



# VOICES, LANGUAGES AND TEACHINGS

*Increasing Safety For Alaska Native Women and Villages*



## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR UPDATE

*Tami Truett Jerue*

Hello! It has been a while since our last newsletter and so much has happened. We are still in pandemic operational mode, which continues to prevent the AKNWRC from getting out to villages for onsite technical assistance (TA). We hope that we will be able to travel and provide this valuable training in villages again soon. If any communities are interested in planning for onsite training and technical assistance, please reach out to [Janelle.chapin@aknwrc.org](mailto:Janelle.chapin@aknwrc.org).

There are several important legislations to be watching at the moment. Please look at our policy updates in this addition of Voices, Languages and Teachings: Increasing Safety for Alaska Native Women and Villages newsletter. There have been many government consultations on important issues such as MMIWG, Boarding Schools, Law enforcement, domestic violence, and office of victims of crime to name a few. The American Rescue Act has helped several Tribes in the State of Alaska and around the nation to work with victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and other crimes that have been impacted by COVID 19. The AKNWRC was awarded grant funds through this Act to help in the areas of domestic and sexual violence in the State in various ways. The Office of Violence Against Women (OVW) will be holding its annual Alaska Grantee meeting in March of 2022 virtually. OVW grantees should have received the invitation regarding this meeting.

The AKNWRC plans to increase our staffing to meet the needs of Tribal Grantees in Alaska under Family Violence and Services Act (FVPSA), Office of Victim of Crime Tribal Set Aside Grants (OVC) and OVW. We are happy to reconnect with you all and please if you or anyone needs information please reach out. We are here to help.

**To contact us:**

Main office phone number: (907) 328-3990

Main email: [info@aknwrc.org](mailto:info@aknwrc.org)

**Be sure to follow us!**

<https://www.facebook.com/aknwrc>

<https://www.instagram.com/aknwrc/>

<https://twitter.com/aknwrc>

[www.aknwrc.org](http://www.aknwrc.org)

Join our **mailing list** at <https://bit.ly/2XjV6Dr>

Important Legislation Updates

*See pages 3 & 5.*

New Staff Spotlights

*See page 10.*

Follow us on social media!

# ALASKA STATE POLICY WATCH

*Debra O'Gara*

Alaska legislature is in full swing with several hundred bills filed. We are monitoring several and I will highlight five.

**Missing/Murdered Indigenous Women Bill**, which is House Bill (HB) 38 and Senate Bill (SB) 211. It was first filed in 2019 and again in 2021 by Rep. Zulkosky.

If passed, this bill would require minimum standards and background checks for law enforcement in employment and training. It would also establish a Department of Public Safety liaison for MMIW with state law enforcement. There have been no hearings on this bill yet this session. A similar bill has just been introduced by Senator Olson, SB 211, on February 22, 2022, also entitled Missing/ Murdered Indigenous Women. This new bill, if passed, would also establish a MMIWG2S review commission and require reporting on investigations. There have not yet been any hearings scheduled.

**State Recognition of Tribes**, which is HB 123 and SB 108

HB 123 and SB 108 are companion bill establishing state recognition for the 229 Alaska Native tribes. There appears to be broad bi-partisan support and there have been a few hearings so far. These bills, if passed, will not alter the status of any tribes but will simply establish a law that the State of Alaska recognizes the federal recognition status of tribes.



**Village Public Safety Officer Grants**, which is SB 108. This bill was sponsored by Senator Olson and Gray-Jackson. This bill has already had four hearings, and another is scheduled for February 28.

If passed into law, there would be required a background investigation for VPSO applicants.

If you want additional information on any of these bills or want to watch past or future hearings, you can go to <http://akleg.gov/index.php>.

On December 14, 2021, Governor Dunleavy launched a public safety focused campaign that he calls the People First Initiative. There are five significant parts to this campaign -- Domestic violence and sexual assault; Missing & Murdered Indigenous Persons; Human/sex trafficking; Foster care; and Homelessness. To assist with implementing these initiatives, the administration has established four additional councils for each of these areas (the State already has the Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (CDVSA)) and actively recruited applications from around the state for appointments to these councils. The appoints are expected to be announced in early March.

To support the People First Initiative, the Governor submitted three new bills to the legislature containing a mixture of statutory amendments, budget requests and proposed additions for staffing and administrative support. Another important piece is the purchase of a new statewide database and management system.

While there are many important and positive elements contained in the Governor's initiative, specifically that there is a public safety concern in Alaska that needs to be addressed. However, the administration fails to recognize the criminal justice system is broken. The initiative shows no concern to the failure of prosecution of crimes against Alaska Native victims or the consistent lack of law enforcement in rural communities. And, the Governor, during his February 11, 2022 press conference refused to support or even acknowledge that the proposed Alaska Tribal Public Safety Empowerment provision, contained in the pending VAWA reauthorization, would allow the tribes to exercise special criminal prosecution for domestic violence in tribal courts.

# FEDERAL POLICY WATCH

*Michelle Demmert*

We are in the second year of the two-year federal legislative cycle. The House was very busy in the first year of the cycle passing both Reauthorization of the Violence Against Women's Act (VAWA) and the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA), and the Senate was more focused on the President's infrastructure projects, and other COVID related bills. While Tribes were well represented in these bills, they focused on funding issues and not changes in the law. In this second year of the legislative cycle, we have some very positive news to report.

On March 10, 2022, the Senate overwhelming, in a vote of 68 to 31, passed the 2022 Consolidated Appropriations Act that includes the bipartisan Violence Against Women's Reauthorization Act (VAWA), authored by Senators Dianne Feinstein (D-California), Joni Ernst (R-Iowa), Dick Durbin (D-Ill.) and Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska). We are filled with gratitude for the work of Senator Murkowski and her staff for hearing the needs of survivors and working towards meaningful solutions.

The new law reauthorizes the 2013 provisions to prosecute non-native domestic violence perpetrators and expands prosecution of these defendants to include obstruction of justice-type crimes, sexual assault crimes, sex trafficking and stalking; and creates pilot project for up to five Alaska Tribes per year (S.3623). The territorial jurisdiction is equivalent to the Census area of a village.



“

*The new law reauthorizes the 2013 provisions to prosecute non-native domestic violence perpetrators...*

Key improvements include:

- Expands definition of domestic violence to include children who witness the crime.
- Provides a specific finding for Alaska and jurisdictional challenges because of restrictive land settlement, lack of law enforcement and geographic immensity.
- Expands Tribal Access Program (TAP) to tribes without law enforcement and additional funding.
- Expands enforcement of tribal protection orders specifically in Alaska with land issues.
- Reimbursement Provisions: for exercising the criminal special jurisdiction.

The VAWA primarily focuses on the justice system and enforcement issues.

**Family Violence Prevention and Services Improvement Act (FVPSA) of 2021**, which is H.R. 2119, passed November 2021. No Senate vote yet on S. 1275.

This FVPSA reauthorization bill provides critical support for shelters, coalitions, training and technical assistance centers, children's services, emergency response hotlines, and prevention initiatives.

The FVPSA bills would expand grant programs and make many needed improvements so that more survivors have access to support and safety, including:

- Increasing the overall funding authorization level to address very low per-program funding levels and provide access to FVPSA funds for more tribes and programs not currently funded. The funding percentage or allocation for tribes, comes right off the top of the yearly appropriation before the remaining funds are distributed according to the remaining formula.
- Authorizing recognition and meaningful funding for tribal coalitions to provide Indian tribes and tribal organizations with technical assistance and training on developing responses to domestic violence.
- Authorizing recognition and permanent funding for the currently funded Alaska Native Women's Resource Center.

- Authorizing recognition and permanent funding for the currently funded StrongHearts Native Helpline to serve as the national Indian domestic violence hotline.

To amend the Act of June 18, 1934, to reaffirm the authority of the Secretary of the Interior to take land into trust for Indian Tribes, and for other purposes, which is H.R. 4352 and S. 1901. The House passed the bill December 2021. No action in the Senate.

This Act reauthorizes the authority for the Secretary of Interior to take land into trust. Need to get this fix for Alaska land into trust process, so there is a regularly accepted legislative process.

### **Not Invisible Act of 2019—Passed legislation**

The Not Invisible Act, sponsored by Secretary Deb Haaland when she served in Congress, mandates the creation of a commission that includes representatives of Tribal, state, and local law enforcement; Tribal judges; health care and mental health practitioners with experience working with Indian survivors of trafficking and sexual assault; urban Indian organizations focused on violence against women and children; Indian survivors of human trafficking; and family members of missing and murdered Indian people. This bill aims at addressing the crisis of missing, murdered, and trafficked Native people by engaging law enforcement, tribal leaders, federal partners, and service providers and improving coordination across federal agencies. This bipartisan bill establishes an advisory committee of local, tribal, and federal stakeholders to make recommendations to the Department of Interior and Department of Justice on best practices to combat the epidemic of disappearances, homicide, violent crime and trafficking of Native Americans and Alaska Natives. The Departments of Justice and the Interior announced next steps in the implementation of the Not Invisible Act, including the publication of a solicitation for nominations of non-federal members to join a Joint Commission on reducing violent crime against American Indians and Alaska Natives to address the long-standing missing and murdered indigenous persons crisis. The agencies are also moving forward with nation-to-nation conduct consultations with Tribal leaders related to the Commission and implementation of the Act.

The commission must be composed of at least 28 federal and non-federal members who represent diverse experiences, backgrounds, and geography, and who are able to provide balanced points of view about the duties of the commission. The commission will hold hearings, take testimony, and receive evidence to develop recommendations for the federal government to combat violent crime against Indians and within Indian lands. Nominations closed September 20, 2021 and no updates have been announced.

In our communities, far too often someone goes missing and we have no tribally controlled way to alert the community other than word of mouth, social media. The Alaska Native Women's Resource Center wants to share with tribes and communities, effective alert systems that are available to Tribal governments and funding possibilities for start-up costs.

Please join the Alaska Native Women's Resource Center and partners in a presentation on the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS) which is a free internet-based tool that tribal officials can use to issue public alerts and warnings, such as Missing Person alerts, health safety alerts related to COVID, or other priorities, to your village. IPAWS allows tribes the capability to deliver a single alert simultaneously through multiple communication pathways, reaching as many people as possible to save lives and protect property.

## Community Action Awareness Resources: Emergency Alert Systems for Tribal Governments on MMIW

When: April 1, 2022 (11:00 am-12:30 pm AKST)

Who: Tribal leadership and tribal advocates

What: A presentation on the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS) which is a free internet-based tool that tribal officials can use to issue public alerts and warnings, such as Missing Person alerts or Health Safety alerts related to COVID or other priorities.

To register: [bit.ly/3CskQ35](https://bit.ly/3CskQ35)

For more information, please contact  
Michelle Demmert at [michelle.demmert@aknwrc.org](mailto:michelle.demmert@aknwrc.org)



# TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE UPDATE

*Janelle Chapin*

It has been a long two years being unable to provide any technical assistance in person due to the pandemic. AKNWRC is hoping we will start being able to deliver our technical assistance in person. As long Covid numbers continue to allow for safe gathering we will start planning for those during the next couple of months. We will continue to include a backup plan to go virtual for every on site training if the numbers reach unsafe levels in the region prior to the gathering. We want to be able to provide valuable on-site training to tribes in Alaska again but only if it can be done safely.

We know that many of our tribes would prefer to safely gather in person. We will make every attempt to honor that as we move forward with technical assistance plans for the year. This will mean looking for larger meeting spaces and more ventilation when meeting.

There has been an increase in funding for a lot of our tribes from many different funding sources recently. We realize a lot of tribes often utilize many different funding sources to run their domestic violence and sexual assault programs. Therefore, our team will work to include as many different community partners as possible to make it valuable for your tribe. Our technical assistance team will be growing in the next few months to better service all your growing tribal needs.

If your tribe is interested in technical assistance please feel free to reach out to Janelle Chapin at [Janelle.chapin@aknwrc.org](mailto:Janelle.chapin@aknwrc.org).



“

*If your tribe is interested in technical assistance please feel free to reach out to Janelle Chapin at [Janelle.chapin@aknwrc.org](mailto:Janelle.chapin@aknwrc.org)*

# NEW STAFF SPOTLIGHT

## *Violet Sensmeier*

Hi Friends! My name is Aandayeen, my English name is Violet Sensmeier. I was born and raised in Southeast, Alaska. I am Tlingit from my Father's side, Raymond Sensmeier. I grew up in Yakutat, the northernmost village in the panhandle. I am Koyukon Athabascan from my Mother's side, Eva Olin Sensmeier. I grew up going to visit my Grandmother in Galena, Lillian Olin in the summers. She taught me to sew and bead and bake bread. I am a proud mother of three beautiful children. One is a full time student at UAA, the other two are in kindergarten and second grade and keep me on my toes.

I am so honored to be working with AKNWRC as a program specialist under OVC. I feel I have truly come full circle in my own journey. As a domestic violence survivor, I understand the important work that needs to be done in our state and across Indian Country. I am very humbled to be working amongst such a dynamic hard working team here at AKNWRC. I look forward to working with the tribes all across Alaska. Baasee'

## UPCOMING DATES

March 31st application deadline for the Division of Family Violence Prevention and Services (FVPSA program) for non-competitive funding to Tribes.

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/fysb/grant-funding/fvpsa-standing-notice-funding-opportunity-tribes-tribalorganizations>



“

*I am humbled to be working amongst such a dynamic hard working team here at AKNWRC*

*FVPSA Grant Deadline*

*NCAI  
Mid-Year*

June 12-16, 2022 in Anchorage, Alaska.

<https://www.ncai.org/events/2022/06/12/2022-mid-year-conference>

*OVW Grant  
Deadline*

OVW's FY 2022 Sexual Assault Services Culturally Specific Program Deadline is April 27th, 2022 11:59 PM ET.

<https://www.justice.gov/ovw/page/file/1481196/download>

*MMIW Week  
of Action*

**2022 NATIONAL WEEK  
OF ACTION FOR MMIW**  
Schedule of Events

The National Partners Work Group on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) and the MMIW Family Advisors are organizing a National Week of Action (April 29-May 5, 2022) to call the nation and the world to action in honor of missing and murdered Indigenous women. Take action by participating in these virtual events and organizing additional actions in your communities on and around May 5th. Join us in saying 'enough is enough'—not one more stolen sister.

- ▶ **Friday, April 29, 2022**
  - ▶ Launch of the National Week, Traditional Opening, 12 p.m. MST
  - ▶ A National Briefing on the Crisis of MMIW, 1 p.m. MST, hosted by NIWRC
- ▶ **Monday, May 2, 2022**
  - ▶ Webinar hosted by Pouhana 'O Nā Wahine, 1 p.m. MST
- ▶ **Tuesday, May 3, 2022**
  - ▶ Webinar hosted by the Alaska Native Women's Resource Center, 1 p.m. MST
- ▶ **Wednesday, May 4, 2022**
  - ▶ Webinar hosted by Indian Law Resource Center, 11 a.m. MST
  - ▶ Running for Justice, May 4-8: A National Virtual Run hosted by Rising Hearts
- ▶ **Thursday, May 5, 2022**
  - ▶ #MMIWActionNow Twitter Storm, 10-10:30 a.m. MST
  - ▶ #MMIWActionNow Twitter Chat, 12-1 p.m. MST
  - ▶ Webinar: Uplifting the Voices of MMIW Survivor Families, 1 p.m. MST, hosted by NIWRC



Register for the National Week at  
[niwrc.org/mmiwnatlweek22](http://niwrc.org/mmiwnatlweek22)

[fb.com/niwrc](https://www.facebook.com/niwrc) [@niwrc](https://twitter.com/niwrc) [niwrc](https://www.instagram.com/niwrc)