Joins Bloomington, Rapid City and Billings openings

Media Contact: Interior_press@ios.doi.gov
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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs Tara *Katuk* Sweeney announced today the opening of the fourth of seven offices established under the Operation Lady Justice Task Force 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, MN, on July 27 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.

"Because President Donald Trump took action, we are addressing the missing and murdered American Indian and Alaska Native crisis impacting tribal communities across the nation," said **Assistant Secretary Sweeney**. "We want to see victims and their families receive closure, and will direct our efforts towards that goal. The Albuquerque cold case office is joining those in Minnesota, South Dakota and Montana that are beginning the work of resolving their cold cases."

"With today's opening in Albuquerque, New Mexico, along with the cold case offices now established in Minnesota, South Dakota, and Montana, we are making progress with our plans for having seven such offices being operational by next month," said **Charles Addington, Deputy Bureau Director for the Bureau of Indian Affairs' Office of Justice Services (BIA-OJS)**. "They are evidence that we are taking seriously the concerns of tribal communities who want to know the circumstances of their people who have gone missing or fallen victim to murder."

Future cold case office locations will open in Phoenix, AZ; Anchorage, AK; and Nashville, TN.

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 Indians 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 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.
