

August 30, 2019

MEMORANDUM

To: Civic Development, Public Assets, and Native Communities Committee members
From: Greg Doss, Analyst
Subject: Resolution 31900: Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Crisis

On Tuesday, September 4, 2019, the Civic Development, Public Assets, and Native Communities Committee members will discuss and may vote on [Resolution #31900](#). This resolution: (1) acknowledges the City's responsibility in addressing the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) crisis; (2) calls on the Mayor of Seattle to direct City departments to make racially appropriate, sustainable investments that address the MMIWG crisis and help bring an end to violence against Indigenous women and girls; and (3) requests that City departments employ a culturally attuned framework that fosters an Indigenous-led initiative that combats disproportionately high rates of structural violence as well as addressing underlying factors of homelessness, poverty, income inequality, death, poor health and education inequities. This includes a number of specific actions that should be undertaken by the Mayor, the Seattle Police Department, the Human Services Department, Department of Neighborhoods and Seattle-King County Public Health.

This memorandum provides a summary of the resolution and background information on the MMIWG crisis.

RESOLUTION 31900

Resolution 31900 highlights:

- The majority of the resolution's provision are modeled after proposed federal legislation and state laws related to the MMIWG crisis.
- The Seattle Police Department (SPD), Human Service Department (HSD), Department of Neighborhoods, and Seattle-King County Public Health, in partnership with the Seattle Indian Health Board (SIHB) will launch an interdepartmental initiative to curb violence against Indigenous women and girls:
 - SPD would review and improve its current method for collecting, disseminating, and using data on urban Indigenous communities.
 - SPD would develop best practice protocols for law enforcement responses to MMIWG cases.
 - SPD would make efforts to improve relationships with Indigenous communities in consultation with the SIHB. In addition, the resolution requests the addition to SPD of a culturally attuned police liaison position to work with SIHB staff.

- HSD contracts with programs that address potential causes of violence against Indigenous women, including homelessness and poverty, gender-based violence, mental health, and substance use disorder services.
 - HSD would report during Quarter 1, 2020, relevant program funding levels and recommended strategies to ensure HSD’s contracting practices are sufficient and distributed equitably.
- The City would confer with local tribes, tribal organizations, and urban Indian organizations in the development of any strategies and policies that are intended to benefit urban Indigenous people.
 - The City would pursue strategies and investments to address the MMIWG crisis, as it is the Council’s belief that additional resources and a detailed work plan by City departments are needed to improve the lives of Indigenous people.

BACKGROUND

Research performed in Canada and the United States:

Indigenous women experience violence at much higher rates than other populations. Studies have shown that Indigenous women are murdered at rates greater than ten times the national average. Many of these crimes, however, are often unsolved and unreported because there are also very high rates of disappearance for Indigenous women.

A 2014 Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) study reported that 1,181 Indigenous women were killed or went missing across the country in a 32-year span (between 1980 and 2012).¹ However, subsequent studies recognized that there is no reliable estimate of the numbers of Indigenous women who were killed or have gone missing in Canada and that the 2014 study likely severely undercounted MMIWG victims.

The Canadian Federal Government subsequently launched an independent, commission-led inquiry into the MMIWG issue in 2015. The Commission held numerous gatherings, hearings and guided conversations across Canada, which included family members and survivors of violence as well as expert witnesses, Elders and Knowledge Keepers, Indigenous front-line workers, and officials. In all, the outreach effort reached over 2,300 people.

The [Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls](#) was released on June 3, 2019. Among other findings, the report recognized that “persistent and deliberate human and Indigenous rights violations and abuses are the root cause behind Canada’s staggering rates of violence.” The two-year investigation was unable to determine a definitive number of Indigenous people who are missing or have been murdered, but noted that Indigenous women in Canada were reported to be at least six times more likely to be victims of homicide than non-Indigenous women.

¹ [Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women: A National Operational Overview](#)

In Washington State, the SIHB² cited that, according to the National Crime Information Center, there were 5,712 reports of missing American Indian and Alaska Native women and girls in 2016, though the US Department of Justice's federal missing persons database, NamUs, only logged in 116 cases. The report also found that as many as 506 Indigenous women and girls have been murdered or gone missing in 71 urban areas in recent decades and that Washington state ranked second among states by the number of cases of MMIWG.

The report notes that racial misclassification and a lack of consistent data collection made for a significant undercount of urban MMIWG cases. The report suggests that a number of societal changes are needed to address the institutional racism that creates and perpetuates violence against Indigenous peoples.

Proposed Changes to Federal Laws:

Earlier this year, Congress considered several pieces of legislation that would make changes to the way the federal government addresses the MMIWG issue. Two of the more prominent bills are discussed below; neither bill was enacted, however, the proposed legislation informed Resolution 31900.

The most wide-ranging piece of legislation is Savanna's Act ([S. 1942](#)), which would boost coordination and data collection among all levels of law enforcement — tribal, local, state and federal — for cases involving missing and murdered Indians.³ It would require federal agencies to obtain recommendations from tribes for enhancing the safety of Native women, and provide statistics on missing and murdered Native women to Congress every year. The specific actions the Department of Justice would take under Savanna's Act include:

- training of law enforcement agencies on recording tribal enrollment for victims in federal databases;
- developing and implementing a system to notify citizens of the National Missing and Unidentified Persons database;
- conducting outreach to Indian tribes regarding the ability to publicly enter information through the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System or other non-law enforcement sensitive portals;
- developing guidelines for responding to cases of missing and murdered Indians;
- providing training and technical assistance to Indian tribes and law enforcement agencies for implementation of the developed guidelines; and
- reporting statistics on missing and murdered Indians.

² [Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls: A Snapshot of Data from 71 Urban Jurisdictions in the United States](#)

³ "Indian" is a specifically defined federal term used in the act. However, Resolution 319000 applies to a broader population of indigenous peoples.

Another congressional bill, the Not Invisible Act ([HR2438](#)), would create an advisory committee comprised of law enforcement, tribal leaders, survivors, and family members of a victim, to make recommendations to the Department of the Interior and the Department of Justice on addressing this crisis. It would also designate an official within the Bureau of Indian Affairs to improve violent crime prevention efforts across federal agencies.

For background, other related bills at the federal level include the Survive Act ([S. 1870](#)), the Tribal Law and Order Act Reauthorization and Amendments act of 2017 ([S. 1953](#)), and the Justice for Native Survivors of Sexual Violence Act ([S. 1986](#)).

Proposed Changes to State Laws:

In 2018 and 2019 many US states, including Washington, Minnesota, and Arizona, began to take steps toward passing legislation to increase awareness of the MMIWG issue and take steps toward building databases to reflect accurate statistics regarding MMIWG. In Washington, the State Legislature passed [HB 1713](#) that identifies best practices for law enforcement responses to Missing Persons Reports for Indigenous women and other Indigenous persons. The bill requires that these practices must include steps that law enforcement should take upon receiving a Missing Person's Report for an Indigenous woman or other Indigenous person.

The HB 1713 also created two liaison positions for missing and murdered Indigenous women and other Indigenous persons, within the Washington State Patrol. The liaisons role is to build relationships to increase trust between governmental organizations and Native communities. Specifically, the liaisons must facilitate communications among Indian tribes and tribal organizations and communities; urban Indian organizations and communities; tribal liaisons in other state agencies; law enforcement agencies at the federal, state, local, and tribal level; and nongovernmental entities providing services to Native American women. As described previously, Resolution 31900 requests that a similar position is created at the City.

Next Steps:

The Civic Development, Public Assets, and Native Communities Committee will discuss and may make a recommendation on the proposed resolution for consideration by Full Council on September 9, 2019. If adopted, the Council will work with the Mayor to determine the resources and a timeline to move towards implementation.

ATTACHMENTS:

cc: Kirstan Arestad, Executive Director
Aly Pennucci, Supervising Analyst