

**UNITED STATE SENATE**  
**SENATE COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS**

**YOUTH SUICIDE IN INDIAN COUNTRY**  
**WRITTEN COMMENT & TESTIMONY**

**BY**

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**February 26, 2009**

My name is Dana Jetty, I am 16 years old and I am an enrolled member of the Spirit Lake Tribe in North Dakota. Before I begin I would like to thank the Committee for giving me the opportunity to talk to you about my family and more importantly about my sister Jami.

Jami Rose Jetty was 14 years old, she had a lot of friends, and was mature for her age. Jami was open minded and always asking questions about anything and everything. She was very caring, sweet, compassionate, and never judged anyone. She saw the world in black and white and found pleasure in simple things like listening to stories from long ago. Jami was like any other teenage girl from a middle class home surrounded by a family who loved her.

November 3, 2008 started as a day like any other but it ended as a day that I will never forget. November 3, 2008 is the day that my baby sister, Jami Rose Jetty, ended her own life. My sister and I were home that day and Jami woke me up around 9:30 in the morning to tell me that she felt sick and dizzy. I knew my sister had been having problems with depression and I asked her if she had taken anything. She told me she had so I immediately called my mom at her office. My mom came to the house right away but Jami refused to tell her what she had taken and refused to go to the clinic. My mom told me to keep an eye on Jami while she went to make some calls to see what kind of help she could get for my sister. Of course my sister was angry with me for calling my mom but I talked to her for a while anyway. After Jami talked for a little while, she asked me to leave her alone. I hesitated but decided to give her some space.

I left her alone and watched TV and made some food. I decided to clean up and called for Jami to come and help me, but there was no response. I walked towards the back of the house and saw that the bathroom door was closed but the light was on. I opened it but she was not in there. I looked towards Jami's bedroom and her door was also closed. I opened it and was instantly flooded with feelings of fear and shock. It was like a horrible dream that I could not wake up from. I saw my sister with a belt fastened to the bunk bed and wrapped around her neck. Jami was sitting lifelessly, her body leaning against the wall. I ran to get my boyfriend and I tried to get the belt off her neck but it was too tight. My boyfriend got a knife and cut her down. All I could do is yell "Why?" as I rocked her lifeless body in my arms. The next thing I recall is my mom and dad running into the house. I watched as my mom frantically called the police and my dad desperately tried to perform CPR. Within minutes the police and paramedics arrived. Even though the paramedics did get a slight pulse, Jami Rose Jetty, my baby sister, was not alive when she arrived at Mercy Hospital in Devils Lake, ND.

On November 3, 2008 I lost my sister and my best friend. On November 3, 2008 my life and my family changed forever. Suicide has left me feeling lost, lonely and angry. I don't understand why my sister felt that she had to do this and I don't know why she didn't ask me for help or tell me what she was thinking. Knowing my sister she would not have wanted to burden others with her problems, but I wish she would have told me.

I, along with my family have turned to our spirituality and our faith to guide us through this dark time. We have prayed, we have attended sweat ceremonies and we have talked to whoever will listen to share our experience. In the aftermath of my sister's suicide and in the ceremonies we attended we have come away with a message from Jami that we are now passing along to others "...tell the ones that are trying to end their lives this way that it is not the way to go...".

And so my sisters' message has become a mission for my family. We have attended meetings in our community to tell anyone that is considering suicide, that this is not the way to go and that there are people who can help. In talking to our community we have

found that suicide is a much more common problem than we ever realized. People in our community have opened up to us and have shared their feelings of suicide and have expressed the shame that they feel for having those thoughts. I never imagined that so many people had these thoughts and kept them inside out of a sense of shame and hopelessness. While I am surprised at how many people feel suicidal, I am not shocked at the hopelessness they feel. I know that my mom had concerns about my sister before her suicide. My mom did all the right things. She took her to the doctor, she talked to counselors, and she even had her evaluated by mental health professionals from Indian Health Services. Those mental health providers dismissed my moms concerns and diagnosed my sister as being a “typical teenager”. I know my mom is angry that these professional people did not provide the help when she needed it and her strength and ability to forgive is amazing.

Now our mission has led us to Washington, DC and today I, along with my family, ask you to support our efforts to prevent suicide by funding and developing quality programs and health services in our Tribal communities. It is not enough to put a counselor in a community. We need trained professionals who really know how to help our communities. We can stop others from committing suicide if we talk openly in our communities and if we provide safe and supportive places for people to go when they need help for themselves or their family members. We need to make sure that our communities and our people know how to reach out for help if they need it and we need to make sure that the help is there when they ask. We need to share Jami’s message: *“...tell the ones trying to end their lives this way, that it is not the way to go...”*.

And so today, I am here on behalf of my sister, Jami Rose Jetty to ask for your help. I ask that you support suicide prevention programs in our tribal communities and I ask that when you have your discussions on the issue of suicide you remember my sister. She was 14 years old. She was a beautiful, outgoing teenager with her whole life ahead of her. She was my sister and she is what suicide looks like in Indian Country.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share Jami’s message with you today.