

Written Testimony of

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State of Montana

Before the United States House of Representatives

Subcommittee on Crime and Federal Government Surveillance of the Committee on the
Judiciary

“Missing and Murdered Indigenous People: Strengthening Public Safety in Tribal Communities”

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Chairman Biggs, Ranking Member McBath, Members of the Subcommittee:

As the Attorney General of Montana and a former county prosecutor in Indian Country, I am grateful for the committee’s attention to the missing and murdered Indigenous persons (MMIP) crisis. We are no stranger to it in Montana as missing Indigenous persons accounted for 31 percent of our reported missing persons cases last year but make up far less – roughly six percent¹ – of our population. Montana is also home to eight federally recognized tribes, which creates challenging jurisdictional issues for us as our state battles this issue.

I’ll start, today, by providing you with some statistics that helped me get a clear picture of the problem when I was first briefed on the issue as Attorney General. Some of what I say might surprise you. It was a surprise to me.

It’s a common misconception that only women are going missing. In 2025, 48 percent of all people reported missing in Montana were male and 52 percent were female. In the Indigenous community, the data starts to skew, but there is still a large percentage of males that are reported missing. Last year, 40 percent of the Indigenous persons that went missing were males. Our current messaging that it’s only a problem for women

¹ *U.S. Census QuickFacts — Montana*. (n.d.). U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Montana. Retrieved September 10, 2026, from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/MT/PST045225>

leaves a large population of men and boys effectively ignored and left out of the conversation².

I was also surprised, and encouraged, to find out that the vast majority of those who go missing statewide and in Indigenous communities are found, come home, or are otherwise located. In fact, last year, our clearance rate in Montana was 99 percent, and five people reported missing that year remain missing.

While a 99 percent clearance rate is certainly welcomed news, there are still 41 Indigenous persons missing today in Montana, 27 of whom have been missing for more than a year³. We're doing what we can as a state and leading the way for the rest of the country. At the Montana Department of Justice, we have a missing persons database that is updated in real time that highlights Indigenous persons cases at the press of a button. We recently launched a public service announcement on TV and radio to raise awareness and remind Montanans to look at the faces in our database to help us bring the missing home. My agency also administers the Montana Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons Advisory Council, and the state legislature recently enabled the group to receive donations that will help them fund projects to end the crisis. Earlier this year, the Council launched a specialty license plate Montanans can purchase when they register their car to help fund those projects.

The Council also recommended, and the 2025 Montana Legislature passed a resolution urging Congress to fully fund public safety and law enforcement in Indian Country⁴. Which brings me to why I am here today: let's work together to solve this problem.

As Attorney General, my hands are tied. I have no jurisdiction on tribal land. The Montana Legislature can pass all the bills they want, but without action from Congress, we will never see meaningful change. You have the power to give tribes the authority they need by removing unnecessary and confusing jurisdictional red tape. You can also give states some authority to help.

My agents and law enforcement officers can't do anything on tribal lands unless they are asked by a federal agency. That results in wasted time and wasted resources in some cases. For example, the Montana Department of Justice performs Sexual and Violent Offender Registry compliance checks in the interest of public safety. On tribal

² Lamping, J. (2026). *Montana Missing & Murdered Indigenous Persons Advisory Council report (July 2024–June 2026)*. Montana Department of Justice. <https://dojmt.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/STRIC-Report-2026-semi-final-1.pdf>

³ *Montana Missing Persons Search*. (2026, September 10). Montana Missing Persons Search Indigenous Persons.

<https://app.dojmt.gov/apps/missingPersonDatabase/results.php?filter=indigenous>

⁴ Bill Text: Mt hj1 | 2025 | regular session | introduced | legiscan. (n.d.).

<https://legiscan.com/MT/text/HJ1/id/3033907/Montana-2025-HJ1-Introduced.pdf>

land, we have no jurisdiction and are required to go in with the U.S. Marshals rather than simply having our own sworn officers do the check. That's unnecessary red tape in the way of our efforts to deter repeat offenders and protect our citizens.

While we still have a long way to go, we are making progress. Recently, one of my Division of Criminal Investigations agents was cross deputized federally and will have the authority to lend more immediate support to help solve murders and find missing persons on reservations across the state on a case-by-case basis.

I am also grateful to the Trump Administration for opening a Federal Bureau of Investigations field office in Billings, Montana, which is a sign they are dedicating more resources to help address violent crime cases and cases that occur on tribal lands.

Although reservations are sovereign nations exempt from Montana's standard reporting requirements, we have established agreements with seven of our eight reservations. These partnerships improve missing persons reporting so we can find people and bring them home quickly.

The missing and murdered Indigenous persons crisis has been plaguing our tribal communities for generations. I'm thankful to the Trump Administration for taking the issue seriously, and to this committee for bringing this discussion to the table today as you continue to explore ways Congress can help solve the problem

I look forward to answering any questions you may have for me.