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VICE-CHAIR
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Congress of the United States House of Representatives

December 8, 2020

The Honorable William Barr
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20530

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

Dear Attorney General Barr and Secretary Bernhardt,

Thank you for your leadership implementing Operation Lady Justice and your commitment to solving the open cases involving missing and murdered indigenous women (MMIW) through the establishment of Cold Case Task Force Offices across the United States. I write to request that a Cold Case Task Force Office be established through Operation Lady Justice in Yakima, Washington.

Through the establishment of the Presidential Task Force on Missing and Murdered American Indians and Alaska Natives, also known as Operation Lady Justice, President Trump has undertaken an unprecedented initiative to address the crisis of missing and murdered indigenous people — particularly MMIW.

As you know, after years of work and advocacy, Congress finally reached a bipartisan consensus on two pieces of critical legislation to address this crisis, and President Trump signed both Savanna's Act and the Not Invisible Act into law earlier this year. The signing of these bills is a monumental step toward accomplishing our shared goal of delivering justice to the families and loved ones of MMIW across the country, but there is more to be done. Now, we must continue working to ensure Native American women will no longer face violent crimes that go uninvestigated or unsolved. That work must begin in the communities most affected, and recent data demonstrates that my home state of Washington is particularly impacted by the MMIW crisis¹.

Native Americans make up an estimated 2% of our state's population, however a recent report by the Washington State Patrol shows that Native Women account for 7% of the state's reported missing women. My congressional district is home to the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation (Colville Tribes) and the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation (Yakama Nation) — two of the 29 federally-recognized tribes in Washington state, and there are currently 31 open cases of MMIW on or near the Yakama Nation reservation alone.

¹ Urban Indian Health Institute, "Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women & Girls Report," Seattle Indian Health Board, November 2018. <https://www.uihi.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Missing-and-Murdered-Indigenous-Women-and-Girls-Report.pdf>.

Both Yakama Nation and Colville Tribes have been actively engaged in working with my office to enact solutions that improve law enforcement coordination, empower law enforcement agencies to effectively investigate MMIW cases, and increase communication with Native communities. With an understanding of the outsized impact this crisis has on Central Washington, I write to request that a Cold Case Task Force Office be established through Operation Lady Justice in Yakima, Washington through dedicated funding provided to your agencies through FY21 appropriations. This office will be instrumental as we continue to work to address and put an end to the decades-long crisis that affects native communities throughout the country.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration. Should you have questions, please contact me or my staffer Aaron Larson at (202) 573-3660.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Dan Newhouse". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping "D" and a long, horizontal stroke at the end.

Dan Newhouse
Member of Congress