and tribal advocates whose voices helped shape the conversation around this difficult subject. They are the driving force behind the signing of President Donald Trump's executive order establishing the Operation Lady Justice Task Force that led, in turn, to the creation of these cold case offices."

"Today, our shared presence, especially during these difficult times, is a demonstration of our commitment to keeping the national crisis of missing and murdered Native Americans a top priority," said **Commissioner Hovland**. "We must move upstream to improve prevention, intervene for those in crisis, and support individuals, families, and communities in need of healing."

The first office opening was on July 27, 2020, in Bloomington, Minnesota. Other offices will be located in Billings, Montana; Albuquerque, New Mexico; Phoenix, Arizona; Anchorage, Alaska; and Nashville, Tennessee.

President Trump's Executive Order established the Operation Lady Justice Task Force, a multi-agency effort co-chaired by Secretary Bernhardt and U.S. Attorney General William P. Barr. Its purpose is to enhance the operation of the criminal justice system and address the staggering number of missing and murdered American Indian and Alaska Natives in tribal communities.

The cold case teams have been established in accordance with Executive Order 13898 which President Trump signed on November 26, 2019, to address this crisis. They will be staffed with law enforcement personnel and newly appointed special agents from the Bureau of Indian Affairs Office of Justice Services (BIA-OJS).

A way for top federal officials to engage, coordinate and work with tribal governments on developing strategies to address the crisis, the Operation Lady Justice Task Force is working to collect and manage data across jurisdictions; establish protocols for new and unsolved cases; establish multi-jurisdictional cold case teams; improve the response to investigative challenges; and provide clarity on the roles, authorities and jurisdiction for those involved. It is also charged with providing a report to the President of its work and accomplishments in meeting the executive order's mandate.

Since 2019, the Department of the Interior and the BIA have undertaken a number of efforts to address the crisis, conducting criminal investigations, stopping illicit drug activity and solving missing and murdered cases.

The BIA-OJS and its partners have opened 200 percent more drug cases across Indian Country than in the last year of the Obama Administration, and their tribal law enforcement officers have seized approximately 6,000 pounds of narcotics worth $30 million in the past two years. Preventing further violence against American Indians and Alaska Natives is largely predicated on ending illicit drug activities and sex trafficking.

The BIA-OJS's partnership with the U.S. Department of Justice's National Missing and Unidentified Persons System, known as NamUs, has led to the development and implementation of new tribal-affiliation data fields to assist law enforcement with capturing information to track missing and murdered persons in Indian Country. Since the addition of these new data fields last year, there has been a 60 percent increase in Native-person entries into the system.

The Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs advises the Secretary of the Interior on Indian Affairs policy issues, communicates policy to and oversees the programs of the BIA and the BIE, provides leadership in consultations with tribes, and serves as the DOI official for intra- and inter-departmental coordination and liaison within the Executive Branch on Indian matters.

Established in 1974 through the Native American Programs Act (NAPA), the Administration for Native Americans (ANA) serves all Native Americans, including state and federally recognized tribes, American Indian and Alaska Native organizations, Native Hawaiian organizations and Native populations throughout the Pacific Basin (including American Samoa, Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands). ANA promotes self-sufficiency for Native Americans by providing discretionary grant funding for community based projects, and training and technical assistance to eligible tribes and native organizations.
