



February 20, 2019

To: Oregon House Committee on Judiciary
HB 2625—Support
Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women

Dear Chair Williamson and members of the committee:

Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility works to protect human life from the gravest threats to health and survival. Here in Oregon a grave threat posed to human health is the murder and disappearance of Native American women. The causes of the epidemic of missing and murdered indigenous women are complex, but the need for action is clear. It is also clear that there is a lack of deep understanding of the fullness of the problem as well as a dearth of resources dedicated to the health and well-being of Native American individuals and communities. Additionally there is a structural unwillingness to investigate and prosecute crimes committed against Native Americans. However, while complex jurisdictional issues can help explain this phenomenon on reservation land, this crisis is not exclusive to reservations. The urban indigenous population is deeply affected, as well. According to the 2018 Urban Indian Health Institute Report on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women & Girls in 2016 there were 5,712 cases of murdered and missing indigenous women and girls, which took place in similar rates on the reservation and in urban areas. Of these 5,712 cases, only 116 were logged in the Dept. of Justice database. Racial misrepresentation on police reports is certainly responsible for a portion of this shocking underreporting by the Justice Department, but structural and institutional racism and sexism play crucial roles, as well. And, while law enforcement is slow to protect Native Americans, it is quick to prosecute. In fact, Native Americans are incarcerated a rate that is 38% higher than the national average.

The rate at which indigenous women are murdered and go missing constitutes a public health emergency. The response of the State, including law enforcement, should reflect the severity of the problem. We need to understand the problem in all its complexity if we expect to make headway in fixing it. Oregon PSR strongly supports the efforts put forth in HB 2625 to increase state criminal justice protective and investigative resources for reporting, identification and investigation of missing Native American women and girls in this state.

Submitted on behalf of Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility by:

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