



# United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
Washington, DC 20240

**MAY - 1 2023**

Dear Tribal Leader:

On April 1, 2021, Secretary Haaland announced the formation of the Missing and Murdered Unit (MMU), a component of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Office of Justice Services (OJS). Secretary Haaland charged the MMU with the responsibility of providing leadership and direction for cross-departmental and interagency work involving missing and murdered American Indians and Alaska Natives. As we head into year two of this work, I would like to provide an update on the important progress the MMU is making as well as invite you to attend a webinar to learn about the MMU and provide feedback

Please join MMU leadership on Wednesday, May 31, 2023, at 11:00 am Mountain Time for the webinar. Please register in advance for this meeting at:

[https://www.zoomgov.com/meeting/register/vJItcOGuqTkoGiVT-DrE8LpQiuUYDyU3\\_k4](https://www.zoomgov.com/meeting/register/vJItcOGuqTkoGiVT-DrE8LpQiuUYDyU3_k4)

Headquartered in Albuquerque, NM, the MMU is continuing to hire senior positions to begin stakeholder collaboration, policy development, and provide oversight of agents conducting field investigations. From 2021-2022, 17 MMU offices across 11 states were established, and staffed by at least one MMU agent.

The MMU commands law enforcement resources across OJS and has expanded OJS's ability to collaborate with other agencies working to solve acute cases, which are defined as cases involving an endangered missing person, persons who have been missing for a long term, and unsolved homicides. An important partner in this effort is the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), which works closely with the MMU to coordinate a centralized intake process for missing and murdered case referrals and conducts investigative activities on current and previously unsolved investigations. The MMU also meets frequently with Tribal, State and County law enforcement programs to discuss case referrals received by the MMU or the FBI.

## **Administrative Milestones Achieved by the MMU in 2022**

- Formalized the MMU Standard Operating Procedures for conducting MMU investigations.
- Established the MMU Victim Services Program that will be comprised of five victim specialists to provide support to the families of the victims.
  - In 2022 two victim specialists were hired.
  - In 2023, , the MMU is hiring three additional victim services employees, two are awaiting starting dates, and one is being re-advertised.
- Established a MMU Case Intake Process to standardize how agents receive and review cases for solvability and investigation.
- Hired Evidence Technicians who are now in training to implement new technologies to assist MMU Agents with processing crime scenes.
- On December 10, 2022, the BIA launched a website ([BIA.GOV/MMU](https://BIA.GOV/MMU)) for the primary purpose of generating tips from the public about active cases that may help law enforcement give closure to victims' families. This website leverages the power of internet and social media, so that case information may be quickly shared through digital means to encourage the



evidence and assist with search and rescue/recovery efforts underwater.

- Establishing four Crime Scene Mapping Stations to provide 3-D regeneration of crime scenes.
- Gaining access to an open-source intelligence platform to assist with finding persons or investigative leads.
- Contracting certified laboratory services to establish and provide a dedicated DNA/Genealogy Crime Lab. The MMU will share these services with other OJS Criminal Investigations or Tribal law enforcement departments that are investigating cases involving missing or murdered AI/AN cases.
- Purchasing five Crime Scene Vehicles evidence technicians can use to process crime scenes.

## MMU Successes

### *Total Case Referrals and Closures*

The MMU receives case referrals from Tribal community members and law enforcement agencies nationwide. From 2021 to present, agents have:

- Investigated 714 missing and murdered persons cases
- Solved or closed 259 missing persons cases
- Solved 8 murder cases

### *Streamlined and Standardized case review processes across Federal agencies*

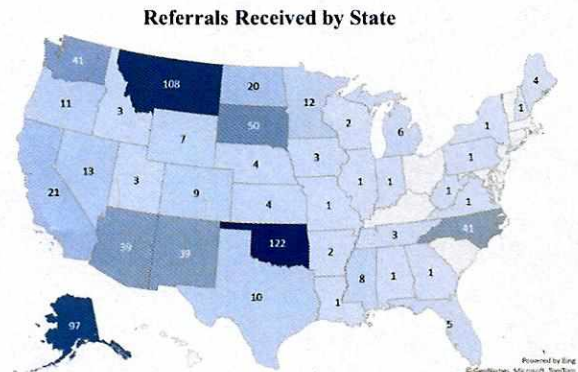
The FBI has investigative responsibilities for Federal crimes committed on nearly 200 Indian reservations nationwide and shares Federal jurisdiction with the BIA. In 2022, the MMU and the FBI began working on establishing a process to streamline the way in which missing and murdered cases are screened, reviewed, and tracked within both Bureaus. The standard processes should be finalized in late 2023 and include identifying the lead investigative agency and assigning a case agent to investigate. This effort promotes teamwork across both Bureaus and is a direct result of Executive Order 14053, on Improving Public Safety and Criminal Justice for Native Americans and Addressing the Crisis of Missing or Murdered Indigenous People. Both Bureaus will continue to finalize these efforts in 2023.

To align with the Savanna's Act, the MMU is also tasked with developing a Multi-Disciplinary Group Initiative. This work is underway with MMU leadership participating in discussions with representatives of the Department of Justice to develop strategies to improve collaboration between federal partners. One key strategy includes developing Multi-Disciplinary Groups to review missing and murdered case referrals. This process will be tested as a pilot project in New Mexico, South Dakota, and Washington state when staff are hired later this year.

### *Establishment of the MMU Victim Services Program*

In December 2021, the MMU established the MMU Victim Services Program for victims and families. The work of the MMU Victim Services Program centers on:

- Working with the lead case investigator to identify information that will not jeopardize the open investigation and to provide this information to the next of kin/family as quickly as





public to submit tips. Other uses of the website include educating the public about MMU's role, purpose, and mission. The MMU is updating content and will be adding new features to the website, including:

- Monthly Case Reporting Data
- Success Stories about key cases that were closed, bringing justice and closure to families.
- Jobs Information to assist in hiring specialists for the MMU

### Key MMU Positions Hired in 2021 and 2022

- Since the Unit's establishment, the MMU has hired and retained 15 special agents to review and investigate acute cases referred to the MMU. The MMU is in the process of filling 5 vacant special agent positions.
  - The MMU is adding an additional 20 agents; 15 positions are awaiting action by Human Resources and new position descriptions are in draft for 5 for new positions. At full capacity, the MMU may employ nearly 65 employees nationwide.
- A Deputy Unit Chief and four regional agents in charge will provide oversight.
- A Program Analyst and Program Specialist now support the MMU to collect and analyze performance data and coordinate administrative and programmatic responsibilities.

AS OF FY 22, AGENTS ARE LOCATED	NEW AGENTS AND NEW LOCATIONS FOR FY23
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 Agent in Carson City, NV</li> <li>• 3 Agents in Phoenix, AZ (1 agent added)</li> <li>• 1 Agent in Fort Apache, AZ</li> <li>• 2 Agents Muskogee, OK (1 agent added)</li> <li>• 2 Agents in Oklahoma, OK (1 agent added)</li> <li>• 3 Agents in Billings, Mt (1 agent added)</li> <li>• 1 Agent in Shelby, MT</li> <li>• 1 Agent in Great Falls, MT</li> <li>• 2 Agents in Bismarck, ND (1 agent added)</li> <li>• 1 Agent in Minneapolis, MN</li> <li>• 1 Agent in Bemidji, MN</li> <li>• 2 Agent in Nashville, TN (1 agent added)</li> <li>• 1 Agent in Vancouver, WA</li> <li>• 1 Agent in Spokane, WA</li> <li>• 2 Agents in Rapid City, SD (1 agent added)</li> <li>• 2 Agent in Albuquerque, NM (1 agent added)</li> <li>• 1 Agent in Anchorage, AK</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 MMU Liaison to FBI</li> <li>• 1 Agent in Sioux Falls, SD</li> <li>• 2 Agents in Mount Pleasant, Michigan (New Location)</li> <li>• 1 Agent in Gallup, NM (New Location)</li> <li>• 1 Agent in Farmington, NM (New Location)</li> <li>• 1 Agent Seattle, WA (New Location)</li> <li>• 1 Agent in Riverton, WY (New Location)</li> <li>• 2 Agents in Devils Lake, ND (Proposed Location)</li> <li>• 1 Agent in Salt Lake, UT (New Location)</li> <li>• 2 Agents, Location to be determined</li> </ul>

### MMU Capabilities Expanded in 2022

Since the MMU was established, it has invested in and implemented several new capabilities and technologies to assist in finding evidence and closing cases. These include:

- Purchasing and providing training on how to use Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) and underwater Oceano bionics.
- GPR provides imagery of what lies underground, which may be used to assist with finding evidence, human remains, etc.
- Oceano bionics includes underwater radar, camera, and robotic arm that are used to identify

- possible.
- Working with families to explain the complicated legal process that occurs as a case develops into a prosecutable case for submission to the Tribal and Federal courts. This provides families and next of kin a better understanding of why case information cannot always be shared while an active case is developing.
  - Bringing humanity to the cases by helping investigators understand what families need throughout the process.
  - Communicating to families that the ultimate, goal of all the parties is to hold offenders accountable to bring justice and closure for a family.

*Improving and expanding partnerships*

The MMU is expanding relationships with Tribal, State and Federal partners across the country as the MMU deepens its capacity. Efforts to build or repair past relationships are succeeding, with key areas involving the Big Horn County Sheriff's Office in Montana, and the Navajo Nation Police Department. The MMU is also working on forging new partnerships with state law enforcement entities such as the Alaska Department of Public Safety, the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, and the Michigan State Police. In other areas, the MMU is expanding existing relationships with law enforcement entities, such as the Montana Division of Criminal Investigations and the Washington State Police.

I hope you will join MMU leadership for the webinar on Wednesday, May 31, 2023, to learn more about the MMU and provide us with your suggestions for improvement. If you have any questions regarding the MMU, please contact Marcelino ToersBijns, Unit Chief for the MMU, at [marcelino.toersbijns@bia.gov](mailto:marcelino.toersbijns@bia.gov) or (505) 563-3762.

Sincerely,



Bryan Newland  
Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs