

Savanna's Act

Background

On August 19, 2017, Savanna LaFontaine-Greywind, a 22-year-old member of the Spirit Lake Tribe, disappeared while eight months pregnant. Her body was found eight days later in the Red River north of Fargo, North Dakota. Police said her death was caused by "homicidal violence." While Savanna's tragic death was heard around the world, thousands of indigenous women are murdered or disappear each year, with many of those cases being ignored or forgotten.

In 2016, the National Congress of American Indians passed a resolution titled "Addressing Crisis of Missing and Murdered Native Women," which called for the creation of law enforcement and justice protocols appropriate to the disappearance of Native women and girls, including inter-jurisdictional issues, and coordination of efforts across federal departments, Tribes, and states to increase the response to the disappearance or murder of Native women and girls. Little data currently exists on the number of missing indigenous women in the United States. However, the data we do know about violence against indigenous women is shocking:

- In 2016, 5,712 cases of missing Native women were reported to the National Crime Information Center (NCIC).
- According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, homicide is the third leading cause of death among American Indian and Alaska Native women between 10 and 24 years of age and the fifth leading cause of death for American Indian and Alaska Native women between 25 and 34 years of age.
- In some tribal communities, American Indian women face murder rates that are more than 10 times the national average.
- Native American women are also two times more likely than other groups to experience rape or sexual assault and two and a half times more likely than others to experience violent crimes in their lifetimes.

Summary of Savanna's Act

Savanna's Act will improve the federal government's response to addressing the crisis of missing and murdered indigenous women nationwide. Specifically, it would:

- Improve tribal access to certain federal crime information databases by updating the data fields to be more relevant to Native Americans, and mandate that the Attorney General consult with Tribes on how to further improve these databases and their access to them. The Attorney General will then submit a report to Congress on how the U.S. Department of Justice plans to implement the suggestions and resolve the outstanding barriers tribes face in acquiring full access to these databases.
- Require the Attorney General, the Department of the Interior, and the Department of Health and Human Services to solicit recommendations from Tribes on improved access to local, regional, state, and federal crime information databases and criminal justice information systems during the annual consultations mandated under the Violence Against Women Act.
- Create standardized protocols for responding to cases of missing and murdered Native Americans, in consultation with Tribes, which will include guidance on inter-jurisdictional cooperation among tribal, federal, state, and local law enforcement.
- Require an annual report to Congress on the statistics on missing and murdered Native women, and recommendations on how to improve data collection.