

Kimberly Loring Heavy Runner

TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS Oversight Hearing on

"Missing and Murdered: Confronting the Silent Crisis in Indian Country."

December 12, 2018

My name is Kimberly Loring Heavy Runner, and I am here today to share my sister Ashley Loring Heavy Runner's story, and to shed light on the mistreatment of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women cases handled by multiple levels of Law Enforcement in Montana, and across the United States.

Ashley's story-

Ashley Loring Heavy Runner is a 22 year old Blackfeet woman that went missing June 12, 2017 on the Blackfeet Reservation in Montana, at the age of 20, over one and half years ago. Ashley's life is valued and cannot be explained in the five minutes that I am being allowed. Please forgive me if I go slightly over the requested time frame.

Failure of Law Enforcement-

The first information in regards to Ashley's disappearance was received on June 25, 2017 stating that Ashley was running from a males' vehicle on US Highway 89, alongside the Rocky Mountain Front on the Blackfeet reservation.

In the beginning stages of the investigation, a sweater was found on the Blackfeet Reservation on June 28, 2017 and placed into evidence with Blackfeet Tribal Law Enforcement (BLES). The sweater was identified by an eye-witness stating that Ashley was wearing the exact same sweater when she went missing. When the sweater, which was stained with 'red spots' and holes was turned over by Blackfeet Law Enforcement (BLES) to the BIA, the agent stated multiple times

that he sent the sweater to the crime lab, when we questioned the results of the testing of the sweater he then changed the story and said he couldn't send out due to testing reasons after eight (8) months of being in evidence with the BIA. We later found out the sweater has never been sent, and is still currently sitting in BIA evidence. The Blackfeet Law Enforcement (BLES) informed us they did a search on the location where the sweater was found on July 28, 2017. We searched that location for two weeks after the sweater was found and never seen either agency BLES or BIA during our searches. We later spoke with a BLES officer that was working on Ashley's case and she had no recollection of a search ever being conducted in that location. We were then told Blackfeet Law Enforcement (BLES) was no longer taking any tips concerning Ashley's case and we instructed to contact the BIA agent assigned to our area in Montana. Several attempts have been made by the family with no response from the BIA agent to date. During the course of the investigation with the Blackfeet Law Enforcement (BLES) we became aware that a Blackfeet law enforcement officer working on Ashley's case was having relations with, and giving information to a prime suspect.

For over the course of nine (9) months that the BIA has taken over the case most leads and information given to BIA have not been followed up on, nor documented. Blackfeet Tribal Law Enforcement (BLES) as well as the Bureau of Indian Affairs have not take Ashley's case seriously.

After two months of being reported missing the BIA Agent responded to our calls by stating "Ashley is of age and can leave whenever she wants to." Despite the fact all the leads coming in were stating that Ashley was in danger, or was hurt and placed in the mountains. From the very beginning, both Blackfeet Tribal Law Enforcement (BLES) and the BIA have ignored the dire

situation that Ashley is in and have allowed this investigation to be handled in a dysfunctional manner. This isn't just a reality for our family but a reality for many MMIW families. We all share the same experience when working with law enforcement.

In closing, think of how each of you would feel if the response you are given about your wife, sister, daughters missing persons case was

”she is of age and can leave when she wants to.”

Ashley is loved and cherished, I will continue to search for my sister.

I am asking you to recognize that Indigenous women matter, and the way our missing and murdered women cases are handled needs to be corrected.

We are going missing, we are being murdered. We are not being taken seriously. I am here to stress to you we are important and we are loved and we are missed. We will no longer be the invisible people in the United States of America, we have worth.