



SELECT COMMITTEE ON TRIBAL RELATIONS

September 29, 2022

The Honorable Deb Haaland
Secretary
United States Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

The Honorable John Barrasso
United States Senator
307 Dirksen Office Building
Washington, DC 20510
and via: nolan_rap@barrasso.senate.gov

The Honorable Liz Cheney
United States Representative
416 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
and via: lindy.linn@mail.house.gov

The Honorable Cynthia Lummis
United States Senator
Russell Senate Office Building, Ste. SR-124
Washington, DC 20510
and via: jennifer_fernandez@lummis.senate.gov

Dear Madam Secretary and Members of the Wyoming Congressional Delegation,

The Wyoming Legislature's Select Committee on Tribal Relations writes to request your assistance in addressing law enforcement issues on the Wind River Reservation, and we request your response to this letter.

Prevention and reduction of crime, especially violent crime, on the Wind River Reservation is a concern that requires federal assistance and attention. Specifically, we have received testimony about the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) law enforcement needs on the Wind River Indian Reservation, including issues related to hiring processes, compensation amounts, and position detail orders and time frames.

First, the Select Committee requests your assistance in reducing the time required for completion of federal background checks required for BIA employment. At the Committee's most recent meeting in August 2022, the Chief of Police for the BIA Wind River Agency explained the challenges in hiring two BIA Victims Specialist positions for the Reservation. Last year, the BIA Wind River Agency offered employment to fill this position, but by the time the nine-month federal background check and clearances were complete, the candidate declined the position. The length of time to complete these background checks and clearances makes hiring unreasonably time consuming, as many people cannot put their lives on hold to wait for nearly a year to accept employment.

Second, the Committee asks that the authorization of time-limited BIA positions take into account the time required for the hiring process so the start date of the time-limited authorization does not commence until a candidate is actually hired. For example, of the two BIA Victims Specialist positions authorized for the Wind River Reservation, one was authorized as a three-year position. One year of the authorization has elapsed without success in recruiting a candidate to fill the position and only two years now remain on the authorization. If a position is authorized as a three-year period, the counting for the three years should start when a candidate is hired, not when the position is authorized.

Finally, your assistance and attention are needed to address BIA Wind River Agency law enforcement officer staffing shortages by providing proper funding to compensate officers and limiting the reassignment of officers to other details. We received testimony indicating that the BIA Wind River Agency Chief of Police has worked hard to overcome dramatic shortfalls in staffing in recent years. The Chief has been fortunate to hire eighteen officers to fill his many vacancies. These officers patrol and respond to calls to cover the entire Wind River Reservation, one of the largest land-based reservations in the United States. His officers work twelve-hour shifts and have two days off per week. We request your help to increase funding to general schedule classification levels commensurate with other Department of Interior positions to compensate adequately the officers for their work. Additionally, despite the new hires, the BIA Wind River Agency struggles to operate at full force because officers are frequently reassigned to details for other agencies. These reassignments leave the BIA Wind River Agency shorthanded and compromise the Agency's ability to respond to calls for assistance and violent offenses, let alone to proactively prevent crime.

Our Committee would also like to thank you for the attention you have already given to missing and murdered indigenous persons (MMIP). Nationwide, as well as in Wyoming, the grave situation of MMIP is beginning to receive the attention and synchronization among agencies that is necessary for successful recoveries and investigations. At a federal level, the BIA Office of Justice Services Missing and Murdered Unit (MMU) investigates unsolved MMIP cases and provides federal technical assistance to tribal law enforcement. These MMU investigators have been at work on the Wind River Reservation. The Presidential Task Force on Missing and Murdered American Indians and Alaska Natives builds on the Attorney General's MMIP Initiative and Operation Lady Justice and enforcement of the 2020 Savanna's Act and the 2019 Not Invisible Act. With regard to Wyoming MMIP efforts, the Committee has received encouraging updates on the improved cooperation among agencies to recover missing and murdered indigenous persons that has resulted from Wyoming state legislation in 2020 (Senate Enrolled Act 0005, "Missing and murdered indigenous persons-agency cooperation" and House Joint Resolution 0001 "Supporting federal missing and murdered persons efforts") and the dedicated efforts of Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon's Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons Task Force.

We hope that preventing and reducing crime in Indian Country will be one of your highest priorities. Lives are at stake and our indigenous communities will never have an opportunity to prosper if their day-to-day safety needs remain unmet. Please let us know if we can be of assistance in your efforts to improve the procedures and funding to enhance tribal

criminal justice systems and pursue the administration of justice. We look forward to working together to prevent violent crime among some of our most vulnerable citizens.

Thank you for your consideration of our requests.

Sincerely,



Representative Lloyd Larsen
Co-chairperson



Senator Affie Ellis
Co-chairperson

Select Committee on Tribal Relations