

Indian Law Resource Center

Indigenous Peoples' Rights

https://indianlaw.org/swsn/savanna_not_invisible_laws

Campaign and Advocacy

On October 10, 2020, two bills were signed into law to help address the crisis of missing and murdered indigenous women in the United States. The bills, which were presented to the President on September 30, 2020, follow years of advocacy by indigenous women, tribes, and Native organizations calling for firm action to combat this human rights issue.

American Indian and Alaska Native women and girls are experiencing violence at extreme and unprecedented levels on tribal lands and in Alaska Native villages. More than 4 in 5 indigenous women have been subjected to violence, and Alaska Native women report assault rates 12 times higher than the rest of the U.S. On some reservations, Native women are ten times more likely to be murdered. Now the COVID-19 pandemic is worsening this already dangerous situation, magnifying the crisis of violence and missing and murdered indigenous women, and shining a spotlight on dangerous gaps in U.S. law and the disparities indigenous peoples face as a result of the United States failure to adequately address their wellbeing for more than 200 years.

Savannas Act, S.227, was originally introduced in 2017 by Senator Heidi Heitkamp after the horrific murder of Savanna LaFontaine-Greywind, a pregnant member of the Spirit Lake Tribe. Senator Lisa Murkowski reintroduced the bill in 2019, and it was passed by the Senate in March 2020. Savannas Act clarifies federal, state, tribal and local law enforcement responsibilities with respect to missing or murdered Indians; aims to increase communication and coordination between federal, tribal, state, and local law enforcement agencies; improves tribal access to resources and information such as the federal criminal information databases needed to respond effectively to missing and murdered Indian cases; requires data collection related to missing and murdered Indian people, regardless of where they reside; and directs U.S. attorneys to develop regionally appropriate guidelines for responding to missing or murdered Indians.

The Not Invisible Act, S.982, introduced in April 2019, is intended to increase intergovernmental coordination to identify and combat violent crime within Indian lands and of Indians. The Act establishes a Joint Commission on Reducing Violent Crimes Against Indians of local, tribal, and federal stakeholders from diverse geographic areas that will make publicly available recommendations to the Departments of Interior and of Justice on best practices both departments can take to combat disappearances, murder, trafficking, and other violent crimes against Native Americans and Alaska Natives. Not later than 90 days after their receipt, the Secretary of the Interior and Attorney General must each make public written responses to the recommendations. The Joint Commission is exempt from the Federal Advisory Committee Act, and a sunset provision terminates the Joint Commission 2 years after the date of the enactment of the Act.

These new laws represent an overdue first step by the United States in responding to the crisis of missing and murdered indigenous women and fulfilling its [f]ederal trust responsibility to assist tribal governments in safeguarding the lives of Indian women.^[1]

For additional information:

[Enrolled Bill S.227](#)

[S. Rept. 116-206](#)

[Enrolled Bill S.982](#)

[S. Rept. 116-214](#)

[Statement from the Press Secretary Regarding the Signing of Savannas Act and the Not Invisible Act \(October 10, 2020\)](#)

^[1] Violence Against Women and Department of Justice Reauthorization Act of 2005, Pub. L. No. 109-162, 901(6) (Jan. 5, 2006).

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