

**American Indian and Alaska Native Women and Girls – Day of
Awareness and Reporting Requirement**

by

Ifesonye Okwuchi

Greetings Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr, and members of the committee. Thank you, Delegate Hill, for sponsoring this important bill. My name is Ifesonye Okwuchi. I am a Family Nurse Practitioner and Doctor of Nursing Practice student specializing in Psychiatric-Mental Health Nursing, expected to graduate in May 2026. I am also a Major in the United States Army. I am speaking today on my own behalf in support of House Bill 588.

Yasmine Wilson, Tiffany Jones, Emily Pike, Ashlynn Mike, Ella Mae Begay, Maleeka "Mollie" Boone, Savannah Greywind, Daisy Mae Heath, and Sherry Wounded, ranging from age 8 to 62 are just a few of the many Indigenous women and girls whose lives were taken by violence. These names represent one too many lost mothers, daughters, sisters, friends, and community members whose purposes, visions, and futures were taken too soon. Their names remind us that the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons continues to devastate families and communities.

Violence against American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) women and girls is both a public safety and public health issue. Violence contributes to health illnesses, mental health disorders, trauma, and substance use disorders. National data show that four out of five Indigenous women experience violence in their lifetime, and homicide remains a leading cause of death for this population. Establishing a statewide day of awareness will improve recognition of risk factors, strengthen coordination between healthcare and law enforcement systems, help close the gap in crime reporting, and support more accurate data collection in both law enforcement and healthcare. Accurate identification and reporting are essential to guide public health responses, inform policy and funding decisions, ensure appropriate jurisdiction, and support culturally responsive care for Indigenous victims and their families.

I respectfully urge the committee to advance House Bill 588 to help Maryland recognize and address the disproportionate violence affecting Indigenous communities and promote safer, healthier communities for all. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Ifesonye Okwuchi

10236 Brighton Ridge Way

Columbia, Maryland, 21044

806 283 0352

Ifyokw@gmail.com



IFESONYE OKWUCHI

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Persuasive