August 25, 2023

Not Invisible Act Commission

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Dear Not Invisible Act Commission:

Thank you for holding a hearing in Billings, Montana last month. I write to support the family of Kaysera Stops Pretty Places, and *all* the families, who traveled to Billings to testify before your Commission. I hope that you take their stories and testimony seriously. And I hope you make recommendations to Congress to address the crisis of Murdered and Missing Indigenous Persons.

Kaysera Stops Pretty Places was murdered in Montana—on or very near the Crow Reservation—and although her family has offered law enforcement significant evidence as to who murdered her, the investigation into her homicide remains unresolved.

On August 24, 2019, Kaysera Stops Pretty Places went missing in a suburban neighborhood in Hardin, Montana, less than a half mile off the Crow Reservation. Kaysera’s body was discovered five days after she went missing, and although significant evidence exists indicating who took her life in August of 2019, her killer still walks free. He has never been charged with any crime, nor has he actually been investigated.

Kaysera’s case is, unfortunately, all too typical. Often times when Native people are murdered, federal authorities refuse to investigate. But the federal government has a trust duty and responsibility to investigate these cases. In Kaysera’s case, the FBI refused to investigate because her body was discovered 300 yards from the Crow Reservation border. Although the FBI has never proven that she was *not* murdered on the Crow Reservation (or that her murder took place *off* the reservation), they claim they have no authority to investigate. The Commission should recommend to Congress that laws need to be changed to *require* the FBI to investigate the deaths of Native people on or near borders of reservations, or within the historical treaty territories of our Tribal Nations. The federal government’s trust duty to safeguard the lives of Native people does not end at the Reservation border.

As for the Missing and Murdered Unit (“MMU”) within the Department of the Interior, the Commission can make helpful recommendations here, too. All too often, MMU officers say they won’t investigate the homicide of a Native woman or girl because the local County Sheriff’s Office has not “consented” to the MMU’s investigation. The Department of Interior’s trust duty and responsibility to safeguards the lives of Native women and girls, however, is not contingent on a grant of permission from a local Sheriff. And the Commission should recommend that the MMU’s authority to investigate homicides of Native people is not dependent on the consent of any local law enforcement agency. Instead, the MMU should have jurisdiction to investigate the homicide of a Native person anywhere in the United States. The MMU must be granted the requisite authority to issue search warrants, get records from social media, search phones—basically, in order for the MMU to make a difference when it comes to the crisis of the MMIP, they need to have the necessary authority to actually investigate the homicides of Native people that are currently going uninvestigated.

Kaysera was murdered in August of 2019. Her family has waited four years for justice. They have waited long enough. Please use the work you are doing on the Commission as an opportunity to advocate for justice and reform.

Sincerely,