

**STATEMENT OF
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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS
OVERSIGHT HEARING
ON
“GAO REPORTS ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING OF AMERICAN INDIANS AND
ALASKA NATIVES IN THE UNITED STATES”**

SEPTEMBER 27, 2017

Good afternoon Chairman Hoeven, Vice Chairman Udall and members of the Committee. My name is Jason Thompson and I am the Acting Director for the Office of Justice Services (OJS) in the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) at the Department of the Interior (Department). I am pleased to provide a statement on behalf of the Department on the topic of the Committee’s oversight hearing on the Government Accountability Office’s Report: “Human Trafficking of American Indians and Alaska Natives in the United States.”

The BIA has a service population of about 1.7 million American Indians and Alaska Natives who belong to 567 federally recognized tribes. The BIA supports 191 law enforcement programs with 40 BIA-operated programs and 151 tribally-operated programs. Approximately 79 percent of the total BIA OJS programs are contracted with tribes as authorized under Public Law 93-638, as amended, or compacted with tribes as authorized under Title IV of the Indian Self Determination and Education Assistance Act, as amended. Additionally, many tribes supplement OJS funding with funding from the tribe’s treasury, grants from the Department of Justice (DOJ), or other sources. Under Public Law 83-280 and similar legislation, the remaining tribes rely on state and local law enforcement to combat major crimes.

OJS provides a wide range of law enforcement services to Indian country. These services include uniform police services, criminal investigations, detention program management, tribal courts, drug enforcement, internal affairs and officer training by the Indian Police Academy. OJS is statutorily responsible for enforcing federal law and, with the consent of a tribe, tribal law within Indian country. With this great responsibility, OJS takes every opportunity to enhance our abilities to protect our tribal citizens and communities.

As human trafficking has grown in areas across the United States, Indian country has not been immune to the criminal elements exploiting the vulnerabilities of Native Americans and the lack of law enforcement presence in some areas. Since human trafficking knows no borders, inter-agency collaboration is vital to our efforts to foster safe and thriving Native communities. To combat human trafficking, the Division of Drug Enforcement (DDE) within OJS has been tasked with leading investigations of human trafficking violations affecting Indian country. Due to the close association of trafficking to drug and prostitution cases, the Division of Drug Enforcement is most closely aligned to these types of crimes.

Over the past three years, OJS has been contacted by tribes reporting an increase in prostitution and human trafficking activity occurring on their reservations. OJS has also reported an increase in sex trafficking occurring on or near Indian country enterprises. The most prevalent activity occurs around areas with high transit populations, such as tribal gaming operations, hotels, and travel plazas.

It is OJS's experience that prostitution networks target highly populated tribal venues for their operations, sometimes traveling from out of state to commit these acts. Although prostitution and human trafficking are not the same, the presence of prostitution networks can indicate high levels of vulnerability, exploitation, and coercion that contribute to trafficking.

In addition, over the past three years OJS has made an effort to improve the collection and maintenance of its data on human trafficking. The improvements allow for the collection of more specific data on human trafficking investigations, thus providing OJS with the ability to better track and evaluate the level of human trafficking violations occurring in Indian country.

Investigative Efforts

OJS has partnered with other federal and state law enforcement agencies in efforts to identify and dismantle human trafficking operations occurring in and around Indian country. Over the past four years, OJS has conducted 12 human trafficking investigations.

Below are the combined results from the 12 investigations:

12 of 23 defendants were charged with Engaging in Prostitution

- 1 was sentenced to 5 years incarceration with the first 4 years suspended
- 3 received a suspended sentence for 1 year
- 5 received a deferred sentence for 1 or 2 years
- 1 was fined and fine was paid in full
- 2 have outstanding warrants

6 of 23 defendants were charged with Solicitation of Prostitution

- 5 received deferred sentences for either 1, 2 or 3 years
- 1 received a suspended sentence for 10 years, 2 years supervised probation

5 of 23 defendants were charged with Pandering

- 1 was sentence to 10 years incarceration
- 1 has a suspended sentence for 20 years
- 1 has a deferred sentence for 10 years
- 2 defendants cases were dismissed in tribal court and the state and federal courts declined to prosecute

Sentencing summary of 23 defendants

- 2 were sentenced to incarceration
- 6 received suspended sentences
- 12 received deferred sentences
- 1 received a fine only
- 3 awaiting court proceedings
- 2 have outstanding warrants

Training Efforts

The Indian Police Academy (IPA) provides human trafficking training to new BIA and tribal police officers attending the Indian Country Police Officer Training Program and to field supervisors during advanced training. The course familiarizes officers with the issues of human trafficking in Indian country, legal considerations, identification of indicators, and how to assist victims and effectively initiate an investigation. To date, the academy has trained 414 officers in human trafficking training in basic and/or advanced training programs.

Additionally, IPA has partnered with the Department of Homeland Security- Blue Campaign and Federal Law Enforcement Training Center for the development of Human Trafficking in Indian Country training videos for inclusion in a future, instructor-led, and online training program.

The OJS Victim Assistance Program also provides Native American Human Trafficking training throughout Indian country communities, at both the local and regional levels. For instance, this year OJS partnered with the National Indian Gaming Commission to provide Native American Human Trafficking training at each of its regional conferences, with the target audience including gaming commissioners, operations staff, hotel and casino staff, as well as tribal leaders and community members.

These training sessions include information on the dynamics of human trafficking victimization, indicators, vulnerabilities, and strategies communities can take to prevent or respond to human trafficking. Through education and training, OJS will continue to educate the public and tribal enterprises on how to identify indicators of human trafficking and reporting to law enforcement. OJS agents will continue to sharpen their investigative skills and identify new ways to target criminal networks that exploit our most precious resources; our Native American men, women and children.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to address such an important matter. The Department will continue to work closely with our federal, tribal and state partners to strengthen our efforts to combat human trafficking in Indian country.

I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.