

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples

A Policy for Justice, Safety, and Healing

Meda DeWitt, Independent and Nonpartisan Candidate for Governor | August 2026

Our Commitment

Every Alaskan deserves to come home, and every family deserves a state that searches, investigates, prosecutes, and heals alongside them. As a Tlingit traditional healer, I have sat with families whose loved ones were taken, and I have seen how often state systems failed them at every step: the underreporting, the jurisdictional confusion among state, federal, and Tribal authorities, and the absence of culturally appropriate victim services. We will treat the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples as the emergency it is, with real coordination, real data, real prosecutions, and families kept at the center. The healing work and the law enforcement work must run together.

The Crisis by the Numbers

Alaska has the fourth-highest number of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls cases in the nation, with documented cases in Anchorage, Bethel, Fairbanks, Juneau, Ketchikan, Sitka, and Utqiagvik (Urban Indian Health Institute, 2018). More than four in five American Indian and Alaska Native women, 84.3 percent, have experienced violence in their lifetime, and 56.1 percent have experienced sexual violence (Rosay, 2016). Murder is the third leading cause of death for Indigenous women aged 10 to 24, and on some Tribal lands the murder rate runs up to ten times the national average.

The data gap is itself part of the crisis. In 2016, the National Crime Information Center logged 5,712 cases of missing American Indian and Alaska Native women and girls, while the federal NamUs database recorded only 116, and 95 percent of cases identified by the Urban Indian Health Institute received no mainstream media coverage (Urban Indian Health Institute, 2018). Behind every number is a mother, a daughter, a son, an auntie, an Elder, and a community carrying grief that compounds when the state looks away. Two-Spirit and LGBTQ+ Indigenous relatives face elevated victimization and lower reporting rates, and they belong by name in every part of our response (James et al., 2016).

Where Alaska Stands Today

Alaska Native advocates, families, and organizations such as the MMIWG2S Alaska Working Group and the Alaska Native Women's Resource Center won real ground over the past five years, and we honor that work. The state now funds four full-time MMIP investigators within the Department of Public Safety, a dedicated MMIP Assistant Attorney General, and a statewide MMIP Review Commission, and Senate Bill 151 took effect January 1, 2025, requiring missing

MEDA FOR ALASKA: Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples

A Policy for Justice, Safety, and Healing

persons reports to be filed with the national NamUs database within 60 days (Alaska Department of Public Safety, 2026; S.B. 151, 2024).

That foundation is real, and it is not enough. Four investigators serve a state where hundreds of cases remain unresolved. A 60-day window for a national database entry is 60 days a family waits. The Review Commission meets behind closed doors. Villages still lack any local law enforcement presence, the 911 system remains outdated in much of rural Alaska, and prevention, victim services, and healing remain chronically underfunded. Our administration will build on what advocates won and take it to scale.

What We Will Do

1. Investigation and Justice

- **Expand the MMIP investigative unit** within the Department of Public Safety with mandatory Tribal coordination, regional positions stationed in hub communities rather than concentrated in Anchorage, and stable state funding that ends reliance on year-to-year federal grants.
- **Grow MMIP prosecution capacity** in the Department of Law beyond a single Assistant Attorney General, so that solved cases become prosecuted cases.
- **Partner with the FBI Anchorage Field Office** on systematic cold-case review, forensic genealogy, and DNA collection and processing.
- **Clear the backlog of untested sexual assault kits** on a published timeline, with public reporting that disaggregates outcomes.

2. Rapid Response: The First 72 Hours

- **Adopt a statewide missing persons response protocol**, co-developed with Tribes, that begins the moment a report is made. There is no 24-hour waiting period in Alaska law, and no officer, dispatcher, or trooper will be permitted to invent one.
- **Assign a trained family liaison from day one** of every MMIP case, so that no family is left doing a search alone, organizing their own volunteers, or begging for updates.
- **Shorten the NamUs entry requirement** from 60 days to 30 days, with same-week entry as the operational standard.

3. Data Systems That Talk to Each Other

- **Integrate state, federal, and Tribal data systems** so that a report made in a village reaches NCIC, NamUs, and Tribal authorities without a family retelling their story to five agencies.
- **Publish a real-time public MMIP dashboard** with case counts, status, and regional breakdowns, replacing quarterly snapshots with standing transparency.
- **Name Two-Spirit and LGBTQ+ Indigenous Alaskans** explicitly in data collection, family advocacy services, and investigative protocols, so no relative is erased by a form.

MEDA FOR ALASKA: Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples

A Policy for Justice, Safety, and Healing

- **Align state practice with Indigenous Data Sovereignty** and the CARE Principles, so Tribes govern data about their own citizens (Carroll et al., 2020).

4. Public Safety in Every Community

- **Rebuild the Village Public Safety Officer program** with competitive pay, housing, equipment, career pathways, and the same defined-benefit pension restoration our teachers and troopers need. The program has been funded to fail; we will fund it to succeed, and it will be in our first budget.
- **Restore trooper recruitment and retention** so posts serving rural Alaska are staffed by officers who stay long enough to know the communities they serve.
- **Upgrade the 911 system** statewide, because a call for help should not depend on a zip code.

5. Tribal Sovereignty and Co-Management of Justice

- **Support Tribal court jurisdiction** under the Violence Against Women Act reauthorization framework, including the Alaska pilot for special Tribal criminal jurisdiction, and negotiate state-Tribal law enforcement compacts and cross-deputization agreements.
- **Implement Savanna's Act and the Not Invisible Act** fully at the state level, including law enforcement protocols, Tribal consultation, and reporting.
- **Create non-competitive grant funding for Tribes** for public safety, victim services, and search and rescue capacity, so small communities are not forced to out-compete each other for survival.

6. Prevention and Root Causes

- **Fund Indigenous-led prevention programs** that address the conditions violence grows from: economic precarity, addiction, intimate partner violence, and trafficking.
- **Expand domestic violence and sexual assault programs** with priority funding for rural and Tribal communities, including culturally grounded and LGBTQ+ affirming shelter, advocacy, and crisis response.
- **Invest in community violence intervention** that stops harm before it starts and keeps young people out of the pipeline.

7. Protecting Young People from Trafficking

Trafficking is where the MMIP crisis so often begins, and our young people are the target. When researchers from Loyola University's Modern Slavery Research Project studied homeless youth in ten cities, Anchorage had the highest reported prevalence of trafficking: 28 percent of young people surveyed at Covenant House Alaska were survivors, compared to 19 percent nationally (Murphy, 2017). Law enforcement has warned for over a decade that rural Alaska Native girls arriving in Anchorage are lured with promises of housing and security. The pattern is predictable, which means it is preventable. Exploitation follows instability: homelessness, aging

MEDA FOR ALASKA: Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples

A Policy for Justice, Safety, and Healing

out of foster care, running from placements, and disconnection from family and culture. As an ICWA Qualified Expert Witness, I have seen how the child welfare system can either be a shield for our young people or a pipeline into harm. We choose the shield.

- **Treat housing as prevention.** A young person with a safe place to sleep is far harder to exploit. We will expand youth shelter capacity, host homes, and transitional housing in hub communities, and fund aging-out supports so no young person leaves foster care into homelessness.
- **Open safe routes into adulthood through the RISE program.** Exploitation follows precarity, and opportunity is protection. RISE funds vocational pathways so rural youth have real routes into stewardship, fisheries, clean energy, healthcare, and construction careers without leaving home, and we will connect aging-out foster youth and young survivors directly to those pathways, with mentorship and wraparound support through the transition.
- **Make schools protective infrastructure.** We will fund universal school meals and keep food programs running year-round, using school greenhouses, gardens, and summer youth programming so no child's nutrition depends on the calendar. A fed child in structured, supervised activity with trusted adults is a child far harder to isolate and exploit.
- **Bring healthcare to where children are through expanded Medicaid.** We will protect Medicaid expansion and grow school-based Medicaid services so districts can deliver behavioral health, counseling, and preventive care on site, easing the load on families and ensuring every child is seen regularly by caring adults trained to notice when something is wrong.
- **Respond immediately when a young person goes missing from care.** Every disappearance from a foster placement, group home, or shelter triggers same-day law enforcement notification, entry into national databases, and notification of the child's Tribe for Alaska Native children. Missing from care is an emergency, never a runaway file.
- **Strengthen ICWA compliance and kinship care,** keeping Alaska Native children connected to family, community, and culture, because connection is the strongest protection a young person can have.
- **Guarantee safe harbor for trafficked minors,** who will be screened, identified, and routed to services as victims, never charged for the acts of their exploitation.
- **Train the adults who see young people every day** to recognize the signs of trafficking and exploitation: school staff, healthcare workers, OCS caseworkers, VPSOs, and workers at the airports and ferry terminals that serve as this state's highways.
- **Hold traffickers and buyers accountable** with dedicated investigative and prosecutorial focus on the people who create the demand, in coordination with federal partners.

MEDA FOR ALASKA: Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples

A Policy for Justice, Safety, and Healing

- **Fund trauma-informed, culturally grounded aftercare** for young survivors, delivered through Indigenous-led and youth-serving organizations, with long-term support rather than a single intake.

8. Accountability and Recovery

Victims and families deserve a justice system where consequences are real and where the door out of addiction is as easy to find as the door into a cell. Today Alaska has neither. Repeat offenders cycle through arrest and release while cases age out, victims lose faith, and predators learn that the system will not hold them. At the same time, Alaskans who want treatment wait weeks for a detox bed that may be a plane ride away. Both failures feed the MMIP crisis: untreated addiction is the leverage traffickers and abusers use, and a revolving door tells them no one is coming.

- **End catch and release for violent and repeat offenders.** We will staff prosecutors, courts, and public defenders so cases are tried instead of dismissed for delay, use pretrial detention and supervision that match actual risk, and ensure that offenders who harm people face consequences that mean something. Accountability is a promise we make to victims.
- **Build treatment capacity Alaskans can actually reach:** detox, residential treatment, and medication-assisted treatment beds in every region, with crisis stabilization so the emergency room and the jail cell stop serving as Alaska's default treatment centers.
- **Fund culturally grounded recovery**, including land-based healing camps, Indigenous-led recovery programs, and peer support, because culture is treatment and connection is what recovery is made of.
- **Expand therapeutic courts** statewide, building on Alaska's proven wellness, drug, and veterans court models that pair accountability with treatment and cut reoffending.
- **Invest in reentry** with housing, extended Medicaid coverage, employment connections through trades pipelines and apprenticeships, and continued treatment, so release from custody is a return to community rather than a countdown to the next arrest.

9. Healing and Family Support

- **Resource culturally grounded healing** through Indigenous-led organizations, including grief support, ceremony, and community wellness gatherings for families and communities carrying loss.
- **Reimburse traditional healers** within our healthcare access framework, so healing services reach families in the ways our cultures have always provided them.
- **Guarantee culturally appropriate victim services** in every region, with advocates who speak the languages and know the communities they serve.

Accountability

MEDA FOR ALASKA: Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples

A Policy for Justice, Safety, and Healing

We will measure what matters and report it publicly: cases opened, cases resolved, time from report to NamUs entry, prosecution outcomes, VPSO staffing levels by region, and victim services funding by community. The MMIP Review Commission's findings and best practices will be published, with privacy protections for families, because a commission that reports only to itself cannot build public trust. Families and Tribal governments will sit at the table where this policy is implemented, reviewed, and improved, every year, for as long as it takes.

Our people are sacred. Our relatives are not statistics, and they are not invisible. As Governor, I will hold the state to its end of the relationship in every community, not just on the road system.

Gunalchéesh.

References

- Alaska Department of Public Safety. (2026). Missing and murdered Indigenous persons. <https://dps.alaska.gov/mmip/>
- Carroll, S. R., Garba, I., Figueroa-Rodríguez, O. L., Holbrook, J., Lovett, R., Materechera, S., Parsons, M., Raseroka, K., Rodriguez-Lonebear, D., Rowe, R., Sara, R., Walker, J. D., Anderson, J., & Hudson, M. (2020). The CARE Principles for Indigenous data governance. *Data Science Journal*, 19(1), 43. <https://doi.org/10.5334/dsj-2020-043>
- James, S. E., Herman, J. L., Rankin, S., Keisling, M., Mottet, L., & Anafi, M. (2016). The report of the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey. National Center for Transgender Equality.
- Murphy, L. T. (2017). Labor and sex trafficking among homeless youth: A ten-city study. Loyola University New Orleans Modern Slavery Research Project and Covenant House International.
- Rosay, A. B. (2016). Violence against American Indian and Alaska Native women and men: 2010 findings from the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey. National Institute of Justice, U.S. Department of Justice.
- S.B. 151, 33rd Leg., 2nd Sess. (Alaska 2024).
- Urban Indian Health Institute. (2018). Missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls: A snapshot of data from 71 urban cities in the United States. Seattle Indian Health Board.