



**Written Testimony of Tamra Truett Jerue
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**Before the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs Roundtable titled, "The Alyce Spotted Bear and
Walter Soboleff Commission on Native Children: Examining Draft Legislation Related to The Way
Forward Report"**

Chairman Murkowski, Vice Chairman Schatz, and distinguished members of the Committee, on behalf of the Alaska Native Women's Resource Center, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony today on the proposed Native Children's Commission Implementation Act of 2025.

My name is Tami Truett Jerue. I am a citizen of the Anvik Village Tribe in Alaska and come to this work as a mother, grandmother, auntie, sister, and wife. All distinct roles that have taught me firsthand how domestic violence ripples through families and communities. These relationships center me in understanding the urgency of this work and the strength that comes from our connections to one another.

I also serve as the Executive Director of the Alaska Native Women's Resource Center (AKNWRC), an Alaska-Native, Tribal non-profit organization dedicated to strengthening local, tribal governments' responses through community organizing efforts and by advocating for the safety of women and children in their communities and homes, especially against domestic and sexual abuse and violence.

The AKNWRC acts on many fronts and depends heavily on our experience working directly with Tribes and Tribal citizens, Tribal governments, other Indigenous organizations, and our state and federal government to implement policies that help to create safer communities. Since 2017, the AKNWRC has served as the Alaska Native Tribal Resource Center on domestic violence to reduce Tribal disparities under the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA).

Today, I'd like to start with what grounds all of our collective work. The United States has treaty and trust obligations with federally recognized Tribes and Tribal nations that remain binding legal commitments today.

These obligations exist because everyone, including Alaska Native and American Indian people, has a fundamental right to live free from violence, and to have food security, access to healthcare, housing, and meaningful employment. These aren't luxuries, they're basic human needs that form the foundation of healthy communities.

The federal government has a duty to ensure our Native communities have equitable access to these fundamental rights that all Americans deserve. This includes addressing the epidemic of violence against Alaska Native and American Indian people, and in particular, our women and children.

Public safety means more than just law enforcement. It means ensuring our communities have the basic infrastructure that supports everyone's right to live free from violence, and includes access to safe housing, reliable food systems, healthcare services, and economic opportunities.

Alaska continues to experience an urban-dominated and supported public safety infrastructure. In most of our rural communities, we do not have a permanent state public safety law enforcement presence. Because of this and the lack of a functioning 911 system for most of our rural and predominantly Alaska Native communities, we live and experience documented challenge after challenge when requesting a law enforcement response from our state agencies each and every day.

The staggering data collected in our state shows that Alaska Natives, and particularly women and children, continue to experience higher rates of violence than any other demographic. What we know about this data and the intersectionality of gender and domestic violence is that *many instances of violence go unreported in our state and Tribal communities.*

But what this data doesn't capture is how violence intersects with other violations of basic rights: how survivors may stay in dangerous situations because they have nowhere safe to live; how they may endure abuse rather than risk their children going hungry; or how the trauma of violence is amplified when families can't access healthcare or economic opportunities that support healing and recovery.

Real progress happens when our federal government invests in Tribal governments *and* Native organizations to create solutions that come from our communities, reflect our cultural strengths, and recognize that safety from violence is inseparable from access to stable housing, food security, healthcare, and economic opportunities that allow families to thrive.

Today, I'd like to focus my time and testimony on Titles II and VII and the impact these resources and programs will have on our Alaska Native survivors and communities.

TITLE II - JUSTICE FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES.

We are pleased to see the draft legislation addresses many of these basic human needs for Alaska Native and American Indian children, women, and communities by recognizing that everyone has a fundamental right to live free from violence, food security, access to healthcare, housing, and meaningful employment. Rights that form the foundation of safe, thriving communities.

In particular, Sections 202 and 203 of Title II address two existing gaps in Alaska for prevention and survivor services. First, they make permanent the Alaska Native Tribal resource center on domestic violence under FVPSA, ensuring that the culturally specific training and technical assistance our communities need will have stable, ongoing support. Second, they establish statutory funding for an Alaska Native Victim Services Fund at the Denali Commission, recognizing that Alaska Native victims need comprehensive support that includes services, housing assistance, and construction projects.

Sections 202 and 203 will help to create meaningful changes that will someday reach every corner of Alaska.

When Tribes, Tribal advocates, and survivors in remote communities know they can access culturally appropriate programming and assistance through the Alaska Native Tribal resource center, it changes how families and communities respond to violence. When local programs and advocates receive consistent, high-quality training and technical assistance, it builds their confidence and effectiveness. And when Tribal governments and their Councils know they can access ongoing support for developing domestic violence policies and programs, they're more likely to take on this incredibly challenging work.

For Alaska Native survivors, this shift to statutory funding means we can finally move beyond crisis response to building the infrastructure our communities need for prevention, early intervention, and long-term healing.

Most importantly, the shift from discretionary to statutory funding for the Alaska Native Tribal resource center under FVPSA sends a message to our Tribes and survivors that their safety and well-being are priorities and not afterthoughts. It tells them that the assistance and services they need will be there when they're ready to seek help, and that they will be designed by people who understand their communities, their culture, and their values. That kind of reliability and cultural grounding is what transforms individual crisis intervention into community healing and prevention.

For the AKNWRC, serving as the Alaska Native Tribal resource center under FVPSA, the breadth of our work illustrates the potential for even greater impact with stable, long-term funding.

Since 2017, we have provided training and technical assistance to over 130 of Alaska's 229 federally recognized Tribes, representing more than 60% of all Tribes in our state. Over the last three years alone, the AKNWRC has reached over 11,000 individuals through training and community engagements across Alaska, the lower-48 and Hawaii, and internationally. These numbers represent more than service delivery statistics. They reflect the deep trust that our Tribal communities and partners have placed in the AKNWRC to develop culturally appropriate and effective responses to violence.

We are also pleased to see a newly created Alaska Native Victim Services Fund in this legislation. Housing this fund at the Denali Commission reflects an understanding of what works in Alaska. The

Denali Commission has earned the trust of Alaska Native communities because they don't just provide funding, they provide partnership. They understand that effective programs in our communities must be designed by Alaska Native people, respect our traditional knowledge systems, and work within the realities of rural Alaska. And their approach to technical assistance and capacity building has consistently supported Tribal self-determination and the uplifting of additional resources and services that honor survivors and their cultural identity while ensuring safety.

While we strongly support the Denali Commission's administration of the Alaska Native Victim Services Fund, we believe this program would benefit from establishing a formal advisory committee or regular consultation process that includes Tribes, Tribal organizations currently serving victims of crime, and the Alaska Native Tribal Resource Center under FVPSA. This advisory body would ensure that the fund truly meets the diverse needs of Alaska Native communities by providing ongoing guidance on program priorities, funding criteria, and service delivery approaches.

In addition, this advisory board would also serve as a mechanism for continuous improvement, offering recommendations on processes and procedures based on the lived experiences of communities and survivors. Most importantly, this structure would create accountability measures that ensure the Denali Commission remains responsive to the Alaska Native communities and survivors they serve.

TITLE VII - ADDRESSING HOMELESSNESS IN NATIVE COMMUNITIES.

We are also pleased to see that the draft legislation addresses some of the critical intersections of survivor safety and basic human needs for our Alaska Native and American Indian women and communities. It recognizes that everyone has a fundamental right to safe and secure housing—rights that are inseparable from survivor safety and form the foundation of thriving communities.

I think that many people believe that homelessness and domestic violence are not connected or that there is no relationship between Alaska Native women who are experiencing homelessness and those who have experienced domestic violence.

But we cannot ignore the intersectionality between domestic violence and homelessness. Studies show that as many as 57% of all homeless women reported domestic violence as the immediate cause of their homelessness.¹ Some of these circumstances could include fleeing a domestic violence situation with no alternative housing to go to, or landlords who evict victims from housing due to repeated calls to the police or property damage created by the abuser.

For too long, Alaska Native survivors have been forced to choose between staying in dangerous situations or facing homelessness, between their safety and their ability to meet their children's basic needs. This

¹ Wilder Research Center (2004). Homeless in Minnesota, 2003, 22; Center for Impact Research (2004).

legislation acknowledges that effective survivor services must address the full spectrum of rights that enable women to leave violent relationships and build stable, independent lives.

We need to ensure there are services for those leaving domestic violence situations, with housing being one of the largest needs in our rural and urban areas. Currently, with housing infrastructure severely limited and costs soaring across Alaska, survivors desperately need dedicated funding for safe housing options. Funding that simply doesn't exist today, forcing women to stay in dangerous situations because they have nowhere else to go.

With 574 recognized tribes across the country, there are currently fewer than 60 tribally centered or native centered domestic violence shelters. In Alaska, we are fortunate enough to have three tribal or native domestic violence shelters, but with the overwhelming number of homeless and survivors seeking assistance and shelter, three is certainly not enough.

Title VII of this legislation, and in particular Sections 701 and 702, includes addressing one of the most dangerous barriers survivors face: the lack of safe, stable housing.

Recently, the AKNWRC conducted a statewide Alaska Safe Housing Assessment that clearly identified what we've known for years - that everyone has a fundamental right to live free from violence, food security, access to healthcare, housing, and meaningful employment, and yet Alaska Native survivors are consistently denied these basic rights due to our state's housing crisis.

The pilot programs outlined in Sections 701 and 702 directly address findings from the comprehensive statewide assessment. We documented that Alaska's housing crisis is worse than anywhere else in the United States, with overcrowding four times the national average, and in rural Alaska Native villages, over 44% of households are severely overcrowded.² For survivors of domestic violence, this means staying in dangerous situations because there is simply nowhere safe to go.

What makes these pilot programs potentially transformative and significant is their recognition that Alaska Native survivors need more than crisis intervention. They need comprehensive support that addresses their right to safe housing, food security, healthcare access, and economic opportunities. The Tribal Homeless Assistance program, modeled after Tribal VASH, acknowledges that survivors fleeing violence are experiencing a form of homelessness and need specialized support and services. This approach understands that a survivor's path to safety often depends on their ability to meet their family's basic needs while maintaining cultural connections.

Our assessment found that survivors face challenges in fleeing abuse that mirror reasons for returning, including lack of housing, abuser tactics, lack of culturally appropriate services, and co-occurring issues.

² Alaska Native Women's Resource Center . "Alaska Safe Housing Assessment Report." 2024, *available at* <https://www.aknwrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Alaska-Safe-Housing-Assessment-Report-2024-FINAL.pdf>.

The Continuum of Care Builds program addresses this by providing funding for construction, acquisition, and rehabilitation of permanent supportive housing; something that is desperately needed in Alaska, where emergency housing is limited and often inaccessible, and long-term housing is scarcer, with insufficient stock and high costs.

The 75% set-aside for projects that benefit Indian Tribes recognizes the unique challenges Alaska Native communities face. Our research showed that safety resources vary significantly between villages, hub communities, and cities, with urban areas having more established services like shelters, while villages rely on informal networks of friends, family, and public facilities not designed for housing. These pilot programs would enable communities to develop housing solutions that work within their cultural frameworks and geographic realities.

Title VII's emphasis on Tribal self-determination is particularly important. Rather than imposing one-size-fits-all solutions, these programs allow Alaska Native communities to design housing approaches that reflect their values and meet their specific needs. This could mean developing housing that supports extended family systems, incorporates traditional healing practices, or addresses the seasonal challenges that affect housing availability in rural Alaska.

Our assessment documented that survivors utilize a variety of services to be safely housed, and most are not domestic violence-specific, with service provider coordination being essential to maximize resources and ensure service continuity. The coordination requirements in Title VII, requiring partnerships between tribally designated housing entities, Tribes, healthcare providers, and social service agencies, directly address this need for comprehensive, coordinated support.

For the Alaska Native survivors we serve, these programs represent hope that they won't have to choose between their safety and their cultural identity, between leaving abusive situations and becoming homeless. They offer the possibility of housing solutions that understand that everyone deserves access to the fundamental rights that make violence less likely and recovery more possible - safe housing, economic opportunities, healthcare access, and food security, all while maintaining connections to community and culture.

Finally, they represent federal recognition that Alaska Native and American Indian communities require specialized approaches to address homelessness and housing instability, particularly for survivors of violence. Most importantly, they provide resources for Tribal communities to develop their own solutions, honoring Tribal sovereignty while addressing one of the most critical needs our people face.

I'd like to express my sincere gratitude to the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs for considering my testimony. The AKNWRC will soon submit additional written comments and recommendations to the Committee.

As the Executive Director of the AKNWRC and, more importantly, an Alaska Native woman and tribal citizen, I urge this Committee to continue to take meaningful action that supports Tribal self-governance, Tribal sovereignty, and our Alaska Native Tribes and communities. Together, we can build a future that preserves our culture, strengthens our communities, and ensures the well-being of generations to come.

Thank you.