

HB588-Missing and Murdered American Indian and Alaskan Native Women and Girls - Day of Awareness and Reporting Requirement

IN FAVOR

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Ya'ateeh Ani Blackhorse Begay yinishi. Toaheedlini nishlii, Bitanii bashischiin, Hashflashne da shi cheii, Tanisaani da shi nali. This is how I am Navajo. This is why my voice matters. I am of the Water that Flows Together People and a citizen of the Navajo Nation. I am also proud to call Maryland home for the past decade. I represent a small percentage of the population of the USA right here in Maryland. A demographic undercounted, overlooked and most often exploited. I am before you today to ask for your support for HB588. Bringing awareness to this epidemic of missing and murdered relatives is a reality we know all too well in Indian Country. Indian Country being defined as the US and Canada and all the Native Nations that reside within its borders. Missing and murdered Indigenous Women defines the crisis within the title; but lets start at inception: ABUSE. Abuse in its myriad forms. Abuse in the form of stalking. Stalking is murder in slow motion; completely avoidable. Stalking acts as a warning sign that should not be overlooked.

Per Stronghearts Native org, 48.8% of Native women have faced a history of stalking. Per the CDC the rate is even higher at 57.7%. Stalking is an isolating and terrifying reality that I've faced in my own life. I am part of this percentage. Research shows that 1 in 2 domestic stalkers, if a threat is made will act on that. Stalking is a form of intimidation. Stalking can play a role in human trafficking.

The National Institute of Justice reports that Maryland ranked top 10 of states with unresolved and unidentified remains in 355 cases in 2025. It is possible that some of these included are Native American women that go uncounted? Perhaps stalked and trafficked?

What do these statistics I have cited tell us? That this is a crisis large enough to raise red flags for agencies such as BIA, FBI, Health and Human Services and DOJ. Red flags large enough to compile data, yet remains a crisis due to the lack of awareness.

Maryland can do its part to bring awareness to this issue by voting yes. If we think that MMIW doesn't apply here, we are part of the problem. Indian Country refers to the US and Canada, which INCLUDES Maryland. We can simultaneously care about people like Nancy Guthrie, as we give care also to Maleeka Boone, Savannah Greywind, EllaMae Begay, Emily Pike and the other numerous Native women that go missing.

I pray that my name is NEVER among these. As a Native woman, as a victim of these forms of abuse listed above, MMIW is my daily reality.