Phoenix location added to those in Bloomington, Rapid City, Billings and Albuquerque; first to be housed in a tribal police department

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs Tara *Katuk* Sweeney announced today that the fifth of seven offices being established under the Operation Lady Justice Task Force to investigate cold cases involving missing and murdered American Indians and Alaska Natives will be located at the Gila River Indian Community Police Department in Sacaton, AZ. The Task Force's first tribally housed cold case office opened August 13.

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.

"I want to thank Governor Stephen Lewis for agreeing to house the Operation Lady Justice Task Force's Phoenix cold case office at the Gila River Indian Community's police department," said **Assistant Secretary Sweeney**. "These cold case offices are a major development in addressing unsolved cases of missing and murdered American Indians and Alaska Natives that are heartbreaking for their families and communities."

"The Gila River Indian Community is pleased to house the new Cold Case office for the Western Region. The entire Region will benefit from bringing together federal resources specifically designated to address this crisis of Missing and Murdered Native Americans," said **Gila River Indian Community Governor Stephen R. Lewis**. "This is a positive first step in reinforcing the trust relationship between the federal government and tribal nations and addressing this longstanding issue in Indian Country. The Community looks forward to helping ensure the success of the Cold Case office within the Gila River Police Department."

"The Hopi Tribe is thrilled to know the work of the recently established Operation Lady Justice Task Force will move forward with addressing the astounding number of cases of murdered and missing American Indians and Alaska Natives in Tribal communities," said **Hopi Tribal Chairman Timothy Nuvangyaoma**. "We are looking forward to supporting our national law enforcement agencies with this much needed coordination and to continue advocating for those who have been silenced by the crimes against our native people."

"The Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah is grateful that under Operation Lady Justice, MMIP Cold Case units are opening regionally and assisting Indian Country in identifying and finally finding closure for families that for years have not found justice or closure for their loved one," said **PITU Chairperson Tamra Borchardt-Slayton**. "It has finally become a priority to finally address issues that are on-going with

MMIP and the multitude of unresolved cases."

"Native Americans, particularly women, suffer from disproportionately high levels of violence across the country—a crisis that is exacerbated by jurisdictional challenges and the lack of a unified national database to track indigenous missing persons cases," said **United States Senator Martha McSally.** "In fact, Arizona has the third largest number of cases of missing and murdered indigenous women. This is unacceptable and our tribal communities deserve better. The establishment today of a Missing and Murdered Native Americans Cold Case Task Force office in Phoenix is a critical step toward delivering justice to our native populations."

The Gila River Indian Community is located on the south side of the city of Phoenix in Pinal County, which is within the Phoenix metropolitan area. The cold case office will be co-located with the Gila River Indian Community Police Department and staffed by two agents from the Bureau of Indian Affairs Office of Justice Services (BIA-OJS).

"The Bureau of Indian Affairs' Office of Justice Services works closely with its partners in tribal, state, local and federal law enforcement agencies to address violent crime in Indian Country communities," said **BIA Deputy Bureau Director for OJS Charles Addington**. "I want to add my thanks to Governor Lewis and the Gila River Indian Community Police Department for their willingness to house the Operation Lady Justice Task Force's Phoenix cold case office."

In addition to Bloomington, cold case offices were opened in Rapid City, SD, on August 4; in Billings, MT, on August 6; and in Albuquerque, NM, on August 11, 2020. Future office openings are planned for 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, alcohol abuse 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 persons in Indian Country. Since the addition of these new data fields last year and NamUs' extensive outreach to states with large tribal populations with the result that they are inputting data directly into the system, there has been a 60 percent increase in Native-person entries in NamUs.

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.
