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PILOT PROJECT LAUNCHED TO ADDRESS MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS PERSONS

The project members are assisting in the development of initial response plans to detail how tribal communities can best respond to reports of missing persons

GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN – Federal, State, Local and Tribal leaders jointly announced Michigan's own Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons pilot project today. United States Attorneys Andrew Birge and Matthew Schneider were joined by Bryan Newland, President of the Bay Mills Indian Community, Dr. Aaron Payment, Tribal Chairperson of the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, Timothy Waters, Special Agent in Charge of the Detroit Field Division of the FBI, Col. Joe Gasper, Director of the Michigan State Police, Matthew Saxton, Executive Director of the Michigan Sheriff's Association, Robert Stevenson, Executive Director of Michigan Association of Chiefs of Police, along with partnering Officials with the United States Marshals Service and the Bureau of Indian Affairs in making the announcement.

Members of the pilot project began meeting in late October, taking the first steps toward establishing the first tribal community response plans for missing indigenous persons cases. The plans will improve the handling of emergent missing person cases by outlining how Tribal governments, law enforcement, and other partners can best work together to respond to such cases. The plans address four core components of a proper response to a missing persons case: law enforcement, victim services, community outreach and public communications.

"Given that there are 12 Tribal communities in Michigan, and many more Tribal members living throughout the state, we adopted a pilot-program approach to help identify issues and establish initial response plans that can be shared with communities throughout the state," explained U.S. Attorney Birge. "I am impressed with how federal, state, local and Tribal law enforcement as well as Tribal leaders are embracing the effort and progressing in an open and collaborative fashion," he added. U.S. Attorney Schneider explained that "Everyone recognizes the sensitivity and importance of these cases and realizes that, in Michigan in particular, multiple agencies and jurisdictions must work together."

"Bay Mills is excited to collaborate with the United States and our fellow tribes on protecting women and vulnerable people in our communities," said Bryan Newland, President of the Bay Mills Indian Community. "For too long, we have allowed the problem of violence against Indian women and vulnerable people to fester. This initiative will start the healing process and ensure that our people receive the protections they deserve."

Dr. Aaron Payment, Tribal Chairperson of the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, noted: “In 2016, according to the CDC, homicide was the third leading cause of death for Native women and girls between the ages 1-19 and sixth leading cause of death for ages 20-44. Time is of essence as the first 72 hours after an individual goes missing are the most crucial according to National Indigenous Women’s Resource Center. The Sault Tribe and Bay Mills have pioneered capacity building in our respective judicial systems including state certification of tribal law enforcement officers, enhancing our tribal courts, and expanding jurisdiction under the *Tribal Law and Order Act* and the *Violence Against Women Act*. We have long had mutual aid law enforcement agreements to ensure there are no holes in coverage and jurisdiction. After 9/11, we worked as a unified team to ensure public safety including comprehensive table-top exercises. I envision our collaboration around MMIP to be a similar critical incident exercise and relationship to deal with what is emerging as an epidemic of missing and murdered indigenous people.”

“The FBI will continue to partner with state, local and tribal law enforcement agencies to combat violent crime and create safer communities for the indigenous people in Michigan,” said Timothy Waters, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI in Michigan. “We are prepared to surge investigative capacity, provide specialized skills and training, perform data analysis, or deploy national assets in our effort to provide justice for families mourning a murder victim and assistance to communities searching for a missing friend or neighbor.”

“It is critically important that all law enforcement agencies work closely together,” said Matthew Saxton, Executive Director of the Michigan Sheriff’s Association. “We are fully supportive of agencies assisting each other with whatever capabilities they may have – especially in the event of a reported missing child or adult under suspicious circumstances. This initiative is a great way to help identify and organize the resources and capabilities of our law enforcement agencies and their capabilities throughout the State of Michigan.”

Michigan is among the first of six pilot-program states developing community response plans, in accordance with the U.S. Attorney General’s Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons Initiative and the President’s Operation Lady Justice Task Force. Importantly, these plans likewise further the goals of the recent Savanna’s Act legislation. The other states are Oklahoma, Montana, Minnesota, Alaska and Oregon.

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