

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5477

---

---

As of February 7, 2023

**Title:** An act relating to implementing the recommendations of the Washington state missing and murdered indigenous women and people task force.

**Brief Description:** Implementing the recommendations of the Washington state missing and murdered indigenous women and people task force.

**Sponsors:** Senators Torres, Trudeau, Braun, Muzzall, Billig, Boehnke, Conway, Dhingra, Frame, Hasegawa, Hunt, Kauffman, Keiser, Kuderer, Liias, Lovelett, Nguyen, Pedersen, Randall, Saldaña, Salomon, Shewmake, Van De Wege, Wagoner, Warnick and Wilson, C..

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Law & Justice: 2/07/23.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Reauthorizes the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and People Task Force until June 30, 2025.
- Requires law enforcement authorities investigating a missing person case to enter the case into the national missing and unidentified persons system.

---

### SENATE COMMITTEE ON LAW & JUSTICE

**Staff:** Ryan Giannini (786-7285)

**Background:** Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and People Task Force. In 2021, the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and People (MMIWP) Task Force was convened in the Office of the Attorney General (AGO). The Task Force was tasked to review the laws and policies pertaining to missing and murdered indigenous women and people and to develop related recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature. In

---

*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

2022, the Task Force was established in the AGO, pursuant to the passage of the 2022 supplemental operating budget.

In August 2022, the Task Force released an interim report which contained findings, data, and recommendations.

National Missing and Unidentified Persons System. The National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) is a national information clearinghouse and resource center for missing, unidentified, and unclaimed persons cases across the United States. NamUs is funded and administered by the National Institute of Justice.

**Summary of Bill:** Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and People Task Force. *General.* The Task Force is codified under the AGO.

*Task Force Membership.* The Task Force's members include:

- one member from each of the two largest caucuses of the Senate;
- one member from each of the two largest caucuses of the House of Representatives;
- five members from federally recognized Indians tribes in Washington;
- one member representing the Seattle Indian Health Board;
- one member representing the NATIVE Project;
- one member representing Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board;
- one member representing the American Indian Health Commission;
- two indigenous women or family members of indigenous women that have experienced gender-based violence;
- one member representing the Governor's Office of Indian Affairs;
- the chief of the Washington State Patrol or the chief's representative;
- one member representing the attorney general;
- one member representing the Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs;
- one member representing the Washington State Association of Counties;
- one member representing the Washington Association of Prosecuting Attorneys; and
- one representative of the Washington Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers.

*Meetings.* The legislative members shall convene the initial meeting of the Task Force by the end of 2023. The Task Force must meet at least two times annually, and convene one summit annually.

*Task Force Duties.* The Task Force must review laws and policies relating to missing and murdered American Indian and Alaska Native people. The Task Force must review and develop recommendations for assessing issues related to gender-based violence against American Indian and Alaska Native people, including:

- systemic causes;
- data tracking, collection, and reporting;
- jurisdictional and data-sharing issues;
- prosecutorial trends and practices;

- barriers to providing more state resources in tracking and reducing incidences of gender-based violence; and
- state resources to support programs and services for survivors, families of survivors, and urban Indian service providers.

The Task Force must also identify and make recommendations for increasing state resources for trainings on culturally attuned best practices for tribal, local, and state law enforcement personnel when working with American Indian and Alaska Native communities.

The Task Force must make recommendations and best practices for collaboration and coordination between law enforcement agencies and federal, state, county, local, and tribal social and health services, and strategies and practices to improve communication and transparency with family members in MMIWP cases.

The Task Force must submit a report including any findings, recommendations, and progress updates to the Governor and the appropriate committees of the Legislature by August 1st of each year, and a final report by June 1, 2025.

*Attorney General Duties.* The AGO will administer and provide staff support to the Task Force, organize the annual summit, and oversee the development of the Task Force reports.

The AGO must coordinate with the Task Force to create and update a missing and murdered indigenous women and people resource, which must include specific instructions, information, and best practices related to MMIWP cases.

*Reimbursement.* Task Force members may apply for a stipend not to exceed \$100 for each day during which the member attends an official meeting of the Task Force or performs statutorily prescribed duties approved by the AGO. A member shall not receive compensation if the member occupies a full-time position in any federal, Washington State, or Washington local government agency, and receives any compensation for such work that day.

*Reauthorization.* The Task Force is reauthorized until June 30, 2025.

National Missing and Unidentified Persons System. The sheriff, chief of police, county coroner or county medical examiner, or other law enforcement authority initiating and conducting a missing person investigation must enter the case into NamUs if a reported missing person has not been found within 30 days of the report, or any time the investigating agency suspects that criminal activity caused the victim's disappearance.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members:** Yes.

**Effective Date:** The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect on June 1, 2023.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:** PRO: Native American women face murder rates three times higher than non-Native women. In 2022, nearly 400 indigenous people went missing in the state of Washington. Seattle has more missing or murdered women than any U.S. city. Washington has the second most of any state. The work of bringing home missing family members is far from done. Law enforcement must communicate with families at all stages of the process and make sure they are not just checking off a box in their investigations. All of the recommendations from the MMIWP Task Force should be adopted. This is an important step by Washington to address continued violence against Native people. The creation of an MMIWP resource is especially appreciated to help provide guidance to families navigating all involved systems when missing loved ones. This bill currently codifies the Task Force in the AGO. Many of the Task Force's operational duties may not be best suited to be tasked to the AGO. Some duties should be assigned to another agency such as the Washington State Patrol. There are also proposed changes to the bill to include recommendations from the AGO that have been submitted and approved.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Senator Nikki Torres, Prime Sponsor; Marissa Perez, The Yarrow Project; Taylor Gardner, WA Assn of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs; Tribal Council Esther Moses-Hyipeer, Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** No one.