



Memorandum

To: Members of the Arizona State 56th Legislature

From: Ryan Springborn, Cold Case and Missing Person Project (DPAA)

Date: 22 March 2024

Re: Implementation of Cost Effective Methodology for Missing Persons Cases in Arizona

Executive Summary:

It is important to understand the application that reallocated funds could contribute to in terms of missing persons cases. During research, there was a focus on methodology and procedures that can contribute to the higher number of missing person cases in Arizona and on tribal lands. By applying cost effective solutions, the Arizona justice system could better combat this growing issue and create a safer community for those affected.

While some steps have been taken towards combating such issues, some areas and counties in Arizona have less open information when it comes to cold case and missing persons statistics. Specifically, many of the tribal areas in Arizona are significantly disconnected from communities and law enforcement outside of tribal land, which can cause more people to go missing in such areas and less people to be found who have gone missing.

Background & Methodology:

Data for this memo recommendation was collected through academic journals, public databases, and credible news outlets. Arizona faces a unique problem, with the state facing the second highest number of missing person cases at 14.2 per 100,000 people¹. The Arizona budget has also been significantly reduced in recent years, going from a 2.5 billion surplus to a deficit². Additionally, missing persons have been a continually raised

¹<https://www.newsweek.com/missing-people-namus-missing-persons-database-department-justice-oklahoma-1866246>

²<https://kjzz.org/content/1867384/how-az-budget-went-25-billion-surplus-large-deficit>

³<https://law.asu.edu/indigenous-land-acknowledgement>

⁴https://ccj.asu.edu/sites/default/files/rovv-lab/files/ASU_MMIWG_report_November_2020.pdf

⁵<https://namus.nij.ojp.gov/>

⁶<https://doi.org/10.29173/cjs10114>

concern on the tribal lands of Arizona, which consists of 27% of the total land in this state³. Arizona has the third highest rate of missing or murdered indigenous women⁴. Data was also collected from conversation and conferences with people who are closely connected with current reports and task forces, such as the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Person's Task Force.

Recommendations:

The suggested recommendation is that with reallocated funding, more resources towards specific combative techniques could allow for the prevention of missing person cases and reduce the high volume of cases in Arizona. First, Arizona currently does not require the addition of missing persons cases to a national database, called Nameus⁵. Such a change could better support the solving of cases in Arizona and states adjacent to Arizona. Next, the levels of segregation that are faced in Arizona between tribal lands and non-tribal lands significantly impacts the number of cases that Arizona faces, with more spread out regions facing more issues regarding missing persons⁶. With a shift of money away from the high cost of death penalty cases, more resources could be contributed to community solutions, such as better street lighting in specific high risk areas, more victim resources for affected families, and cold case units in counties that do not currently have a unit.

Conclusion:

With minor action taken towards issues such as the task force created by Governor Hobbs, it is imperative that we take this time to continue to push forward solutions for one of Arizona's biggest criminal justice issues. Families and victims of crime should not have to fear a person close to them going missing. Arizona should strive towards building safer communities and prevent crimes before they happen. Addressing the areas in which crime is more prevalent is the first step towards a more equitable justice system. Moving towards safer communities makes economic and social sense for the benefit of citizens. Divestment in retributive punishment systems that tie victims families to the outcomes of court procedures that span decades when more resources are needed long term for them as well as other families who have not been provided justice in missing persons and cold cases. It is undeniable that we can support victims better, it is imperative to break cycles of violence that the state moves forward legislation that combats these injustices through financial resource allocation.