

Committee on Natural Resources
“The Needs and Challenges of Tribal Law Enforcement on Indian Reservations”
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Pretty Bird Woman House
Standing Rock Reservation

My name is Georgia Little Shield. I am the Director for the Pretty Bird Woman House Shelter, which is located on the Standing Rock Reservation. I have been employed at the shelter since November of 2004, opening the office of the shelter in January of 2005.

We have had many challenges with police officers since that time. I would like to share a few stories of what has occurred on our reservation. The second month that I worked, I received a call from a woman living 18 miles out of McLaughlin SD. She was severely beaten and did not want to go to the hospital, but did want to make a complaint. We called the Police Department that morning and were told that when an officer becomes available he would be headed to our residence. We waited two (2) hours, when the officer didn't show, I called again and was told there was another traffic accident and when he was free he would be on his way. I stayed with the woman, talking to her and assuring her that the officers would be there at any time. We waited another two (2) hours, called again and the dispatch stated that there was only one officer on and that he would get to us when he is free. At 6:00 PM the woman said it was useless to wait because they would not come. This woman ended up not wanting to make a complaint, was very scared, but told me to go home and leave her since there would be nothing done any way. I called that woman the next morning and asked her if the police ever came to see her and she stated “No”.

Now do you think that she will call again if this happened to her again? This is what happens when you supply only one officer to a shift that has to cover 2.3 million acres.

I have since set up trainings for the police officers through South Dakota Coalition Against Domestic Violence And Sexual Assault. I talked to the Chief of Police, Lieutenant White, and he stated he would have officers at these training but no BIA officers attended. When I called back to see why officers were not there, I was told that due to a shortage of officers, they were not able to send any. Thus, because there is a dire shortage of officers on Standing Rock Reservation they are not receiving the proper training regarding domestic violence and sexual assault.

Another domestic violence call I received one night came from the City Police located in McLaughlin, SD. The officer stated there was a woman in his Police Department that he thought I could help. After talking to the young woman, I assured her that I could get her to a shelter where she could feel safe.

When I reached the Police Department, the Officer on duty said he just was not able to pick the guy up as he did not have jurisdiction because he was Native American (does this mean the officer quoted the law wrong or he meant that it occurred on tribal land?)

and so was the woman. The officer had called the police in FT. Yates, so they were aware of the situation. She had signed a complaint and the officer did take pictures.

I asked the officer what this man was driving and was told he was driving a gray and black Suburban. When I came down Main Street, I saw a gray and black suburban driving around. This man chased this woman 18 miles to town, her car into the ditch several times. But no BIA Police Officer ever showed up. This man could have killed her and no one would have ever known she was out there in the ditch. I took her to a shelter off the reservation so she could feel safe. She left her car at the police station and got in with me and the officer escorted us out of town and that poor woman lay on the floor because she was so scared until we were 60 miles out of town. I picked her up the next day to get her car and we talked to the City Police who told us the BIA still had not stopped to get the complaint she filed.

It is important to note that when I first got the call from the City Police Officer, he stated he had a woman who wanted to be put in jail for the night, but he thought I could help her more. When any woman thinks the safest place for her is in jail, something *has* to be wrong!! For a Native woman to feel the need to seek safety outside her homeland is equally unacceptable.

One year ago I attended a meeting at the Bridges Against Domestic Violence Shelter in Mobridge and asked how we could help them with a situation involving 5 rapes occurring in one weekend. One woman had been brought in by a passer-by from the Standing Rock Reservation and she was taken to the Mobridge City Police Station. The Chief of Police called Standing Rock and they came, however, the officer conducting the interview took 5 hours to get there and had an attitude with the Chief of Police in Mobridge. Chief Niles stated to us that he knew nothing was going to be done about it, because of statements the BIA officer made to him. Jurisdiction was on the Standing Rock Reservation so that is who had to pursue it. (Shouldn't this have been turned over to the FBI?)

This is a classic example of why woman don't report rapes - insensitive and ineffective responses.

Another similar incident to the one above involves Advocate from Bridges Against Domestic Violence contacting the Ft. Yates Police Department for two days and repeatedly being told someone would be there to take statements. No one ever did show up. Do you think this woman got justice? Another time a woman was severely beaten and taken to IHS who notified the Police Department in FT. Yates. The advocate at BADV made many calls in regard to this case and did not receive any follow up for 4 weeks. The person who assaulted her was not arrest. What about her? Did she get justice? The issue is not just about numbers of officers. It must be about prioritizing safety and accountability through out the entire response.

Another situation that exemplifies the issues women face occurred a month ago. We had helped a young woman who's batterer's level of violence was well-known throughout the community. The next day early in the morning I received a call from an advocate who

stated that the phone was not working at the shelter - the phone company said the phone line out side had been cut. This is especially dangerous in a rural area. We called the police as soon as we had service and waited. Then two hours later we called again and stated we needed to make a complaint for the record. We waited no officer came to this date!! When the Women's Shelter is not a priority then there is something wrong.

As of May 25, 2007, I was informed that we are down to 4 police officers on the Standing Rock Reservation. Because of the lack of officers and under- sourcing through -out the criminal justice system and community-based advocacy programs, every day is a dangerous day for women living on the Standing Rock Reservation.

We need to look at the lack of Advocates to provide safety and support to the women who call for help, in addition to basic resources such as transportation and housing. Until a few months ago, there were only two of advocates for the entire Standing Reservation and surrounding area. Now there are three. More are needed as is general operating and emergency funds.

There is a need for Advocates to work on the northern half of Standing Rock Reservation. It is our hope that we can have an Outreach Office in or near Fort Yates in the future. We need Advocates available to transport and accompany women to Court Hearings, to assist women through the process of obtaining Protection Orders and other legal advocacy. We need Advocates to accompany women to medical facilities for examinations and ongoing treatment after an attack, to work through social service/TANF, mental health needs etc. We need Advocates to respond to the crisis line 24/7. We need Advocates to work with the children who have witnessed violence, provide ongoing support to women who have been battered and raped, to provide emergency monies, clothing, food, and housing. We need Advocates to provide community and agency education, leadership in a coordinated community response and to create the social change necessary to end violence against women.

The South Dakota Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, and Sacred Circle, National Resource Center to End Violence Against Native Women provide training and technical assistance. The problem is finding the funding to be able to provide the kind of services and resources needed.

Currently, as advocates for Pretty Bird Woman's House we do our best to cover all of Standing Rock and offer the services needed or help to search out resources for the women. We work 24/7 because of our commitment to saving the lives of the women and their children in our community. We do the best we can to do whatever, wherever when we are need. We need the resources and support as great as our commitment.

One other recommendation that I would like to state is a great need is to make sure to match the Police force to the Land Base as there is a extreme amount of land 2.3 acres through out Standing Rock Nation.

But all so keep in mind to match the population to the people to the police officers. When advocates are in the field I fear for there safety as there are no police services to help serve protection orders or to make complaints or just to feel safe.

Finally I would like to say these stories are just the tip of the iceberg. I have so many stories it would fill so many pages. The women of Native Lands are depending on you for changes.

In the past 13 years that I have worked in the field of domestic violence I have witnessed many, many situations that you could not imanage seeing in your life time. I have worked here on the Standing Rock Reservation for three (3) years but have worked on the Cheyenne River Reservation for 10 years; the same situations were faced on that reservation as are being faced here on the Standing Rock Reservation. When I did work on Cheyenne River we had many advocates. Three (3) from the Family Violence grant four (4) from the Rural Domestic and Sexual Violence and Child victimization grant. Since President Bush has been president we have had one budget cut after another and have since lost all seven advocates in Cheyenne River. What I am trying to state is that the shortage of police is just not on Standing Rock. The difference is that BIA police Standing Rock and Tribal Officers police Cheyenne River. We are all suffering from the lack of police on both reservations.

We have become a Lawless Nation and people have starting to make there own laws. With this attitude we will have more deaths and people taking the situations in to there own hands. The people have started using violence to fight violence.

With a heavy heart I bring these things to the hearing with hopes that there is something down to fix the situation. Please think of the Women and Children when you talk of these issues.