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Congress of the United States House of Representatives

July 17, 2019

The Honorable David Bernhardt
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Bernhardt,

Native American and Alaska Native women throughout the country face a murder rate ten times higher than the national average, with 84% experiencing some kind of violence in their lifetime. In my home state of Washington, Native Americans make up about 2% of the population, but a recent report by the Washington State Patrol shows that indigenous women account for 7% of the state's reported missing women.

Central Washington sits at the epicenter of this crisis. In the past five years alone, seven women have been murdered or have gone missing in my congressional district. Just last week, our community was given another horrible reminder of the pervasiveness of the missing and murdered indigenous women (MMIW) crisis when it was reported that the remains of Rosenda Strong were found near the city of Toppenish on the Yakama Nation reservation 275 days after her disappearance.

Rosenda's unsolved murder is just one of the 71 open MMIW cases in Washington state – 31 of them occurring in my congressional district.

The response of the local community has been commendable. Tribal and community leaders have held multiple rallies and community forums to raise awareness and demand action. The diligent reporting of the *Yakima-Herald Republic* has highlighted the community response and activism on the ground by creating an online hub to list open cases involving missing and murdered women and providing resources for the community to report disappearances. Recently-passed state laws in Olympia have enhanced data collection and improved communication between tribal leaders and various state agencies.

I applaud these efforts, and I am inspired by the progress being made at the local and state level. However, this is a national problem that requires a national response. I introduced *Savanna's Act* with my colleagues Representatives Norma Torres (D-CA) and Deb Haaland (D-OK) to empower law enforcement agencies and tribes to effectively address this devastating issue that impacts communities in Central Washington and across the country.

As the Department of the Interior continues to work with tribes to address the MMIW crisis, I invite the Department to Central Washington to speak with a diverse community of tribal and law enforcement stakeholders about their experiences on the front lines of the crisis, Interior's work with indigenous communities, and how legislative proposals, like Savanna's Act, would help communities serve justice for indigenous women and their families.

Thank you for your consideration and for your strong leadership and advocacy for our nation's native communities. I look forward to welcoming you to Central Washington and to securing solutions to address this devastating crisis.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Dan Newhouse", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dan Newhouse
Member of Congress