

RCW 43.10.320 Missing and murdered indigenous women and people cold case investigations assistance unit. (1) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, there is hereby created a missing and murdered indigenous women and people cold case investigations assistance unit within the office of the attorney general for the purpose of assisting federal, municipal, county, and tribal law enforcement agencies to solve cold cases involving missing and murdered indigenous women and people.

(2) The missing and murdered indigenous women and people cold case investigations assistance unit may proactively offer assistance to the law enforcement agency with primary jurisdiction over a missing or murdered indigenous women or person cold case. The missing and murdered indigenous women and people cold case investigations assistance unit shall not investigate or assist with a criminal investigation except at the request of the law enforcement agency with primary jurisdiction over the case, in which case the assistance shall be limited to the content of such request.

(3) The missing and murdered indigenous women and people cold case investigations assistance unit shall prioritize assistance to jurisdictions that do not have sufficient resources to investigate cold cases.

(4) The missing and murdered indigenous women and people cold case investigations assistance unit shall include an advocate or case navigator.

(5) Nothing in this section alters the attorney general's concurrent authority to investigate and prosecute crimes. [2023 c 104 s 2.]

Findings—2023 c 104: "The legislature finds that:

(1) American Indian and Alaska Native women experience violence at much higher rates than the national average. A recent federal study reported that Native American women are murdered at rates greater than 10 times the national average. Many of these crimes, however, are often unsolved or even unreported because there are also very high rates of disappearance for Native American women;

(2) The national center for disease control reports that homicide is the sixth-leading cause of death for indigenous women and girls and the third-leading cause of death for indigenous men;

(3) The legislature established the Washington state missing and murdered indigenous women and people task force in the attorney general's office to address the crisis, and in 2022 the task force unanimously recommended the legislature establish and fully fund a cold case investigations unit in the attorney general's office that can offer assistance to law enforcement agencies with jurisdiction over unsolved cold cases involving missing and murdered indigenous women and people;

(4) Cold cases vary in scope, but may include unsolved homicides, sexual offenses, sexually motivated offenses, missing persons, and cases of unidentified remains;

(5) Cold cases may include cases in which the investigating agency is not actively working the case and has suspended the investigation;

(6) Most law enforcement agencies in Washington state do not have dedicated cold case units, and can benefit from assistance;

(7) When cases go cold, family members of native and indigenous women and girls often continue to search for their loved one using their own resources;

(8) The attorney general's office and Washington state patrol have dedicated significant time and resources towards working with families of missing and murdered indigenous women and people to build trust and engagement;

(9) The homicide investigation tracking system (HITS) program within the attorney general's office tracks and investigates homicides and rapes. HITS partners with Washington law enforcement agencies to collect, analyze, link, and then provide law enforcement with information that will facilitate the resolution of violent crimes and speed the apprehension and prosecution of violent criminals. Typically, in every calendar year, HITS will respond to almost 800 requests for assistance or information. The investigators who work in HITS also provide expertise to the local and national jurisdictions on homicide and rape investigations;

(10) A missing and murdered indigenous women and people cold case unit should use a culturally attuned, trauma-informed, and family and victim-centered approach in assisting local law enforcement agencies; and (11) A missing and murdered indigenous women and people cold case investigation unit will expand resources available to law enforcement, coroners, and other agencies." [2023 c 104 s 1.]