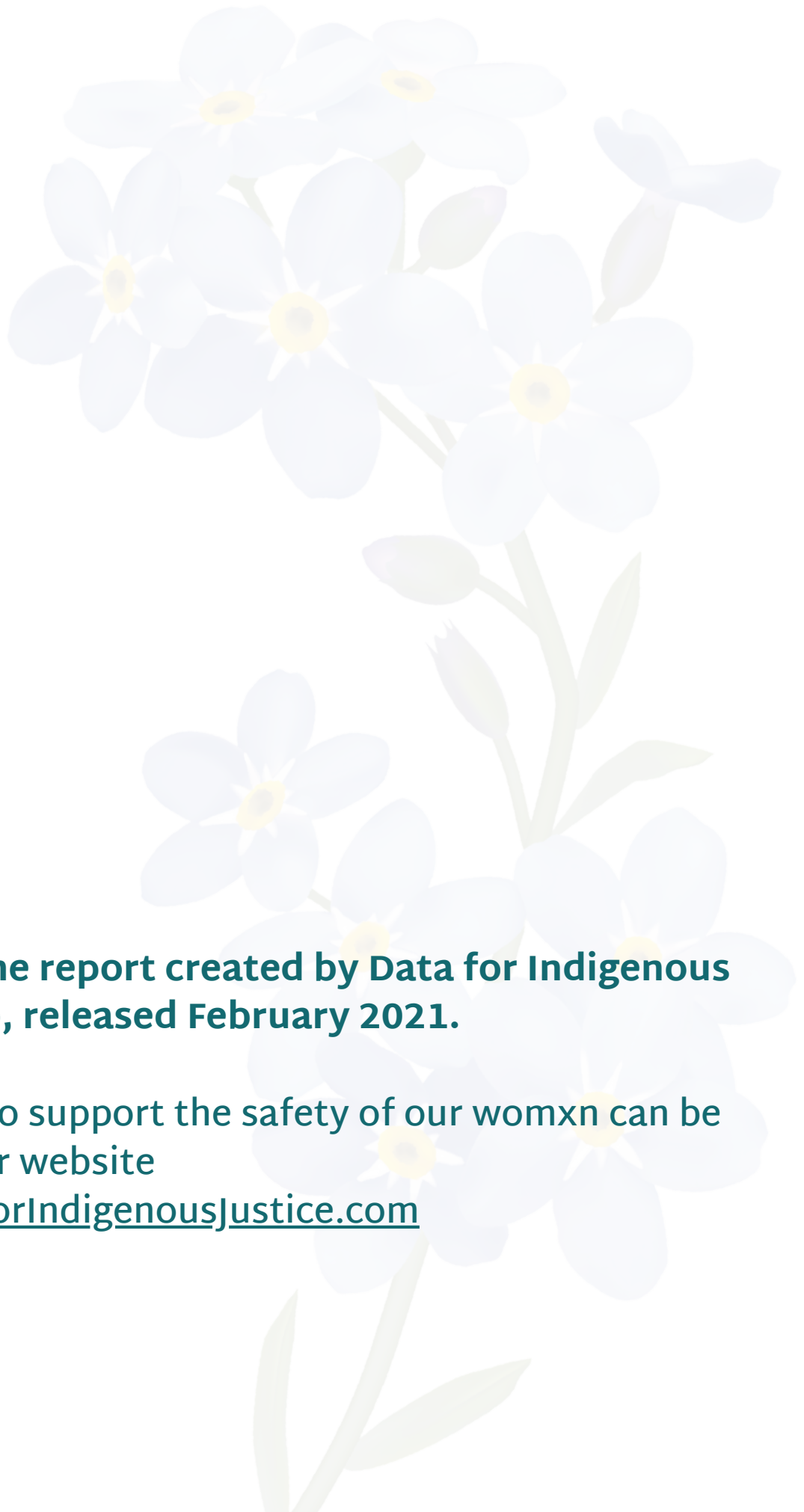





*We Are  
Calling To You*

Alaska's Missing and Murdered  
Indigenous Womxn and Girls



**This baseline report created by Data for Indigenous Justice (DIJ), released February 2021.**

Donations to support the safety of our womxn can be made on our website  
[www.DataforIndigenousJustice.com](http://www.DataforIndigenousJustice.com)



**This report is a reclamation of our stories that we have always had and maintained. This ancestral knowledge of data that we put forward is for our families and communities to self-determine our pathways to justice. While the use of data and reports can be used in innumerable ways; our intention here is first and foremost to ensure the safety of our people.**

\*Womxn (and Mxn) are terms used in intersectional feminism which are inclusive of transgender and gender expansive people. \*MMIWG2S- Missing and Murdered Indigenous Womxn, Girls, and Two-Spirited. Though we want to uplift all expansive genders, this report to date will use MMIWG as that is the information we can accurately report at this time. We do not currently have Two-Spirit and/or Trans-persons data.



# DATA FOR INDIGENOUS JUSTICE

## **AUTHORS**

Charlene Aqpik Apok, Iñupiaq  
Malia Villegas, Native Village of Afognak  
Abigail Echo-Hawk, Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma  
Jody Juneby Potts, Han Gwich'in from Eagle Village, Alaska

## **REPORT DESIGN**

Kelsey Ciugun Wallace, Yup'ik, Yaaruin Creative LLC

# Table of Contents



Indigenous Is Not A Survival Story .....	1
A message from Charlene Aqpiq Apok, Executive Director & DIJ co founder .....	2
1. Genealogy .....	4
2. Scope of the Problem .....	6
a. Invisible 153 .....	7
b. Invisible In Media .....	8
3. Acknowledging Persistent Issues with MMIWG data .....	9
a. Data Consistency .....	10
i. Jurisdiction .....	10
ii. Protocol Variation .....	11
iii. Centralization & Digitization of Data .....	12
b. Data Collection .....	13
i. Names, Sex & Gender .....	13
ii. Race & Ethnicity .....	14
iii. The “Other” Box .....	14
iv. Home Status of Victim .....	15
v. History of Perceived or Documented Discrimination .....	15
c. Data Reporting .....	16
i. Name, Race and Ethnicity, Location of Incident .....	16
ii. Home Community & Status of the Victim .....	17
iii. Determination of Cause of Death .....	17
iv. Case status .....	18
d. Summary of Persistent Issues .....	18

# Table of Contents



5. We Call To You, Our Loved Ones. Alaska’s MMIWG Data .....	19
a. Data Sources .....	20
b. FOIA Requests .....	21
c. Agency & Institutional .....	21
d. Media and Social Media .....	22
6. What is Documented .....	23
a. Limitations .....	24
7. Recommendations & Pathways Forward .....	25
a. Establish a Data Codebook Across Agencies to Ensure Consistency In Data Collection and Reporting .....	25
b. Mandate NamUs Entry .....	27
c. Improve Oversight of Investigations .....	28
d. Establish Tribal Review Boards .....	28
e. Mandate Cultural Training for Law Enforcement .....	29
f. Articulate Clear System Responsibilities in Alaska for addressing MMIWG .....	29
g. Provide Case Support for Families and Communities .....	30
8. Conclusions .....	31
9. References .....	32



---

## INDIGENOUS IS NOT A SURVIVAL STORY

---

Indigenous is not a survival story  
it is a genealogy  
an ancestral story of Matriarchs  
with bright eyes  
long hair  
fiery strength  
and gentle words  
tripping over colonial tongues

the settlers language can't translate  
the  
words  
it was never meant for their ears

- **ABIGAIL ECHO-HAWK**



## A Message From Charlene Aqpiq Apok Executive Director DIJ Co-Founder

*We Are Calling To You* echoes the unwavering efforts from MMIWG families; who we know never give up in finding their loved ones and seeking justice. This title also reflects a practice of throat singing from my Inuit cultural heritage. It is a practice often carried by women, who are paired and learn to call and response sing together through life. Due to impacts of colonization, this is less commonly practiced today. Due to impacts of colonization our womxn are missing and murdered at unthinkable rates. *We Are Calling To You* then, is also the met silence from our losses; the call from one womxn to another that goes unanswered because she has been stolen from us, her voice gone. But we will keep calling. This is our call to you- to anyone reading this, to join the response of addressing the crisis of MMIWG.

We put forward this report as one tool our Tribes and communities need on this pathway towards justice. We begin with our genealogy, the origins of this work, rooted in our values, guided by our ancestors. Next, we situate Alaska and three main system issues regarding data: Data Consistency, Data Collection, and Data Reporting.





## A Message From Charlene Aqpiq Apok Executive Director & DIJ Co-Founder *cont.*

The section **We Call to You, Our Loved Ones: Alaska's MMIWG Data** describes data sources and presents what is documented for MMIWG figures in Alaska. We emphasize that the 229 cases represent loved ones, lives, stories, and dreams always in our collective memory. The familiar number, 229, is also the number of federally recognized tribes here in Alaska. We can't help but recognize this chance co-occurrence signifies that indeed, all of us- each of our 229 tribal communities are impacted by MMIWG.

Finally, we outline starting point recommendations for a pathway forward. These recommendations include the urgency for interagency cooperation, data specific recommendations, policy and legislation, and family and community supports.

There is so much work to be done. We need everyone to be a part of the solution in responding to this call for justice. As an Indigenous led effort, we share our work so our communities can build, co-create, and rise together. We invite allies to support Indigenous people's efforts, in relational solidarity, against colonial systems contributing to this issue. Throughout the work we have ahead, we know the transformational healing that must take place if we are to realize the justice we seek. Let's move together from a place of love, be courageous about speaking our truths, and deliberate in actions for justice.

**Charlene Aqpiq Apok**  
*Executive Director*  
*DIJ Co-Founder*

# Genealogy

As Indigenous peoples we have genealogies of strength. We are rooted from our homelands and connected through water. Our vision for our people is:

*To live our ancestral power to the fullest,  
in safety, while thriving.*

We share this vision and connection because this work is grounded in being life-affirming -- we affirm that the lives of our Indigenous womxn are precious and worthy of being kept safe. Because we are related, we are all impacted by every missing person in our communities. We enact responsibility to each other by building and normalizing safety and protection through storytelling, community-building, and the creation and revitalization of tools of justice. Our intention in gathering this information and putting it back into the hands of our peoples is that we are equipped to self-determine and advocate for pathways to justice, thus realizing our vision of Indigenous womxn living safely wherever they choose.

*The heart-work of homing our Alaska MMIWG  
database.*

Origins and our story: the roots of our work are in community. Several years ago, in an Indigenous-led rally organized to call attention to the issue of MMIWG in Alaska, organizers wanted to read the names of loved ones who are missing and murdered, only to find that there was no list, no tracking, no available data of our people. Grassroots organizers took it upon themselves to start that list. This began the heart-work of homing our Alaska MMIWG database. We want to give special recognition to Native Movement who organized and facilitated this rally that brought the community together for action. The original list was a labor of love from Adrienne Aakaluk Titus & Misty TooOozhrii Nickoli. With their permission and guidance, Data for Indigenous Justice (DIJ) was founded to continue caring for our loved ones names and memories.



In order to reclaim these data, DIJ has worked in close partnership with two organizations: Native Movement and Native Peoples Action. It should be acknowledged that Native Movement has been a force within Alaska to uplift and mobilize Indigenous peoples -- defending the sacred of land, waters, and bodies. Native Peoples Action Community Fund and Native Peoples Action have tirelessly partnered to grow the network of advocates addressing MMIWG in Alaska to bridge policy gaps and stop the crisis. We also recognize the leadership and work of the Alaska Native Women's Resource Center. These organizations have done incredible work along the frontlines of addressing MMIWG in Alaska.

Further, we want to recognize the efforts done by the Urban Indian Health Institute, which released the first national report on MMIWG in 2018, *Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women & Girls: A snapshot of data from 71 urban cities in the United States* [1]. This trailblazing report provided beginning case numbers and analysis for Alaska. UIHI's second report in *We Demand More 2019* [2] brought much needed visibility to systemic issues.

# Scope Of The Problem

## ***Indigenous Nations and Communities have been calling for Justice.***

Indigenous nations and communities have been calling for justice for our Indigenous womxn over many years now --from Canada's national MMIWG inquiry initiated in 2015, to the Urban Indian Health Institute (UIHI) report "We Demand More" in 2019. Notably, the absence and poor quality of data collection in cases of missing and murdered Indigenous peoples has been a key contributing factor to injustice. In other words, the scope of the problem is invisibility.

*Artwork by Dustin Newman*

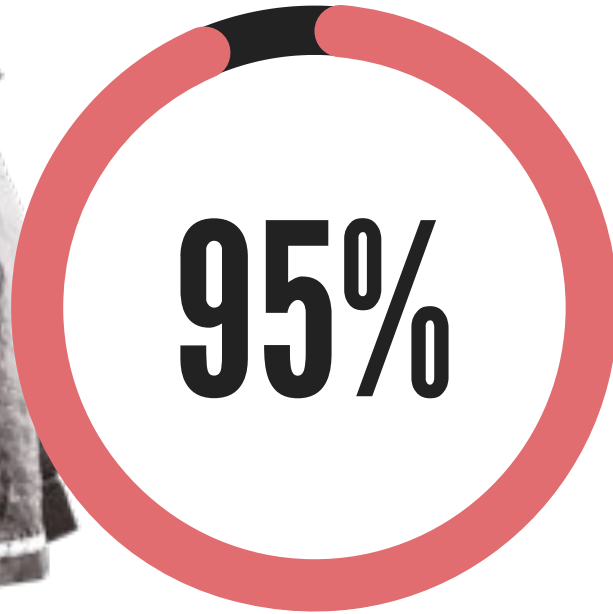




## Invisible 153 = 153 loved ones unreported

Through research methods outside of FOIA requests (government missing persons databases, news reports, social media and advocacy sites, direct contact with families and community members who volunteered info), **UIHI found 153 cases that were not in law enforcement records.**[1]

The 'Invisible 153' represent a sliver and a window into those who have gone missing from our communities and data for far too long. When these reports were published, it was the first accessible data communities had that began to highlight the barriers and injustice being faced by Indigenous womxn and their families. Revealed through those who are literally missing in person, missing in data, and missing in media; these initial reports provided the first written documentation of the problem in the nation: That "As of 2018, Alaska stood as the 4th highest state of MMIWG cases and the city of Anchorage having the 3rd highest cases in the nation"[1]. This information began to shed light on the rates of MMIWG through a sheer number of cases; that there are pervasive systemic issues contributing to making our Indigenous womxn unsafe in their communities. Yet, we know there are many stories not captured in this data, that these high rates are only what is known. UIHI's report pointed out that not only are our loved ones actually missing from our lives but they are missing in data and in media. Time and time again we have missing loved ones and there is no media coverage or concern outside of our Indigenous communities.






***A content analysis regarding MMIWG revealed that more than 95% of the 934 articles reviewed were never covered by any national or international media. [1]***

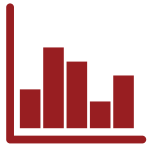
The lack of tracking, quality data, and reporting means there is a scarce amount of available data for Tribes and Indigenous communities to advocate for and have access to resources. We recognize that there are many compounding and interdependent issues outside of this specific data analysis that impact the rates of MMIWG: systemic racism, sexism and gender based violence stemming from patriarchy, colonial legal and judicial systems, inequity in healthcare, and resource extraction to name a few. This report is intended to address the data gap by calling forward the stories of MMWIG into the light and thereby creating a tool for Alaska Tribes, Alaska Native, and Indigenous communities to self-determine their pursuits of justice. To do so, we next describe issues with MMIWG data that relate to data consistency, data collection, and data reporting.

# Acknowledging Persistent Issues with MMIWG Data

As Indigenous peoples we know ourselves by our relationships. When we lose someone it impacts all of us. We live the losses, the absence of our loved ones. The inability of western data collection to capture, report, and coordinate accurate information illustrates two things, namely: 1) that those systems were not designed to serve us, and 2) that healing and justice for MMIWG will be realized only through the self-determination of our peoples. Here, specifically, we aim to name colonial systems and the impacts they have on accurately documenting MMIWG data. This is important because oftentimes these systemic issues are considered ‘working’- yet we respond with, ‘for whom?’ and ‘for what purpose?’ Therefore, articulation of persistent issues in data is necessary for generating systemic change. This section is offered as an overview and is not exhaustive.

There are issues of three different sorts, namely those related to Data Consistency, Data Collection, and Data Reporting. All three are systems issues, though one sort may be easier to address than others and could lead to improvements across the board. For instance, improving data collection could lead to the reporting and use of more consistent data. We offer the following chart to help communicate some of the differences across these issues:

 <b>Data Consistency</b>	 <b>Data Collection</b>	 <b>Data Reporting</b>
Jurisdiction	Name	Name
Protocol Variation (Data Collection, Reporting, & Case Management)	Sex & Gender	Race & Ethnicity
Centralizing & Digitization of Data	Race & Ethnicity	Location of the incident
	Home status of victim (e.g., Homeless)	Home community and status of the victim
	History of Perceived or Documented Discrimination	Determination of cause of death
		Case status



## Data Consistency

### Jurisdiction

Jurisdiction in Alaska is a multi-dimensional web that, instead of creating multiple layers of secure networks for families and tribes, results in people falling through endless gaps. While this report cannot fully cover the jurisdictional barriers in Alaska regarding MMIWG, this section is meant to shed light on one part of a system full of gaps leading to injustice. To begin, there are various layers of law enforcement, including: Alaska Police Departments, Village Police safety officers (VPSOs) through the Alaska Department of Public Safety and Alaska Tribes, Alaska State Troopers, and -- when called in and determined to engage -- the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Criminal jurisdiction for Alaska as a Public Law 280, or P.L. 280, state created concurrent overlaps of authority for the federal and state governments but failed to provide overlapping resources and infrastructure necessary to exercise that authority. Much like the shortcomings of the Violence Against Women Act in Alaska due to language about 'Indian Country', criminal jurisdiction overlap does not lead to mean dual coverage, but instead results in an unwillingness by either system to assume responsibility for the safety of Indigenous people.

Regional tribal leaders have tried to explain time and again to the US Department of Justice that the pervasive lack of resources for law enforcement and Tribal courts have contributed directly to violence against Indigenous people across the State of Alaska.[3] The ACLU has documented and filed suit in the far north as a severe shortage of law enforcement compounded with systemic racism and bias has resulted in horrific rates of violence and injustice being faced by the largely Alaska Native residents of Nome, Alaska.[4] One sentiment that illustrates the issue is that law enforcement and criminal prosecution often mobilize to address hunting violations more quickly than they do for cases of homicide against Indigenous people. This is to say that while a lack of resources has been a continual issue across rural Alaska, the question of coordination, accountability, and follow through with current capacity must also be addressed.





## Protocol Variation


Jurisdiction issues contribute to an already complex level of variation in data collection and management processes. Variety agency data is problematic on multiple levels. Particularly, law enforcement is a central barrier to MMIWG data. Across the state, no matter which law enforcement is present, the varying information on process, protocol, and services is unclear.



***Law enforcement is a central barrier to MMIWG data***

For example, within one body of law enforcement, there may not be standard procedure for filing a missing persons report, let alone a procedure across all police departments in the state or all troopers. Further, without shared protocols, different agencies are likely collecting data that does not communicate across systems for information sharing. This leads to the burden being placed on the community to navigate through.

Overarching to this issue is the lack of transparency in policy for law enforcement which has led to a lack of accountability. If families and tribes are unaware of what to expect in the process of investigations, reporting, and case management they are unable to advocate or ensure follow through. If agencies do not have simple procedures in place, nonetheless shared ones, there is no consistency for law enforcement, the data they create in incidents, nor for families to understand.



One example found is that not all law enforcement agencies have a rule on whether families have to wait a certain number of hours to file a missing persons report. While one agency might say a missing persons report can be filed any time there is a concern, and specifically direct to not wait 24 or 48 hours, another agency will have no standard on this. For example, Anchorage Police Department has their policy on this publicly available, that there is no time needed to wait before filing. Meanwhile, there is no information on this for Alaska State Troopers, such as on the Missing Persons Clearinghouse website, or when searching other Alaska Police Departments policies on missing persons.

***This lack of shared procedure is problematic in itself but also causes communication across systems to be an issue that leads to data barriers.***

## **Centralization & Digitization of Data**

At the system levels there are issues with data centralization and digitization that complicate the situation further. The lack of centralized systems leads to missing data but also means in many cases reports cannot even be generated at a community or agency level. The systems also do not connect or speak to each other. In many instances, the data collected is not even digitized to be used at the system level. Ultimately, the lack of centralized systems results in a lack of centralized resources and procedures for families and Tribes when a loved one goes missing or murdered.

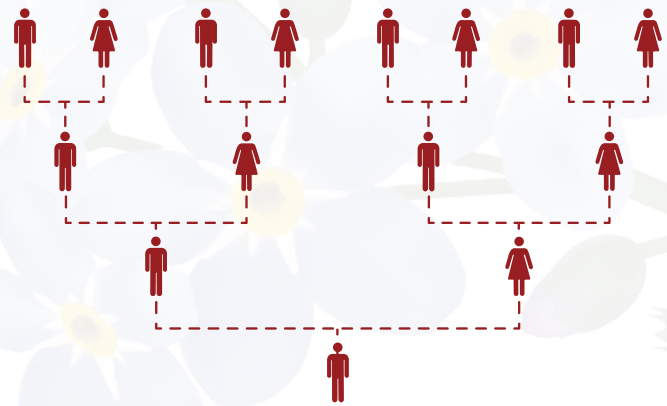
Though there are issues with the data systems and protocols being centralized, digitized, and consistent, these issues can only help address inequality if the data itself is available and of sufficient quality. Due to the following challenges with data collection, MMIWG data is absent, not accessible, or inaccurate to understand how our people are targeted and harmed at disproportionate levels.



## Data Collection

### Data Points, Definitions, and Accuracy

**Names:** Names in Alaska Native cultures are an important kinship marker that often are not legalized. In the context of MMIWG, having these namesakes, traditional names, or ‘nicknames’ collected in incident reporting and communications could be valuable in getting case information more rapidly spread in communities. For example, if a person is missing and only their legal name is used by law enforcement for inquiry or postings, it may not be familiar to those who would have leads or information. However, having the namesake or ‘nickname’ often quickly identifies who they are referring to.



**Sex & Gender:** Sex and gender are often used interchangeably in demographic data systems. However, these terms are not interchangeable and have different meanings. Both current uses in data systems reflect restrictive binary options of male & female. This binary system is problematic in several ways. The first is that simple consistency as a data field- not having systems use the same term- ‘sex’ or ‘gender’ means incompatible sharing across systems. Secondly, sex assigning identifiers and misgendering do not represent the spectrum of ‘womxn’ being impacted, as an issue of gender-based violence occurring. Due to current systems in use, this report is limited to information available on ‘female’ and ‘women’ data fields. We emphasize our use of the term ‘womxn’, an effort to reflect a gender expansive and inclusive reality. See recommendations for options to better include trans and gender expansive people.

**Race & Ethnicity:** The lack of comprehensive data on missing and murdered Indigenous peoples is reflective of the arduous relationship between Indigenous peoples and Tribes with state and federal governments. To begin, the standard four-box race and ethnicity options of White, Black, Asian, Indian originating with the US Census have been a colonial tool that works to eliminate the existence of Indigenous peoples, instead of truly enumerating us. Through a top-down structure of applying the demographic categories to state and federal systems, race and ethnicity boxes have inhibited the data we have regarding Indigenous peoples. Law enforcement agencies in Alaska still rely on the four checkbox categories for race and ethnicity. An ‘Other’ box is another standard option. See online Wasilla Police Department form as an example.

The image shows a screenshot of the City of Wasilla Police Department's 'ONLINE CITIZEN REPORT FORM'. At the top, there is a 'Print Form' button, the department logo, and a 'Case Number' field. Below this is a notice: 'Notice to person completing this form: AS 11.56.8000 makes it unlawful to knowingly make a false report to a peace officer that a crime has occurred.' The 'INSTRUCTIONS' section lists three steps: 1. Fill out form online. 2. Complete as much of the requested information pertaining to your situation as possible. 3. Write a brief summary in the Statement section. The 'COMPLAINANT INFORMATION' section contains fields for Name, Mailing Address, Physical Address, Phone #'s (Home, Work, Cell), Sex, Race, Date of Birth, Driver's License/ID, Business Name, and Business Address. The 'RACE' dropdown menu is highlighted with a red circle and lists 'White', 'Black', 'Asian', 'Indian (includes Alaska nat', and 'Other'. A red arrow points from the 'Other' option to the 'Location where incident occurred:' field.

The ‘Other’ box is used in multiple scenarios. For example, if race and ethnicity are not asked at the incident, it may be listed as ‘Other’. When authors spoke to law enforcement about when ‘Other’ is used in reporting, it was noted that in cases where officers believe they may be accused of racial profiling, they may not ask race and ethnicity, instead selecting ‘Other’. Another scenario is when people report multiple race/ethnicities, those data are often collapsed into the ‘Other’ box.

Nearly half of American Indian and Alaska Native people identify with more than one race/ethnicity group. [5] The collapsing of this data point is problematic in that Alaska Native/American Indian people become invisible in data sets.

“

*Alaska  
Native/American  
Indian people become  
invisible in data sets*

”

In sum, the presence of the category ‘Other’ creates issues in classifying, reporting, and tracking violence against Alaska Native people.

**Home Status of Victim:** The unhoused or houseless population in the urban Alaska setting is a targeted group for violence and exploitation. In a post-presentation community dialogue, a chilling comment was made that Anchorage’s homeless are the “pre-MMIWG”. Sadly, this rings true, and the safety of unhoused loved ones continues to be a deep concern.[7] Without data on the home status of the victim, communities cannot adequately track the extent to which our unhoused relatives are becoming missing and murdered.

**History of Perceived or Documented Discrimination:** The mistrust many Alaska Native people have of law enforcement emerges from a long history of discrimination and unjust outcomes. Stereotyping and systemic bias are just two examples of how discrimination work, especially when data collection takes place after an incident. For law enforcement even with good intention, there are missed cultural queues, internalized stereotypes, or miscommunication on processes that inform the ways the public provide information. Victim blaming is all too familiar in recounts from families’ interactions. For informants, if mistrust and fear are activated, the willingness to share information may be limited. All of these complexities can result in missing or inaccurate data. In some cases of MMIWG, it can result in no reporting to any state agency by families, or, when reported, no action or investigation by law enforcement.




## Data Reporting


**Name:** As noted earlier, reporting of traditional names and nicknames could contribute to solving MMIWG cases.

**Race & Ethnicity:** Increased disaggregation of American Indian and Alaska Native data in reporting is also critical in understanding the incidence of MMIWG and developing effective strategies to find our relatives and bring them perpetrators to justice.

**Location of the Incident:** Location data can be inaccurate in a few aspects. Due to jurisdiction, the location for MMIWG cases are documented in paperwork by the filing/reporting law enforcement agency of record. For example, in smaller rural communities, if an incident occurs, the location information is reported through law enforcement at the nearby hub such as Nome, Fairbanks, or Juneau, for example. Though paperwork may be more specific to the smaller community or be noted somewhere, the filing that gets reported often only lists the hub location. Therefore, distribution of case reporting currently reflects regional hubs listed as locations of incidents of MMIWG. So, if a small community has multiple incidents, it may not stand out in data because it is obscured by the hub designation in reporting.




*Despite this being an overview, the takeaway is that many families and communities are not represented in location data and therefore are unable to advocate for the losses they face. There needs to be multi-level system changes if this gap is to be addressed.*



**Home Community & Status of the Victim:** Another influencing factor of location as a data point is that in-state transience may not be accounted for. For many reasons, families and individuals travel into the urban areas of Anchorage and Fairbanks; medical, visiting relatives, jobs, school, shopping etc. Some families have shared about their loved ones travelling to the urban setting and not coming home. Cases are unique and may have nuances we are not able to capture here. However, human trafficking is a huge issue in Alaska, particularly in Anchorage.[6] (The aspect of human trafficking to MMIWG cannot be covered here but the intervening issues are absolutely present.) The cases which occur in the urban areas of Anchorage and Fairbanks, for instance, and are reported there are accurate, but obscure the home community of victims. Further, as stated earlier, without data collected and reported on the home status of the victim, we cannot account for how houselessness is a factor in the prevalence of MMWIG for Tribes. Ultimately, these reporting issues contribute to data gaps in that communities do not have figures to account for their missing and murdered people.

**Determination of Cause of Death:** Though law enforcement are responsible for the investigations, collecting evidence, and reporting, Alaska State law requires the medical examiner's office to be involved if the death is “Sudden, when a person is in apparent good health, Not under the care of a physician, Suspicious, unusual or unexplained, and All deaths that are not due to a natural cause (accidents, homicides, suicides etc.)”. [8] And sadly, in communities without law enforcement, families are faced with preserving evidence until they arrive, which has taken several days [9] in too many circumstances. Determination of cause of death by the state medical examiner's office from MMIWG family perspectives has led to much scrutiny. Examples include deaths being listed as ‘suicide’, ‘accidental’, or ‘not suspicious’ when the family believes there is evidence to support it being classified and reported as suspicious or a homicide.

***Clearly, the importance of thorough investigations cannot be understated in bringing justice to our relatives. But without accurate determinations of cause of death, there will continue to be a lack of investigations [10].***



**Case Status:** For missing persons, poor case status reporting has led to over poor data quality, non-investigation, and non-closure of MMIWG cases. For example, when a missing person's case has been 'closed' due to not having any active leads to follow, it is often marked as 'closed' when in actuality the person has not yet been found. This same data field 'closed' is used also when a person indeed has been found. In contrast, if a missing persons report was filed, and the person was found by family or community members but did not notify law enforcement, the case may appear to be active when the person has been located. For missing persons case status, these inaccuracies within local law enforcement agency reporting are then what is provided in the federal data systems, if provided at all. In this report, we were able to work with only one law enforcement agency to manually cross reference this data field despite efforts to do so with others.

Case status reporting when the cause of death is a homicide is somewhat more straightforward in that either a homicide case is solved or not solved. Active cases indicate that there are leads still being followed up on. 'Cold cases' mean they have not been solved and do not have any active leads. Closed means they have been solved. However, in cases of homicide, the data field which we have heard concerns from families is the cause of death.

## Summary of Persistent Issues

This report is meant to provide baseline information regarding MMIWG in Alaska, as well as a system-level overview of contributing factors in order to advance justice for our precious people, families, and communities. Through the previous discussion of the persistent systemic issues that contribute to poor data quality and availability, it is clear that the systems are not designed to serve our people. There is not only a lack of technical capacity, but an apparent lack of systemic will to achieve justice in the cases of MMIWG. All of these areas can and should be addressed more deeply at all levels. Our intention here is to share what we have learned and untangled in an effort to gather and reclaim our MMIWG data. The next section will present what is currently documented from Alaska MMIWG data with recommendations and possible pathways forward detailed at the end of the report.





# *We Call to You, Our Loved Ones*

## Alaska's MMIWG Data

Always, we must acknowledge how we use the term 'data' is not limited to western concepts. Instead, we understand data to be the stories of precious lives -- our past, present, and future is wrapped within figures. The following data are people, loved ones, gifts from ancestors, who are each deeply missed. While we do not provide names in this report, we know these names in our collective memory. We join the collective in calling for them and in acknowledging that we will never give up seeking justice for every single one. Described in the following section as Data Sources, we provide an overview of how we have gathered these names. Next, a baseline of what is known about MMIWG in Alaska will be presented alongside previously documented cases.

# Data Sources



## Community Knowledge

The grassroots origin of the database was shared at the beginning of this report. As such, we acknowledge that the primary source of these data are our community members who have come together to share this information with us, trusting us to care for it. In other words, our data was and continues to be gathered by our people, for our people. Families that do not trust law enforcement and have not filed cases have chosen to share their stories with us. We honor the truths of families in this data set by correcting misclassifications of deaths, victim race and ethnicity, and other key domains in order to generate a more accurate and decolonized dataset than what is currently available in state reporting. The community sharing of data is the heart of our work and compels us to take care of and take action towards seeking justice for our relatives. We also utilize a variety of other data sources which we continually cross reference in this journey to use the very best tools to achieve our collective goals.

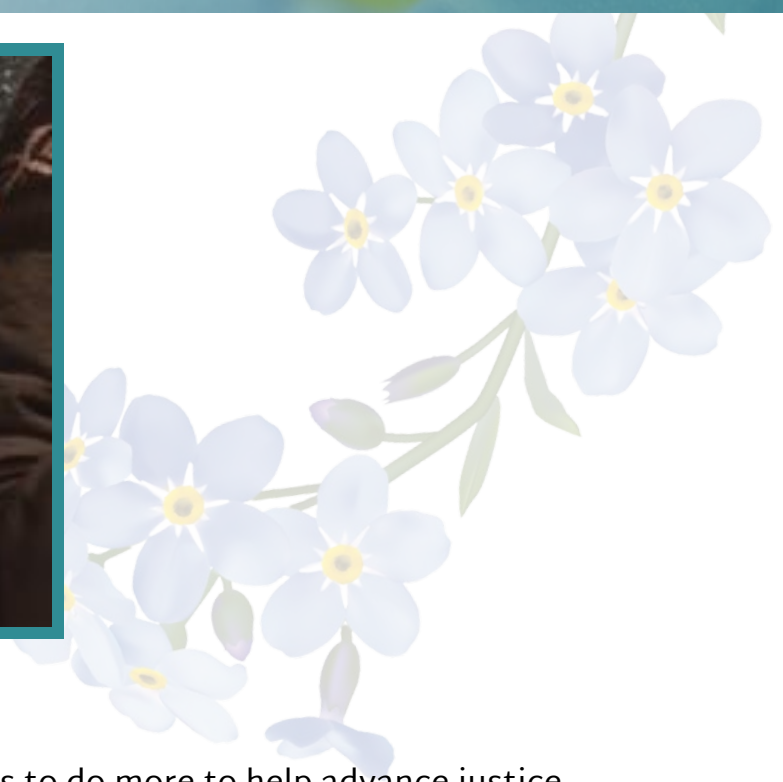


## FOIA Requests

With these community data, we began to search for information about our relatives' cases. It came to community members' attention that the Alaska State Troopers (AST) Cold Case website had very little information available regarding cases in Alaska. This lack of information was concerning because without more public information, community members are not able to give tips, share information, or have updates on cases. After individuals had separately tried to request information via Freedom of Information Act Requests (FOIA requests) and had been denied, a small group decided to work together to request public information on '101 cold cases'. Our group reviewed the previous denials and crafted a simple, straightforward ask that would achieve the goal of securing the information requested. The group submitted over 40 identical FOIA requests to the AST from individuals, tribes, and organizations. From this coordinated effort, our community reclaimed data and information that was later released through an updated AST Cold Case website. With this collective approach, FOIA requests have continued to be a mechanism of gathering information specifically from AST. It should be noted, however, that this process is non-intuitive, has no clear parameters for requestees, is not timely, and we continue to get denied information on a regular basis. Thus, this is not a sustainable method to secure MMIWG data with a goal of achieving justice for our peoples. As such, we decided to develop the baseline of data and this report to advance justice from a different systemic basis.

## Agency & Institutional

While the requirements and accuracy of interagency reporting is still ambiguous, there are some reports that get cross-referenced into our work. Police and university reports, while de-identified, sometimes have demographic identifiers and quantitative data, which when cross-referenced can help cases emerge. This cross-referencing confirmed nine missing cases early in our data set. Ideally, these reports are from integrated data sources and this step should not be necessary. Nonetheless, manual cross referencing of reports can still be a useful method, mostly due to the systems communication issue described earlier.



## Media & Social Media

While we would invite media organizations to do more to help advance justice regarding the crisis of MMIWG, media sources have provided some key information over time. For example, with respect to older cases, occasionally there may be a newspaper article or bulletin of a case that predates electronic databases. So, where public information or agency data may not be digitized, older newspapers sometimes can provide key information. Additionally, where gaps such as race and ethnicity of victims occur in data systems, media articles give information from families who identify loved ones and themselves as Alaska Native.

Social media also is a huge repository of information that serves as a tool in gathering data. These days, social media such as Facebook and Instagram are go-to communication outlets for family members trying to connect. It also is the first stream of communication to spread word when there is a concern for safety. If a report is made, details are often shared first and widely on social media before any other information is provided to community members. In addition to being a personal sharing platform, social media often hosts organized groups and pages dedicated to missing persons and cold cases in Alaska. Notably, S.A.M: Seeking Alaska's Missing page has over 26k followers. Social media has posts both from families who have filed reports and from those who have not. These posts also may provide information that, again, fills gaps which current data systems have.

# What Is Documented

Despite all the uncertainty and ambiguity, we know this: the numbers below represent a mere brushstroke on the surface of a much bigger picture of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Womxn and Girls in Alaska. These figures are an offering from us to our community leaders in an effort to place information into the hands of our people to achieve justice for MMIWG. In the 2018 UIHI inaugural report, Alaska had 52 cases total, being the 4th highest state in the nation, with Anchorage having the 3rd most cases (31) of any city in the U.S.



***We have now gathered and reclaimed a total of 229 cases of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Womxn and Girls in Alaska.***

***149 as missing status.***

***80 as murdered.***

This number 229 is important to us as Alaska Native tribal people for many reasons including the fact that it is the number of federally-recognized Tribes in the state, and here it appears again. We call to these 229 Alaska Native womxn and girls. We call for justice for these 229 missing loved ones, missing laughter, missing joy, missing gifts, missing talent, and missing potential. We call for justice for these 229 breaks in generations of families. We call to these 229 dreams from our ancestors. We tell these stories today, insisting they are not forgotten. We do not have to list the names to know these are our relatives. Their lives are forever a part of our collective memory of mourning, and of healing. All of this, we know.

## Limitations

Due to persistent issues described earlier in the report, there are limitations to these reported data. Specifically, this report, while honoring a gender spectrum, does not include data for our Two-Spirit relatives and transgender family. We know that Two-Spirit relatives and transgender family members face incredible rates of violence. We believe in recognition of all genders to be deserving of safety and that this work should benefit all.

Similarly, intersecting systemic violence means Indigenous men/mxn face high rates of violence resulting in being missing and murdered. It is our intention to name gender-based violences and create system solutions that are preventative and beneficial to the safety of all genders. We encourage articulation and strength-based solutions that serve Indigenous men/mxn as well.

Finally, this is a baseline report. Meaning, it is an initial assessment of this crisis and serves as an indicator of what MMIWG in Alaska are facing. It is one tool -- a starting point for advocacy and change. We will continue to reclaim and care for MMIWG data in Alaska until we see justice realized.



## ***Everyone is part of the solution to address MMIWG.***

Everyone is a part of the solution to address MMIWG. Efforts to exercise sovereignty, transform justice systems, decolonize, and create healing spaces are all essential parts of this work. This report has provided an overview with touch points to address this complex crisis. On this overarching level, the need for partnership and coordination is urgent. Partnership and coordination must include all levels, such as: Tribal, local, state, federal, NGOs, advocates, service providers, and of course families of MMIWG. Multiple layers of jurisdiction across the largest state poses incredible hurdles that cannot be traversed unless coordination occurs. Specifically, justice system considerations as a P.L. 280 state need to be clarified and communicated so that communities are served, rather than overlooked. Tribal sovereignty, government to government relations, must be recognized and tribes need to be sought and included in decision making. Further, specific resources to establish preventative measures driven by community insights and to address MMIWG must be allocated to Tribes and communities.

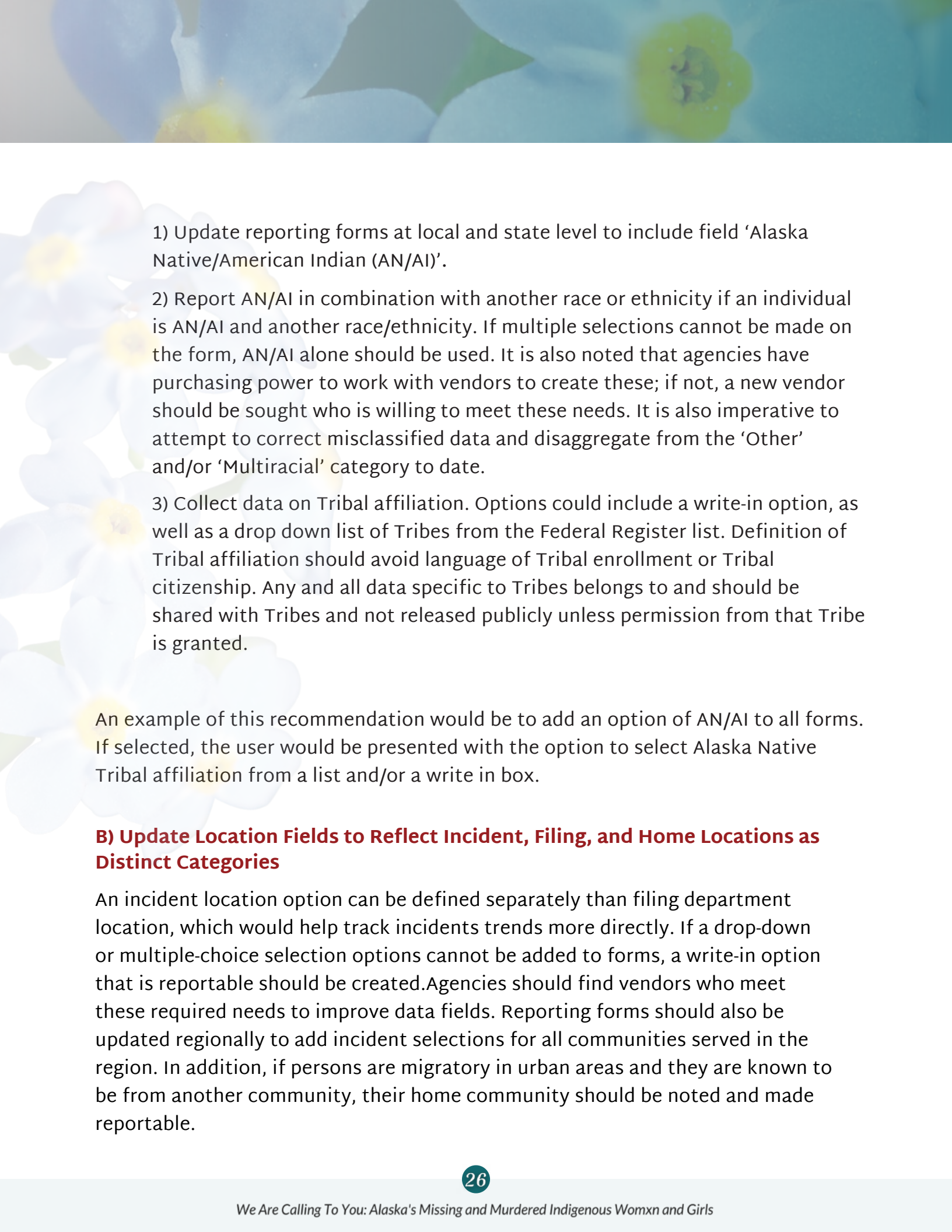
1

## **Establish a Data Codebook Across Agencies to Ensure Consistency in Data Collection and Reporting.**

The collection of data should be made more consistent across agencies and locations, especially in the case of missing persons and murder victims. Reporting requirements should be made consistent across agencies with communicable data systems with like fields in place. A data codebook of fields and definitions should be made and streamlined across agencies. Reporting requirements to who, what and when should be accessible information. FOIA requests need defined parameters on any associated fees. Some best practices we highlight include:

### **A) Collect and Report on the Race, Ethnicity, and Tribal Affiliation of MMIWG**

In order to improve data collection and reporting to achieve justice for MMIWG, there are a number of recommendations for the justice system we offer below, including:



1) Update reporting forms at local and state level to include field 'Alaska Native/American Indian (AN/AI)'.

2) Report AN/AI in combination with another race or ethnicity if an individual is AN/AI and another race/ethnicity. If multiple selections cannot be made on the form, AN/AI alone should be used. It is also noted that agencies have purchasing power to work with vendors to create these; if not, a new vendor should be sought who is willing to meet these needs. It is also imperative to attempt to correct misclassified data and disaggregate from the 'Other' and/or 'Multiracial' category to date.

3) Collect data on Tribal affiliation. Options could include a write-in option, as well as a drop down list of Tribes from the Federal Register list. Definition of Tribal affiliation should avoid language of Tribal enrollment or Tribal citizenship. Any and all data specific to Tribes belongs to and should be shared with Tribes and not released publicly unless permission from that Tribe is granted.

An example of this recommendation would be to add an option of AN/AI to all forms. If selected, the user would be presented with the option to select Alaska Native Tribal affiliation from a list and/or a write in box.

### **B) Update Location Fields to Reflect Incident, Filing, and Home Locations as Distinct Categories**

An incident location option can be defined separately than filing department location, which would help track incidents trends more directly. If a drop-down or multiple-choice selection options cannot be added to forms, a write-in option that is reportable should be created. Agencies should find vendors who meet these required needs to improve data fields. Reporting forms should also be updated regionally to add incident selections for all communities served in the region. In addition, if persons are migratory in urban areas and they are known to be from another community, their home community should be noted and made reportable.



### C) Update Sex & Gender Fields to Be Inclusive

At minimum, the Gender field on forms should include selections for Female, Male, or Custom: \_\_\_ (write in). Further options could include a 'Sex Assigned at Birth' category, which includes 'intersex'; an 'Identified Pronouns' section; and a 'Gender Identity' section. Pronouns and Gender sections should be inclusive with write in options. For example, pronouns used should include at minimum: She, He, and They. Gender should include at minimum, Female/Woman, Male/Man, TransFemale/TransWoman, TransMale/TransMan, and write-in. In short, non-binary options need to be provided in data collection and reporting in order to understand more about how different groups are targeted and experience violence toward the goal of increasing safety.



Artwork by Yaari Walker

## 2

### Mandate NamUs Entry

In 2019, the National Institute of Justice reported that, “[s]ince inception, NamUs [the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System] has been used to resolve 358 [I]ndigenous missing person cases, and is currently supporting another 385 active, unsolved cases of missing [I]ndigenous persons.” The NamUS system has added specific Tribal data fields. At least eight states (e.g., Oklahoma, New Mexico, Tennessee, New York, Michigan, Illinois, Arkansas, and West Virginia) have passed legislation mandating case entry into NamUS, and we recommend that the State of Alaska work to mandate NamUS Entry for missing Indigenous people. [11]



### 3 Improve Oversight of Investigations

Investigative resources and systems must be improved. To begin, there must be an increased expectation to investigate in the case of MMIWG given the prevalence of cases, and a failure to investigate must have serious repercussions for agencies. Secondly, audits of forensic data should be required to inform best practices and correct errors that have left families and communities unable to seek recourse for their loved ones. As part of these audits, closed cases must be reviewed for thorough, quality work. Review and oversight mechanisms should include options to re-open cases for further investigation. Lastly, mandatory oversight and review committees of all MMIWG cases should be created and should include tribal and constituent citizens.

### 4 Establish Tribal Review Boards

There are countless Tribal leaders, members, and organizations who want to assist in improving the ability of the justice system to find our missing and prevent our people from being murdered. Constituent citizen review boards can provide additional insight, support, and accountability for law enforcement, justice systems, and medical examiners offices, amongst others involved. In other words, partnerships to increase reporting and investigations must be made. The current systems are designed for compartmentalization and isolation. Systems must create pathways to connect if this issue is to be addressed. All partnerships and committees should include community member expertise, inviting MMIWG families to provide feedback if desired.



## 5

### Mandate Cultural Training for Law Enforcement

Improved and required renewal of cultural training is imperative, including that of: tribal sovereignty, systemic racism, power and privilege, and expansive genders should be done from law enforcement leadership to new recruits to equip them with the tools to serve our communities. Training on data collection and reporting from Indigenous-led organizations needs to be provided with expanded data sharing capabilities.

## 6

### Articulate Clear System Responsibilities in Alaska for Addressing MMIWG


As a P.L. 280 state, Alaska needs to define which system actor is responsible for what in relation to MMIWG to mitigate the lack of explicit accountability in a system with overlapping jurisdiction. In addition, a major part of articulating clear system responsibilities is investing in system alignment.

#### **A) Identify MMIWG Priorities within Existing Divisions**

Rather than relying on time-limited task forces that focus solely on MMIWG, it is important to articulate how various divisions and departments have responsibilities in relation to MMIWG in order to advance justice in this area. For example, investigations could be improved if all communities in Alaska had access to a 911 emergency service system. This is not only an issue in relation to MMIWG, but it would contribute greatly to addressing the issue.

#### **B) Align Data Protocols across Agencies**

Policies and protocols across agencies should be synchronized for missing persons reporting and alerts. For example, agreed upon protocols for lines of contact, inquiry, and search coordination should be outlined clearly for communities. There should be required response time frames from prosecution on cases so that actionable steps forward are being made and communicated to families. Homicide cases should provide case updates and reporting directly to family members. Before cases are closed, immediate family members should be informed and consulted on all leads taken and have their questions met to their satisfaction.



Family members should have access to copies of case information with points of available contact for questions. Case outcomes, including sentencing, should be available information for MMIWG. Lastly, FOIA processes must be made to serve the public citizens. This includes the usability of the requests and removing barriers and fiscal burdens from those requesting.

### **C) State and Department Budgets Should Reflect Priorities**

State and department budgets need to reflect a serious dedication to addressing MMIWG. Long term maintenance and investment of quality data collection needs to be accounted for. This is not a recommendation of increased funding necessarily. Instead, it is a recommendation to re-prioritize and match budgets to stated system priorities. Similarly, before departments are expanded, there should be a review of how existing positions are held responsible for addressing MMIWG in ways that are already in their purview.

## **7**

### **Provide Case Support for Families and Communities**

Direct services to families of MMIWG should be provided. This could include case advocacy; having a person be a point of contact for communication between family and agencies, legal advocates, and investigation coordination. Behavioral health services should be accessible, coordinated, and provided without cost.

Communities should also have resources for case management, points of contact, coordinators and resource advocates at the community level. Other forms of community support can include vigils, memorials, talking circles, search parties, awareness raising, healing events and gatherings, arts, and marches. All of these should be done with respect and consideration of MMIWG families. Specific names and cases should only be brought forward by request and/or permission of MMIWG families. Cultural protocols and ceremonies should be determined and guided by local community leaders. Finally, strength-based approaches to creating solutions and raising awareness should be utilized. Indigenous ways of knowing and healing are central to sustainable pathways forward.

# Conclusions

We take a deep breath, close our eyes, and exhale. One breath at a time, we put life ways into existence. We honor and remember always the lives and legacies of love from each missing and murdered Indigenous womxn and girl. As we conclude this report, we remind ourselves of the genealogies of strength -- that we enter this place because we carry responsibility to our relationships, to our ancestors past and future. This report is one tool we have created so our peoples are equipped to walk towards and demand justice for every stolen loved one. Some of this work is dismantling systems of oppression that perpetuate violence. In balance to that work is the healing and creating that we put forward for future generations. We plant seeds of resistance through lives of health and wellness. Certainly, the complexities and challenges are ever present; but looking forward we remember the vision of living our power to the fullest, in safety, while thriving. We are calling for this vision of justice to come forward in the same way we call to our relatives in an effort to ensure they can rest in peace and with memory eternal.



## References

1. Lucchesi, A., & Echo-Hawk, A. (2018). Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women & Girls: A snapshot of data from 71 urban cities in the United States.
2. Urban Indian Health Institute. (2019). MMIWG: We Demand More, A corrected research study of missing and murdered Indigenous women & girls in Washington State. <https://www.uihi.org/resources/mmiwg-we-demand-more/>
3. Demarban, Alex, and Kyle Hopkins. “‘Enough Is Enough’: Can William Barr Fix Alaska's Rural Sexual Violence Crisis?” ProPublica, Anchorage Daily News, 30 May 2019, 11:13 am, [www.propublica.org/article/alaska-law-enforcement-attorney-general-william-barr](http://www.propublica.org/article/alaska-law-enforcement-attorney-general-william-barr).
4. ACLU Files Suit to Help End Racial Bias in Sexual Assault Investigations in Nome, Alaska.” American Civil Liberties Union, [www.aclu.org/press-releases/aclu-files-suit-help-end-racial-bias-sexual-assault-investigations-nome-alaska](http://www.aclu.org/press-releases/aclu-files-suit-help-end-racial-bias-sexual-assault-investigations-nome-alaska).
5. Norris, Tina, et al. “The American Indian and Alaska Native Population: 2010.” US Census Bureau, Jan. 2012, [www.census.gov/history/pdf/c2010br-10.pdf](http://www.census.gov/history/pdf/c2010br-10.pdf).
6. Murphy, Laura T. “Labor and Sex Trafficking Among Homeless Youth This Study Provides a Detailed Account of Labor and Sexual Exploitation Experienced by Homeless Youth in Covenant House’s Care in Ten Cities. A Ten-City Study Executive Summary.” Covenanthouse, 2016, [www.covenanthouse.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/Loyola%20Multi-City%20Executive%20Summary%20FINAL.pdf](http://www.covenanthouse.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/Loyola%20Multi-City%20Executive%20Summary%20FINAL.pdf).
7. Minemyer, Derek. “Homeless Individuals Concerned for Safety Following Recent Murders in Anchorage.” <https://www.alaskasnewssource.com>, 18 Oct. 2019, 7:08 PM, [www.alaskasnewssource.com/content/news/Homeless-individuals-expressing-safety-concerns-following-recent-murders-563422841.html](http://www.alaskasnewssource.com/content/news/Homeless-individuals-expressing-safety-concerns-following-recent-murders-563422841.html).
8. Division of Public Health, SOA. “Frequently Asked Questions, Health and Social Services.” State of Alaska, 2019, [dhss.alaska.gov/dph/MedicalExaminer/Pages/faqs.aspx](http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/MedicalExaminer/Pages/faqs.aspx).
9. Horwitz, Sari. “In Remote Villages, Little Protection for Alaska Natives.” The Washington Post, WP Company, 2 Aug. 2014, [www.washingtonpost.com/sf/national/2014/08/02/in-rural-villages-%E2%80%8A-little-protection%E2%80%8A-for-alaska-natives/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/national/2014/08/02/in-rural-villages-%E2%80%8A-little-protection%E2%80%8A-for-alaska-natives/).
10. Estus, Joaqlin. “Lawsuit Says City of Nome Ignored Sexual Assaults against Alaska Native Women.” IndianCountryToday.com, 24 Feb. 2020, [indiancountrytoday.com/news/lawsuit-says-city-of-nome-ignored-sexual-assaults-against-alaska-native-women-Lun7EhFg8Uuob-si1uNslw](http://indiancountrytoday.com/news/lawsuit-says-city-of-nome-ignored-sexual-assaults-against-alaska-native-women-Lun7EhFg8Uuob-si1uNslw).
11. B.J. Spamer; Danielle Weiss; Charles Heurich, "Solving the Missing Indigenous Person Data Crisis: NamUs 2.0," July 12, 2019, [nij.ojp.gov: https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/solving-missing-indigenous-person-data-crisis-namus-20](https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/solving-missing-indigenous-person-data-crisis-namus-20)