STRC and Missing Persons, 2017-2023

For discussion at the October 5, 2023 meeting of the State-Tribal Relations Committee
Prepared by Casey Pallister, Committee Staff

2017-2018 Interim

Summary of Activities: Received a list of programs and services from MT DOJ related to missing and endangered persons in Montana. Organized a roundtable with state, tribal, and federal representatives to address the issues of law enforcement response and how to determine jurisdiction in cases.

STRC Report: "Addressing an Epidemic: Missing and Murdered Indian Women"

2019 Legislative Action

- HB 20: requires a missing persons report if a child's location is unknown in a custodial interference case
- HB 21: authorizes the DOJ to assist with all missing persons investigations and creates a missing persons specialist at the DOJ. The bill includes a $100,000 appropriation.
- HB 54: revises laws related to missing persons reports and requires all law enforcement authorities to accept a report without delay
- HB 749: creates two-person human trafficking team
- SJ 2: resolution to study options to break the youth runaway cycle *DID NOT PASS*
- SB 40: requires the Office of Public Instruction to establish a repository for school photos of children whose parents give permission for the photo to be held and shared with law enforcement if the child goes missing
- SB 312: creates the Montana Missing Indigenous Persons (MMIP) Task Force and Looping in Native Communities (LINC) grant program

2019-2020 Interim

Summary of Activities: Received statistical information about missing youth from MT DOJ. Explored options to allow runaway youth to stay at homeless shelters without parental consent and to allow them to graduate without meeting a school district's individual credit requirements. Listened to reps from OPI and Paris Gibson Education Center in Great Falls address the topic: "Runaway Youth: Reasons Why They Run Multiple Times."

STRC Reports: "Runaway Youth: Breaking the Cycle"
                      "STRC Action Report: MIP Task Force Recommendations"
MMIP Task Force Report to STRC: "Looping in Native Communities, 2020"

2021 Legislative Action

- HB 35: establishes a Missing Persons Review Commission *Terminated June 30, 2023*
- HB 36: establishes a missing persons response team training grant program *DID NOT PASS*

- HB 98: extends the Missing Indigenous Persons Task Force and the Looping in Native Communities grant program to June 30, 2023
- SB 4: extends the Missing Indigenous Persons Task Force
- SB 16: allows minors to consent to no-cost emergency shelter and related services *DID NOT PASS*
- SB 17: clarifies that minors may not disaffirm contracts for housing
- SB 18: requires school districts to issue diplomas to students who have experienced an educational disruption due to homelessness, involvement in the child welfare or juvenile justice system, or a medical or mental health crisis if they meet the Board of Public Education's minimum credit requirement for graduation. The bill also allows students younger than age 19 to continue to attend the district's career training and postsecondary credit courses to advance their postsecondary success.

2021-2022 Interim

Summary of Activities: Received updates from Missing Indigenous Persons Task Force and Missing Indigenous Persons Review Commission. Received bill draft recommendations from MIP Task Force.

MMIP Task Force Report to STRC: "Looping in Native Communities, 2021-2022"

2023 Legislative Action

- HB 18: establishes the Missing Persons Response Team Training grant program, administered by the Department of Justice, to help fund training opportunities for community-based missing persons response teams.
- HB 163: extends the Missing Indigenous Persons Task Force and the Looping in Native Communities grant program to June 30, 2033. It also adds a representative from OPI to the task force and allows the task force to make recommendations to federal, state, and local agencies.
- HJ 1: requests a study and report on missing youth in Montana.