
SUBSTITUTE HOUSE BILL 1177

State of Washington

68th Legislature

2023 Regular Session

By House Community Safety, Justice, & Reentry (originally sponsored by Representatives Lekanoff, Orwall, Reed, Berry, Ramel, Callan, Doglio, Timmons, Walsh, Reeves, Chopp, Duerr, Gregerson, Taylor, Wylie, Stonier, Pollet, Davis, Kloba, and Ormsby; by request of Attorney General)

1 AN ACT Relating to a missing and murdered indigenous women and
2 people cold case investigations unit; adding a new section to chapter
3 43.10 RCW; and creating a new section.

4 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

5 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** FINDINGS. The legislature finds that:

6 (1) American Indian and Alaska Native women experience violence
7 at much higher rates than the national average. A recent federal
8 study reported that Native American women are murdered at rates
9 greater than 10 times the national average. Many of these crimes,
10 however, are often unsolved or even unreported because there are also
11 very high rates of disappearance for Native American women;

12 (2) The national center for disease control reports that homicide
13 is the sixth-leading cause of death for indigenous women and girls
14 and the third-leading cause of death for indigenous men;

15 (3) The legislature established the Washington state missing and
16 murdered indigenous women and people task force in the attorney
17 general's office to address the crisis, and in 2022 the task force
18 unanimously recommended the legislature establish and fully fund a
19 cold case investigations unit in the attorney general's office that
20 can offer assistance to law enforcement agencies with jurisdiction

1 over unsolved cold cases involving missing and murdered indigenous
2 women and people;

3 (4) Cold cases vary in scope, but may include unsolved homicides,
4 sexual offenses, sexually motivated offenses, missing persons, and
5 cases of unidentified remains;

6 (5) Cold cases may include cases in which the investigating
7 agency is not actively working the case and has suspended the
8 investigation;

9 (6) Most law enforcement agencies in Washington state do not have
10 dedicated cold case units, and can benefit from assistance;

11 (7) When cases go cold, family members of native and indigenous
12 women and girls often continue to search for their loved one using
13 their own resources;

14 (8) The attorney general's office and Washington state patrol
15 have dedicated significant time and resources towards working with
16 families of missing and murdered indigenous women and people to build
17 trust and engagement;

18 (9) The homicide investigation tracking system (HITS) program
19 within the attorney general's office tracks and investigates
20 homicides and rapes. HITS partners with Washington law enforcement
21 agencies to collect, analyze, link, and then provide law enforcement
22 with information that will facilitate the resolution of violent
23 crimes and speed the apprehension and prosecution of violent
24 criminals. Typically, in every calendar year, HITS will respond to
25 almost 800 requests for assistance or information. The investigators
26 who work in HITS also provide expertise to the local and national
27 jurisdictions on homicide and rape investigations;

28 (10) A missing and murdered indigenous women and people cold case
29 unit should use a culturally attuned, trauma-informed, and family and
30 victim-centered approach in assisting local law enforcement agencies;
31 and

32 (11) A missing and murdered indigenous women and people cold case
33 investigation unit will expand resources available to law
34 enforcement, coroners, and other agencies.

35 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** A new section is added to chapter 43.10
36 RCW to read as follows:

37 CREATION. (1) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated
38 for this specific purpose, there is hereby created a missing and
39 murdered indigenous women and people cold case investigations

1 assistance unit within the office of the attorney general for the
2 purpose of assisting federal, municipal, county, and tribal law
3 enforcement agencies to solve cold cases involving missing and
4 murdered indigenous women and people.

5 (2) The missing and murdered indigenous women and people cold
6 case investigations assistance unit may proactively offer assistance
7 to the law enforcement agency with primary jurisdiction over a
8 missing or murdered indigenous women or person cold case. The missing
9 and murdered indigenous women and people cold case investigations
10 assistance unit shall not investigate or assist with a criminal
11 investigation except at the request of the law enforcement agency
12 with primary jurisdiction over the case, in which case the assistance
13 shall be limited to the content of such request.

14 (3) The missing and murdered indigenous women and people cold
15 case investigations assistance unit shall prioritize assistance to
16 jurisdictions that do not have sufficient resources to investigate
17 cold cases.

18 (4) The missing and murdered indigenous women and people cold
19 case investigations assistance unit shall include an advocate or case
20 navigator.

21 (5) Nothing in this section alters the attorney general's
22 concurrent authority to investigate and prosecute crimes.

--- END ---