

THE NEGLECTED EPIDEMIC OF MISSING BIPOC WOMEN AND GIRLS

HEARING

BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON CIVIL RIGHTS AND CIVIL
LIBERTIES
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT
AND REFORM

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THE NEGLECTED EPIDEMIC OF MISSING BIPOC WOMEN AND GIRLS

Thursday, March 3, 2022

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM
SUBCOMMITTEE ON CIVIL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 11:07 a.m., in room 2154, Rayburn House Office Building, and via Zoom; Hon. Robin Kelly presiding.

Present: Representatives Maloney, Raskin, Mfume, Kelly, Norton, Ocasio-Cortez, Tlaib, and Mace.

Ms. KELLY. [Presiding.] The committee will come to order.

Without objection, the chair is authorized to declare a recess of the committee at any time.

First, I would like to start by recognizing the chairman of the subcommittee, Mr. Raskin, for his opening statement. Congressman?

Mr. RASKIN. Thank you so much, Ms. Kelly, and, especially, thank you for chairing this hearing as I continue to recover from COVID-19. Good morning, everyone. Thanks to our witnesses for joining us today. Thanks to all the members for participating. Again, I want to thank Representative Kelly for her leadership, and I want to thank Representatives Pressley and Ocasio-Cortez also for joining in this critical work of combating intimate partner violence and advocating for missing women and children throughout the country. This is a crisis that is hiding in plain sight, and I hope the hearing will help us to shine a light on the shocking plague of missing and murdered women and girls in communities of color across the country.

In 2020, 100,000 of the quarter million women and girls who went missing in the U.S. were black, brown, or indigenous. Black women and girls make up just 13 percent of the female population in the country but accounted for fully 35 percent of all missing women in 2020. This crisis is dire in indigenous communities. In South Dakota, 2 of 3 missing persons are Native American despite only 1 of 10 South Dakotans being Native American. In Montana, Native Americans account for 1 of every 4 missing persons despite only 1 of 20 Montanans being Native American. These numbers don't even reflect the full extent of the epidemic. According to the GAO, the total number of missing and murdered indigenous women is still unknown. Federal data bases do not contain comprehensive nationwide data. The data that is collected includes Hispanic and Latino women among white women, leaving their numbers also

mysterious. Missing women from immigrant communities also go unreported and uncouned out of fear of deportation.

The causes driving the disproportionate rates of missing women of color are many and complex. Intimate partner violence affects nearly half of African American and indigenous women compared to 37 percent of white women. Unfortunately, fewer than 20 percent of all women who face intimate partner violence seek services, which only perpetuates the cycle of violence. Sex trafficking also drives these disproportionate numbers. Nearly two-thirds of sex trafficking victims in this country are black and Latino or Hispanic. The numbers are just as dire for native women. In South Dakota, Native-American women and girls constitute 40 percent of victims of sex trafficking. Native women also face unique dangers: so-called man camps. Temporary housing for pipeline and oil industry laborers affects indigenous and other marginalized communities in rural areas where they are located. Studies have shown that the placement of man camps statistically coincide with dramatically significant increases in crime. For example, the Fort Berthold Reservation saw a 75-percent increase in sexual assaults on native women after man camps arose in their region during the oil construction boom of the late 2000's. Notably, there was no corresponding rise in crime outside of this area.

Unfortunately, these communities are structurally hamstrung in their response to such threats. Tribal law enforcement is prohibited from prosecuting non-native individuals who commit crimes against their people. Local law enforcement often has limited resources, are spread thin, and may be hesitant to engage with jurisdictional uncertainty. Federal law enforcement has not been able to step into the gaps. They may have a geographically limited presence to investigate and prosecute serious crimes against native communities. Even so, in 2017, U.S. attorneys declined to prosecute over 1 in 3 of their cases arising in Indian Country, primarily citing a lack of evidence. Jurisdictional wrangling and limited resources often lead to significant delays. The first 24 to 48 hours in a missing persons case is critical, and poor communication between law enforcement agencies can make the difference between life and death.

The neglect shown by the media toward cases involving missing and murdered women of color is a primary reason that this epidemic remains obscure to the public. Countless families in these communities shoulder the burden of a missing loved one alone. Countless others shoulder the additional trauma of a law enforcement system that discounts their fears and their experience. Just one example here: in Wyoming, out of the more than 700 indigenous women who have gone missing last 10 years, less than 1 in 5 received any media coverage. How is that possible?

So we are here today to render visible this invisible crisis in our midst. Congress and the Biden Administration have taken some important preliminary steps to clarify the epidemic of missing and murdered women of color. Savanna's Act, the Ashlyne Mike Amber Alert in Indian Country Act, and the Ashanti Alert Act have all been enacted into law. There have been executive orders, but we have more work to do. We must act to ensure that Federal law enforcement is fully coordinating with the Western states that have

created missing and murdered indigenous women task forces. The Administration needs to constitute the Joint Commission on Reducing Violence Against Indians. Congress must reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act and the Frederick Douglass Trafficking Victims Prevention and Protection Act, and fully fund implementation of the Ashanti Alert Act. Finally, we must consider the Protect Black Women and Girls Act, introduced by my friend and our distinguished colleague, Congresswoman Kelly.

We must work together to confront and address this pressing problem. The core function of government is to protect the safety and the security of the people. That is the essence of the social contract. We must secure and fortify the social contract for women of color all across America. I look forward to hearing the testimony of our witnesses today, and I yield back to you, Ms. Kelly.

Ms. KELLY. Thank you. And with that, I now recognize the distinguished ranking member, Ms. Mace, for an opening statement.

Ms. MACE. Thank you, Chairwoman Kelly, and thank you Chairman Raskin as well. You look great, so I am glad to see you are doing OK. I thank the chairman for holding today's hearing on such an important issue.

In my hometown of Goose Creek, South Carolina, just over two years ago in September, I believe, of 2019, there was a huge human trafficking and sex trafficking bust. These kinds of issues are happening all over our country unbeknownst to many people today, and there are thousands of innocent victims. All Americans, especially women and girls, deserve to realize their full potential in this country and achieve the American Dream, but far too often, violent criminal activities and sex trafficking serve to limit opportunities and extinguish their livelihood.

A shockingly high number of women and girls will be the victim of tragedies of child abuse, domestic violence, sexual assault, or human trafficking during their lifetime. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, intimate partner violence has affected or will affect 1 in 4 women in the U.S., and half of all female homicide victims in the U.S. are killed by a current or former male intimate partner. In my home state of South Carolina, there were almost 60 homicides in 2021 alone related to domestic violence. According to the South Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, the rate in South Carolina is over twice the national average for femicide.

The 1 in 4 number I mentioned previously is only for the general population. In fact, there are even a higher proportion of survivors of domestic violence among women of color, with 35 percent of Native-American women estimated to be victimized by rape, physical assault, and stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime. In New York City alone, despite only making up 20 percent of the population, black women were 45 percent of domestic violence related to homicide victims. Women and girls are also frequently targeted by human traffickers, especially by sex traffickers who prey on the most vulnerable.

These tragedies are particularly acute among women of color. For example, despite only making up eight percent of the population in South Dakota, Native-American women are 40 percent of sex trafficking victims in the state. In Louisiana, almost half of sex traf-

ficking survivors are black women and girls, even though they make up only 19 percent of Louisiana's youth population. Nationwide, black women and girls are estimated to be about 40 percent of domestic sex trafficking victims in the U.S., and it is estimated that there are currently between 64,000 and 75,000 missing black women and girls in the United States, many of whom have been targeted by sex traffickers. These crimes subject victims and their communities to great cost. The CDC estimates the total economic impact of domestic violence to be somewhere north of \$3-and-a-half trillion, which includes medical services for injuries, lost productivity from work, criminal justice costs, and, tragically, the personal cost for every victim of domestic violence is greater than \$100,000 over this women's lifetimes, on average.

This is an important hearing. I look forward to learning from the witnesses today about their own experiences with these tragedies and what they and their organizations are doing to raise awareness of these issues to reduce the vulnerable from being targeted, and to ensure that survivors can live the best life possible in our country. I am especially interested in what policies we should be advocating for to improve access to education and economic opportunities for all women to decrease their vulnerability and risk for being targeted by criminals. All of us deserve to live in a society free from the fear of falling victim to violent crimes, and I hope this hearing will illustrate how important this issue is today because so many Americans are not informed, don't have the data or the information, and would never believe this is happening in our country today.

So, I want to thank the chairwoman. I do want to, Madam Chair, ask for unanimous consent to enter a statement into the record from Tara Sweeney, who is a former assistant secretary for Indian Affairs at the U.S. Department of Interior.

Ms. KELLY. Without objection.

Ms. MACE. Thank you, and I yield back.

Ms. KELLY. Thank you, Ranking Member Mace. I now recognize the chair of the full Committee on Oversight and Reform, Chairwoman Maloney, for an opening statement.

Chairwoman MALONEY. Thank you. Thank you so very much, Chairman Raskin and Ranking Member Mace. I commend both of you for your leadership in calling attention to this tragic and underreported story. Congresswoman Kelly, thank you, too, for the leadership role you have played on this issue, and in developing this hearing, and literally having other hearings in your district on the subject. I also appreciate your willingness to fill in as chair this morning.

Of the more than 250,000 women and girls reported missing in 2020, at least 40 percent were women of color. Despite making up a much smaller share of the overall U.S. population, black, indigenous, and Hispanic women are going missing at shockingly high rates, and there is really no data on what happened to them. No one knows where they are. It is just a shocking, almost unbelievable situation in this country, and we are going to have to do a much better job in helping these women and really documenting what is happening. They are also more likely than white women

to fall victim to intimate partner violence and other crimes that contribute to missing person cases.

Yet the data available to us today likely understates the problem, and there is very little governmental data. It comes from not-for-profits, and according to the Government Accountability Office, the total number of missing indigenous women is unknown due to inadequacies in Federal data bases. These data bases also lack any data whatsoever on missing Hispanic women who are included with white women in official Federal counts. This tells me women of color are likely even more disproportionately represented among missing person cases than we know, creating a significant blind spot for policymakers as we seek solutions to these problems.

Women of color who go missing or who are victims of crime are also not getting the assistance and attention they deserve. This is a dire problem in my home of New York City. In Brooklyn, Natoya Stephens, a 29-year-old black woman of two, has been missing since 2012 after an argument with her fiance. Her loved ones are still seeking information on her whereabouts. Leanne Marie Hausberg, a 14-year-old girl of Native-American descent, also from Brooklyn, has been missing since 1999 when she disappeared from her family's apartment. To this day, her parents don't have answers about what happened to her. And earlier this year, we learned the tragic news that a 43-year-old Hispanic mother from my district in Queens, Yecely Sanchez, was found dead after going missing on New Year's Eve. Her four children will now have to grow up without their mother.

I hope to learn more about this through this hearing, about how we can do better by these women and the tens of thousands of others whose families and loved ones are still seeking answers. At the very least, I hope we can identify solutions to the data gaps that exist so we can know the true extent of the problem. In addition to the demographic information that is clearly lacking, there is likely additional data we should be routinely collecting and examining. More information on who is going missing, the communities they belong to, and what happened to them will help us direct the resources and attention necessary to better serve women of color who may be at risk.

In closing, I would like to echo President Biden's call during the State of the Union Tuesday night for Congress to finally send him a bill to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act. The House acted nearly a year ago passing reauthorization legislation I co-sponsored on a bipartisan vote. Our bill would provide vital services to victims of the types of crimes that fuel missing person cases, and it would address some of the challenges we will be discussing today. I hope it can be signed into law soon. And I think that this hearing is a long overdue, and it is hard to believe that so many women are missing in our country, unaccounted for, and we must do everything to improve the situation.

I want to thank all of our witnesses for sharing their stories and for their work in this area with us today, and I yield back. And I wish a speedy recovery of our chairman of the subcommittee, Jamie Raskin. He looks healthy and good, but we are all praying for you, Jamie, and thank you for your hard work in pulling this subcommittee hearing together. I yield back.

Ms. KELLY. Thank you, Madam Chair. First, I would like to thank the Civil Rights and Civil Liberties Subcommittee for holding this important hearing. I would also like to thank the panelists for appearing here to speak on such a critical issue, and especially Ms. Foster and Mr. Wilkinson for sharing your stories. I know this cannot be easy for you.

The issue of missing black, brown, and indigenous women and girls in America is truly an epidemic and critically important to me. Just under a month ago, the Caucus on Black Women and Girls hosted a roundtable discussion in my district on this very issue. We heard from a number of experts on the topic: families of victims and victims themselves. Resources were shared and made available for victims, including a toolkit so people could keep themselves and their communities safe. We heard ideas on how Federal and local agencies could work together to improve the reporting and solving of missing persons cases and better protect BIPOC women and girls. It was a productive conversation, but it was clear that more work needs to be done.

Black women and girls are too often ignored when they go missing, and they go missing at a much higher rate than white women. Even with these cases being underreported, black women made up a little more than one-third of all missing women reported last year, which is far higher than the nearly 15 percent of the population we account for nationally. Human trafficking also disproportionately affects black women. The congressional Black Caucus Foundation issued a report on human trafficking and found that 40 percent of sex trafficking victims were black women. All these factors contribute to the disproportionate number of missing black women. Unfortunately, the same can be said for many other minority populations. These shocking numbers are likely lower than reality as crimes against black women and BIPOC women in general are underreported. It is horrible that these cases do not receive more attention.

The media reporting of these women pales in comparison of white women, as in the tragic case of Gabby Petito, which received nearly 24-hour coverage until her body was found. You could not scroll through Twitter or read the news without seeing coverage of the story. Yes, she deserved to have this kind of media attention, but so do other women of color. Much of this can be contributed to biases toward women of color and what Dr. Julia Jordan-Zachery calls hyper-visibility of black women. When women of color are talked about in the media, it generally perpetuates negative stereotypes, creating a vicious cycle where we get less positive media attention. But this is not just about media attention. The issue of disproportionate missing BIPOC women and girls is one that needs more national attention by law enforcement policy as well.

States, such as Minnesota, have created task forces to better coordinate crackdown on the factoring contributions to missing BIPOC women and girls. At the Federal level, we need better coordination as well. This is why I introduced the Protect Black Women and Girls Act. This bipartisan bill would establish an inter-agency task force to examine the conditions and experiences of black women and girls in the United States and inform policy-makers on how we can better respond to this epidemic. We must

authorize, as you have heard over and over, the Violence Against Women Act, which has not been reauthorized since 2013 and expired in 2018. The House has done its job, and now the Senate must act. Lives are on the line. We need better coordination among Federal and state law enforcement, better funding to community organizations that report on missing persons cases, and support in finding these women.

I am grateful that the committee is having this hearing and bringing light to this issue. I am hoping for a productive hearing that will produce solutions to finding our missing women and girls.

Now I would like to introduce our witnesses. Our first witness today is Pamela Foster of the Navajo Tribe, the mother of a missing child. Then we will hear from Angel Charley, the executive director for the Coalition to Stop Violence Against Native Women. Then we will hear from Patrice Onwuka, the director of the Center for Economic Opportunity at the Independent Women's Forum. We will then hear from John Bischoff, the vice president of the Missing Children's Division at the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Then we will hear from Shawn Wilkinson of Gaithersburg, Maryland, the father of a missing child. Finally, we will hear from Natalie Wilson, one of the co-founders for the Black and Missing Foundation.

The witnesses will be unmuted so we can swear them in. If you can stand up. Please raise your right hands.

Do you swear or affirm that the testimony you are about to give is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

[A chorus of a yes.]

Ms. KELLY. Thank you. Let the record show that the witnesses answered in the affirmative. Thank you.

And without further objection, your written statements will be made part of the record, and you can sit down.

With that, Ms. Foster, you are now recognized for your testimony.

[No response.]

Ms. KELLY. You are still muted.

Ms. FOSTER. Can you hear me?

Ms. KELLY. Yes, we can.

STATEMENT OF PAMELA FOSTER, MOTHER OF MISSING CHILD

Ms. FOSTER. Good morning to everybody from the subcommittee. I am honored to be here today. My name is Pamela Foster, and I am a Navajo from the Navajo Nation.

On May 2, 2016, my children, Ian Mike and Ashlynnne Mike were kidnapped at the bus stop after school on the Navajo reservation in New Mexico. My children were abducted by a stranger and taken deep into the desert miles from home where Ian managed to escape, and, to great sadness, Ashlynnne was brutally assaulted and murdered. With the kidnapping of my children and the horrific murder of my daughter, I felt a great injustice. It was during the events of the abduction that I found out that there were no AMBER Alerts established on the Navajo Reservation. There were no 9-1-1's to call or roadway digital signs. Tribal law enforcement

did not act quickly enough, and had poor communication systems, and had little to no training on missing persons and child abductions. The lack of technology and infrastructure made it difficult to search for my children.

Because I felt there was a slow response from tribal law enforcement, I got on social media and reached out to family and friends asking them to share my urgent message. My community had no training regarding abductions, plus they had no idea an abduction had occurred. Myself, family, and friends reached out to law enforcement and search and rescue teams off reservations and pleaded for their help. Due to jurisdictional laws, authorities off reservations were not able to help. They had to receive word from tribal police that an abduction had occurred. This amplified the strain that we felt. That evening, Ian was found by a passerby and taken to law enforcement. After what seemed like an eternity, an AMBER Alert was finally issued for Ashlynnne 12 hours after we made that first call to law enforcement, and 12 precious hours were wasted.

Since the kidnapping of my children, I have found out that the first 48 hours after an abduction are the most critical times to search and investigate for a missing person. As each hour passes, the likelihood that a missing person will be found decreases substantially. I began voicing my concerns about the problems that I faced during the abduction of my children, and I found other tribes were experiencing the same problem as Navajo. My daughter's death may have been prevented if there was an AMBER Alert system in place at the time of her abduction. Prior to the abductions, the Navajo Nation had been given the opportunity to implement an AMBER Alert system, and they failed to do so.

I began advocating about the tragedy we experienced and vowed to make a difference on Indian Country. I spoke about the many crimes that happen to our indigenous people on and off Indian Country—kidnapping, sexual assaults, child abuse, violence against women and girls. And I also felt the urgency to ask our leaders to locate all sexual offenders on reservations because many had not registered in the system, and their whereabouts were unknown.

Shortly after, I started a petition, called the AMBER Alert in Indian Country Act, to bring protection to indigenous families and their children, and with the help of representatives from Washington, I was able to pass my bill into law. The bill was signed into law on April 13, 2018, and renamed Ashlynnne Mike AMBER Alert in Indian Country Act. Ashlynnne's Law amends the PROTECT Act and helps tribes to implement their own AMBER Alert systems, and helps tribes with education, and training, and technological challenges encountered by tribes. We were actively implementing AMBER Alert legislation directly into Indian Country when COVID-19 hit. There are still a lot of reservations which need to implement the AMBER Alert system, and hopefully this progress will move forward again.

The dynamics of violence contributing to missing and murdered indigenous people is immensely difficult and challenging to understand. It is important to bring awareness to the challenges that indigenous people face on a daily basis, to bring attention to the obstacles that can only be fixed by lawmakers like you. I am fortu-

nate I had a large platform to share my story because there are thousands of stories that don't have the media coverage, and they have been silenced by falling through the cracks of the judicial system. I hope my story can help make the changes that we desperately need. If it means my story helped to save one life, then it was worth sharing.

I thank you today for my testimony, and I hope that we will be able to make much-needed changes. Thank you.

Ms. KELLY. Thank you so much, Ms. Foster. Thank you for sharing.

Ms. Charley, you are now recognized for your testimony.

**STATEMENT OF ANGEL CHARLEY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
COALITION TO STOP VIOLENCE AGAINST NATIVE WOMEN**

Ms. CHARLEY. [Speaking native language] Chair and members of the committee. My name is Angel Charley, and I'm from the Pueblo of Laguna. I serve as the executive director of the Coalition to Stop Violence Against Native Women. Today, I thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about an issue that is impacting the lives of too many indigenous peoples: the murdered and missing indigenous women crisis, or MMIW.

Our goal at the Coalition is to build healthy families and healthy communities. We do this by enacting social change that is grounded in the principles of kinship, healing, accountability, and love. Based on these principles, I am here to share with you what we believe is at the root of inaction that our families face when seeking justice or closure to the murder or disappearance of their loved one. It is a system that is rooted in the devaluation of indigenous lives since the onset of colonization.

While some progress has been made in attempting to address this crisis, what continues to obstruct our ability to access the resources and appropriate support is the embedded bureaucracy within these well-intended solutions. Families across Indian Country remain burdened with the financial cost of investigation, search, and rescue. The system responses created to date have left these families un-resourced, without direction, and lost within the intricacies of tribal, state, and Federal bureaucracies.

Last week, I spoke with a mother from Farmington, New Mexico, who was told by investigating detectives not to speak publicly about her case, but the only media coverage that keeps her daughter a priority requires that she tells her story. During Operation Lady Justice listening sessions, a family from Shiprock, New Mexico, were forced into silence because they did not have internet access, transportation to a hotspot, nor the ability to leave their community during lockdown orders. Right now, here in Washington, DC, exists an unknown number of backlogged, untested, and unprosecuted rape kits from across Indian Country. These are untraceable by tribal leadership, families, and victims. These cases remain unsolved.

These examples are too common throughout our communities, and it is a failure on the part of the justice system. It is the repeated deferred responsibility of those who have sworn to protect, declaring complications of jurisdiction or a lack of resources. This

is keeping our families from having justice, but, more importantly, this is keeping them from healing.

Our organization knows that it is not if a native women will experience violence in her lifetime, but it is when. More than 85 percent of our women will experience it, more than half of it will be sexual violence, yet annually, over a third of these cases are declined for prosecution, citing lack of evidence. It is the complexity of jurisdiction, the historic lack of funding, and systemic racism that continue to fuel the crisis of MMIW. The disparate treatment of indigenous women by law enforcement and media goes unchecked, and our communities experience multiple disappearances: a disappearance from family, from community, then by the media, and then in the system.

Our women are 10 times more likely to be murdered, and so we continue to ask why. Why are our lives not valued? Why are we invisible? What is clear is that our justice is caught in the limbo of bureaucracy. This is not an epidemic. This is a crisis ongoing through time, created by the very system that now seeks to address it. Congress, the Department of Justice, and decision-makers throughout Indian Country have the reports outlining the violence that we face, yet year after year, we fail to follow through with increased funding, expansion of service areas, and multi-year commitments to address the root causes of these issues. The reauthorization of VAWA remains unauthorized where a list of tribal provisions expand oversight and, thereby, protection of our women and children. Recommendations from government oversight committees linger with continued inaction, and the sexual violence created by man camps and extractive industries practices continue to cause devastating impacts on our communities, adding to this crisis.

In closing, I would ask the committee to remember this: that it is our communities who are left filling in the gaps of the system. It is the families and advocates who continue to show up against all odds to tell their story, demand visibility, and ensure that justice remembers their loved ones. Thank you.

Ms. KELLY. Thank you, Ms. Charley. Ms. Onwuka—

Ms. ONWUKA. Thank you.

Ms. KELLY [continuing]. You are now recognized for your testimony.

STATEMENT OF PATRICE ONWUKA, DIRECTOR, CENTER FOR ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY, INDEPENDENT WOMEN'S FORUM

Ms. ONWUKA. Thank you, Chairman Raskin, Congresswoman Kelly, Ranking Member Mace, and the members of the committee. I appreciate you having me here today. My name is Patrice Onwuka, and I am a director of the Center for Economic Opportunity at Independent Women's Forum. We are a nonprofit committed to advancing policies that enhance people's freedoms, opportunities, and well-being, and my work is focused primarily on women of color. Now, we cannot begin to discuss the solutions to economic mobility and freedom when many of our daughters, granddaughters, sisters, and students disappear into the darkness every year. My heart goes out to my fellow panelists whose loved ones are still missing.

According to missing persons data provided by the NCIC, over 540,000 missing cases were open in 2020. They tend to be young. About half are female. Black and minority women are disproportionately represented, as we have heard today. Just over a third are people of color, including black, Asian, and Indian. Now, this is noticeably higher than the proportion of the larger U.S. population, and among the 37 percent of missing women of color, the lion's share tends to be black. Now, 80 percent of missing person cases were closed because the missing person was located by law enforcement, returned home, or the file was determined to be invalid. In fact, in 2020, the year closed with 89,637 still missing, far too many, but far fewer than I think we started this number with. Among these open cases, we do still see similar racial trends: 35 percent are people of color, not including Hispanics; 31 percent are black; 17 percent are females of color; and 15 percent are black females.

I pause here just to underscore how important it is to recognize that most missing person cases are closed. That should give us some perspective but also recognize that there is an opportunity for hope. Nevertheless, the disappearance of just one child can be devastating to a family and community. I think of Asha Degree, a nine-year-old from Shelby, North Carolina, who is missing 22 years after her disappearance on Valentine's Day in 2000. Today, she'd be 31 years old. But then there is Jashyah Moore, a 14-year-old New Jersey girl who vanished on October 14 of last year. Luckily, she was found in New York City one month later; or a 12-year-old Bronx girl who went missing on January 10 of this year and found days later doing a Facebook Live on the famous red stairs in Times Square. These stories of minority girls who disappear may not have made national headlines, but they did make local headlines. By acting quickly to report the missing children, law enforcement authorities, working with the family and the community, were able to track them down and reunite them with their families.

As we have heard, experts tell us that the first 48 hours following the disappearance of a child, or an individual are most critical to finding them and returning them home. So it is important to explore the role of families, communities, and law enforcement, as well as the media in helping to find missing persons. You know, we also need to explore what causes young adults or juveniles to run away from home to begin with. And by the way, missing people tend to be young people who are leaving home, very often by choice. The home environment plays a significant role here. Juveniles in vulnerable situations may perceive that fleeing is their best option, even if it is more dangerous. Domestic violence, child abuse, sexual abuse, drug addiction, mental illness, and economic hardship can all contribute to the destabilization of the home.

Public policy is important but can only go so far in strengthening families. This is where civil society, like churches, grassroots organizations that are building human capital and empowering individuals to be good parents and gainfully employed, productive citizens, can also help. Education is a key concern for many reasons. One of the negative impacts of the prolonged pandemic lockdowns and school closures was that these policies kept more women and girls in vulnerable home situations. They fell through the cracks. Any

discussion of missing, abused, or exploited women and girls must also start with the role that good education and in-person learning provides. In addition, rising crime across our Nation cannot be ignored. More funding for policing can be helpful in solving missing person cases and tackling the domestic violence that drives young people to leave their homes.

So finding all missing persons, but especially girls and women of color, should be a priority. We can discuss reforms needed to VAWA, but let's also engage in solutions that prevent people, particularly young people, from disappearing in the first place. Thank you, and I look forward to today's discussion.

Ms. KELLY. Thank you for your testimony.

Mr. Bischoff, you are now recognized for your testimony.

**STATEMENT OF JOHN E. BISCHOFF, III, VICE PRESIDENT,
MISSING CHILDREN DIVISION, NATIONAL CENTER FOR
MISSING AND EXPLOITED CHILDREN**

Mr. BISCHOFF. Good morning, Chairwoman Maloney, Chairman Raskin, Ranking Member Mace, Congresswoman Kelly, and members of the subcommittee. My name is John Bischoff, and I'm the vice president of the Missing Children Division at the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. I'll refer to the National Center by our acronym, NCMEC, throughout today's hearing. I'm honored to be here today to discuss this crucial topic.

NCMEC data shows us that black, multiracial, and Native-American children go missing at disproportionate rates in the United States, and we are appreciative that the subcommittee is calling attention to this issue. We would not be able to fulfill our mission without the generous support of Congress, and we are grateful for the critical resources we receive to carry out our work. Since 1984, NCMEC has relied on many public/private partnerships to find missing children, support their families, and provide victim-centered services. NCMEC offers several core services, which include a 24-by-7 call center, case management support, forensic services, analytical resources, and peer support for families experiencing a missing or exploited child. My written testimony provides a more detailed description about many of our core programs, but for the sake of time, I'll move on with the topic at hand.

In recent years, NCMEC has seen an exponential increase in cases involving children missing from state care and a disproportionate increase in the missing child cases involving black, multiracial, and Native-American children. The Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act requires state agencies to report children missing from state care to both law enforcement and to NCMEC. This law was essential in compelling states to address a problem that often went unnoticed and unaddressed. An analysis of our missing child data from 2016 to 2020 shows an increase in overall casework by 38 percent. Of that data, 31 percent of the children reported missing were black, which is more than double their representation in the U.S. population. Ten percent of the children reported missing were multiracial, while they represent four percent of the U.S. population. An early analysis of our 2021 data shows, unfortunately, similar trends: the number of missing black children reported to NCMEC increased from 31 percent in our four-

year analysis to 34 percent in 2021. Black and multiracial children continue to be disproportionately represented in cases of child sex trafficking. Black children represent 36 percent, and multiracial children represent 12 percent. Representing another area of concern, 60 percent of children missing from care were girls.

To address these trends, NCMEC has worked to expand our partnerships and resources to better address how cases of missing black, indigenous, and native children are reported, investigated, and resolved. We always strive to serve as a conveyor for collaboration, bringing together representatives from civil rights, law enforcement, and child-serving communities to discuss the disproportionalities we are seeing within our data. Over the past decade, NCMEC has worked to engage native, indigenous, and tribal communities to learn how we can best support them. From 2009 to 2021, over 3,200 Native-American children were reported missing to NCMEC. Of these children, almost 2,500 were missing from state care, and 56 percent were female.

In our experience, cases involving Native-American children go unreported for many reasons. Tribal child welfare entities do not have the same reporting requirements as state agencies. We also acknowledge that the lack of reporting is rooted in a distrust of outside organizations based on historical and present-day traumas these communities experience. NCMEC continues to invest in building partnerships with initiatives like hosting the Northeast Tribal Conference on Child Victimization with tribal partners and other tribal child-serving organizations. Earlier this year, we created our first-ever tribal fellowship position to continue to develop and maintain meaningful relationships with tribal communities.

In closing, NCMEC is an organization centered around hope: hope that no parent or guardian has to make that dreaded call that their child is missing, hope that every missing child will be recovered safely. While hope inspires us to improve, it takes action to accomplish goals. Action is required to address the obstacles our black, Native-American, and indigenous children face when they go missing. NCMEC will always take action to be the voice for all missing children, especially those who are marginalized.

On behalf of NCMEC, thank you again for the opportunity to appear before the subcommittee, and I look forward to your questions.

Ms. KELLY. Thank you. Mr. Wilkinson, you are now recognized for your testimony.

STATEMENT OF SHAWN WILKINSON, FATHER OF MISSING CHILD

Mr. WILKINSON. My name is Shawn Wilkinson. I thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

My daughter, Akia Eggleston, eight months pregnant, went missing in May 2017 and today is still missing. It is with great displeasure to speak on such a topic as this. However, the magnitude of this specific topic has become a major part of our family's being. There is not a day that goes by without conversation about our daughter/unborn grandson's ongoing case. How do you wrap your mind around the fact of Akia and baby's disappearance, domestic violence, and subsequent murder investigation in the same breath? From the beginning, the family was in awe of the news and had

no clue what to do in such a matter. Report her missing to the police is the natural thing to do, right? Let's have a search party, right? Let's report it to the media, right? These are all things you would see on a TV show like Law and Order. It is unfortunate that all of these things don't work exactly like TV shows.

The epidemic of missing persons of color is not a new topic but one that has been dismissed because society does not care about us. This is a trickle effect that has come down through this country's history. Only time has brought us to this point of actually acknowledging the disparities that exist. As a retired veteran of the United States Marine Corps, three tours in Iraq, who gave all to my country with every regard to protect her with my life, I stand broken at the thought of not being able to receive immediate help for my daughter when needed. Also, to include that having PTSD further heightens my emotional and physical being. This episode has intensified my ability not to sleep, like others.

Support for black, indigenous, or people of color is needed now. We are important and deserve the same attention as whites. I have exhausted everything that has been asked of me to do, and I still feel like nothing has been accomplished. I try to understand why her case is so secretive and only want to know what happened and where she is. Parents are not supposed to live longer than their children, but we are here to see their accomplishments in life. That will never happen, and in some regards, the justice system took almost five years to figure out what we already knew. The ability to communicate with the police has been very difficult, to say the least: multiple calls with no response for weeks, even up to a month; being on hold for countless minutes at a time just to be told the detective on the case is not available as he moved to another office. Talking to several officers at the police desk and then being hung up on just intensifies who picks up the phone next. Handing out flyers in the community and beat officers do not even know who my daughter is when a local district is less than two miles away from her home. Having to write a congressional swift to Dutch Ruppersberger, the U.S. representative for Maryland's 2d congressional District, was the only way to let people know how we were feeling. Through this, this led to speaking to the heads of various Baltimore police divisions, the FBI, and meeting with the ADA of Baltimore City, which has been an experience that will live with us forever. These encounters have not been ones that have been good. Again, the lack of communication has been very stressful.

The ability to communicate with those who have the authority to provide media coverage was what I thought most ridiculous. Calling or emailing every news station in Baltimore to get coverage did not get the case attention. It made no sense that even after her case was aired on local television in Baltimore, it only stayed within the confines of the city. It did not get picked up in neighboring counties. It did not get state, national, or international coverage. Why is this so? My thought only: single black woman with child living in low-income neighborhood that is known for drugs and other issues where the police only know the community for being an area of troubled folks who don't care to trust law enforcement anyway. The slogan here, "snitches dig ditches," is well known. A community that stays to themselves is not how cases get solved.

Even though within her case an assailant has been arrested, if you read the letter written used to arrest the individual, it details a timeline of her last days, possibly her resting place in a landfill in Virginia that covers acres of land. We struggle with not knowing what happened to them, where are they, why they can't be found. Will the evidence in this case put this person in jail for life? Funding groups that can assist in helping black, indigenous, or people of color is more important now than ever. External search teams, to include dogs, are needed, teams to plaster flyers in local areas are needed, and extended community activism on the part of local law enforcement needs to be improved and/or developed. Education for all is imperative. Moneys toward training advocates in the areas of media relations, community relations, cultural relations, and family assistance that a national standard operating process for missing people be provided instead of each level or law enforcement having their own, this would be fundamental in the area of media coverage. In the case of being proactive, suggested by Akia's aunt, Sanobia Wilson, an alert for pregnant women that details their status in case of being missing until found.

I make this comment now that Akia's case is horribly unfortunate, but the outcome can be different for the next family. Thanks to Black and Missing for their guidance and critical understanding of how to get the attention that keeps Akia's case in the spotlight of law enforcement, media relations, and all levels of local, state, and Federal Government. I thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I yield my time.

Ms. KELLY. Thank you so much and thank you so much for being willing to share your story. Thank you.

Ms. Wilson, you are now recognized for your testimony.

Ms. WILSON. OK.

STATEMENT OF NATALIE WILSON, FOUNDER, BLACK AND MISSING FOUNDATION

Ms. WILSON. Good morning, Chairman Raskin and members of the Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties. I am Natalie Wilson, co-founder of the Black and Missing Foundation, a non-profit organization that brings awareness to missing people of color across the country, and I'm pleased to provide testimony today on the issue of missing women and girls of color. My sister-in-law and I started the foundation after hearing about the case of Tamika Huston, who disappeared in Spartanburg, South Carolina. It was disheartening to us that her family struggled to get national media coverage on her disappearance, yet another missing woman, Natalee Holloway, was dominating the national headlines.

While missing persons of color made up 40 percent of the missing population, their stories were rarely told by the media, and their families often struggled to get sufficient law enforcement resources to bring their loved one's home. We are not naive to believe that every missing person's case will get national coverage. However, missing persons of color cases only receive seven percent of the national media coverage. And we can all name Gabby Petito, Natalee Holloway, Chandra Levy, and many other white women who have gone missing, but can any of you name a person of color that has garnered national media coverage? We want our missing to be

household names, too, but when we peel back the layers, we find that these families deal with several stereotypes that ultimately impact the resources and support they receive, and our missing deserve to be treated equally.

The three most common stereotypes for missing people of color are the runaway child, the thug or criminal, and the undeserving poor. From our interactions with families, we find that 9 out of 10 children of color reported missing are classified as a runaway by law enforcement, and if you're classified as a runaway, you do not get the AMBER Alert or any media attention at all. There's no urgency to find them, and this stigma further delays the search and steals precious time to collect evidence. With missing adults, particularly black women and girls, they're often not viewed as victims. This stigma hampers efforts to find them because there's a mindset that their action or deviant behavior led to their disappearance. These individuals are viewed as a burden to society and on our tax dollars, and we must not forget they are our daughters and mothers. In our nearly 14 years as an organization, we have seen firsthand how our Nation has become de-sensitized to the plight of missing people of color who come from marginalized communities. The perception is when someone of color is reported missing, no one will miss them, so why dedicate the resources to finding them. Race shouldn't be a barrier to media coverage and law enforcement support, and here are the challenges and possible opportunities for change.

The data available is not robust or reliant to paint a full picture of the magnitude of the problem. We believe the numbers are much higher based on the information below. Missing Latinos are being classified as "white," although all the research shows that at least 24 percent of them classify themselves as Afro-Latina, otherwise identifying as black. No one is keeping track of the whereabouts of those who are homeless, in foster care, or part of the social services system. In regard to law enforcement, there is no uniformity in policies across jurisdictions throughout the Nation. Specifically for guidelines for reporting a missing person, in some cities there is no time-frame limit in reporting the person missing. In other localities, it could be as much as 24 to 48 hours, and we know that time is of the essence when a person goes missing to collect those vital clues and evidence that could help bring them home. The classification of runaways should be prohibited. When children are reported missing, resources should be dedicated to find them.

And I want to share some examples of the power of media coverage. Within 14 minutes of a segment airing on *The View*, we received a tip that led directly to a missing child. And I remember a time when a young woman went missing out of St. Louis and I called every single news station, and yet there was no interest in her story. Media coverage is important because it alerts the community that someone is missing, but it also adds pressure to law enforcement to add resources to the case, which increases the chance of a recovery. And earmarking funds for organizations, such as the Black and Missing Foundation, is needed to continue support for these families, and we need stronger sentencing guidelines for perpetrators of sex trafficking. Black girls are sex trafficked at a higher rate. They make up 40 percent of sex trafficking victims,

and, sadly, the perception by sex traffickers is that if you traffic a black girl, you get less jail time.

I will close with some promising news. Last year, HBO launched a four-part docu-series that provided an insider's look that families of color face as well as the organization in getting media coverage and law enforcement assistance and resources. The black press has been instrumental in providing visibility for our cases. The Black News Channel has a weekly missing person series on their platform. We have been invited to and have had conversations with some of the top national news outlets, and Access Hollywood has launched a monthly missing persons series to feature our cases. You know, we need to care as a Nation because it takes all of us—law enforcement, the media, and the community—to help bring awareness to and find our missing.

Thank you.

Ms. KELLY. Thank you so much for your testimony.

I now recognize Chairman Raskin for five minutes for questions.

Mr. RASKIN. Madam Chair, thank you so much. I want to thank all the witnesses for this extraordinary and riveting testimony. And let me start, Ms. Wilson, with you. You made a significant point at the end there where you said that media coverage can actually drive police resources and the intensity of investigation. And you pointed out that there are dramatic differences in the media's propensity to cover cases of missing women who may be white versus missing women who may be African American or other people color. Can you just elaborate on that point a little bit and explain how the presence of media coverage will drive police resources and the absence of media coverage will have a dampening effect on police attention to a missing person case?

Ms. WILSON. Right. So, we have seen that media coverage really adds traction to the case where law enforcement, they don't want to be embarrassed. They don't want to be called out by the community, so they then add resources to the case. I'll give you an example. Derrick Butler out of the District of Columbia, his sister was missing, and he utilized his media contacts. And he, you know, talked to the media quite frequently, and this, you know, caused law enforcement to add additional resources to the case. But we also have to look at law enforcement as the first line or the gatekeepers in getting that media coverage. So normally, they are the ones who would reach out to the local stations asking them to profile or to feature that missing person. So, again, media coverage is very vital because it alerts the community that someone is missing, and we are not picking on the media or law enforcement. We all have a responsibility. But if the community isn't aware that someone is missing, then they are not looking for them, and they normally hear about these cases through the media. And we have been using social media as well because we cannot wait for any news cycle, and we need to get this information out instantaneously to the best audience.

Mr. RASKIN. Thank you. Thank you for that answer. Ms. Foster, thank you for your testimony. I am terribly sorry for your loss, and I commend you for your leadership and your advocacy. You know, if democracy means anything, it is that the lives of all the people, in a moral sense, have to be treated equally by the government.

And you said something powerful in your testimony about how you felt a great sense of injustice after your kids were kidnapped and after you lost your daughter, and I wonder if you would just expand upon that a bit. What ingredients in the legal system and in the political atmosphere created a new a sense of injustice about what had taken place?

[No response.]

Mr. RASKIN. Ms. Foster?

Ms. FOSTER. There we go. Can you hear me now?

Mr. RASKIN. I got you now, yes.

Ms. FOSTER. OK. I felt a great injustice. Because of the death of my daughter, I saw that there were different rules being on the reservation, then off, and that it took her death to start something, and that the commitment for safety on the reservation wasn't as strong as I felt that it should be. So through that, I felt that there was an injustice because we lacked a lot of the infrastructure that people have off of a reservation. If my daughter had been abducted and taken off the reservation, there would have been a quicker response to start searching for her and start an investigation, and the things that I needed, the resources that I needed, would have been available for her. And, unfortunately, since the events happened on the reservation, the resources that I needed weren't available for her to start the search.

Mr. RASKIN. Well, thank you for making that really powerful point, and you experienced it as an injustice, and it was an injustice. And the differential investment of law enforcement and police resources in the Native-American communities, on the reservations, versus what is taking place outside is a matter of basic injustice and justice. And I want to thank you for trying to make a bad situation better by converting your pain into activism to make sure that future families and parents don't go through the nightmare that you have experienced.

So I want to thank you and all of the witnesses for their activism and for their public advocacy today, and I yield back to you, Madam Chair.

Ms. KELLY. Thank you, Chairman Raskin. I would now like to recognize the ranking member for five minutes for questions.

Ms. MACE. Thank you, Chairwoman Kelly. And, first of all, I want to thank everyone for their testimony today. Mr. Wilkinson, thank you for serving our country. Listening to your testimony and Ms. Foster's testimony this morning, as a mom, it is very difficult to hear. And I wish everyone in the House of Representatives was here today to hear your story, and I wish those stories were told to the national press because there is great disparity in the national media in how black women and girls are covered when they are missing versus not. And this is a very educational hearing today, and I wish everybody could hear how heartbreaking your stories are of your daughters. So I want to say thank you.

My first question goes to Ms. Onwuka. Can you explain why you believe human traffickers and other criminals frequently target women of women and girls of color?

Ms. ONWUKA. Thank you for your question, Ranking Member Mace. You know, human traffickers, I think, you know, these individuals who profit off of the bodies of girls and women, they see

vulnerable women, particularly black minority women, as an easy target. Many of them may be coming from homes, not all of them, but maybe there are vulnerabilities in their backgrounds. They are coming from places where maybe they themselves are either viewing abuse, they are victims of abuse, they are exposed to it, they may be raped themselves, and so it is easy to profit off of individuals like that. And I think that is a fantastic opportunity for our law enforcement and our criminal justice system to beef up, as one of the other panelists mentioned earlier, the penalties for this kind of behavior.

Ms. MACE. And then in terms of the last two years in the COVID-19 pandemic, a lot of schools have shut down. Children are at home. Women are at home. Women have had to leave their jobs. How has COVID-19 and these sorts of shutdowns affected women and girls of color? Has it exacerbated the situation and their vulnerabilities? Has it made them a greater target for human and sex trafficking because of that?

Ms. ONWUKA. Absolutely. So I teased it a little bit in my opening comments, just talking about pandemic-related educational and economic disruptions. An interesting study by the Council on Criminal Justice found that the imposition of lockdowns early in the pandemic—you are talking about March and April—led to an eight-percent increase in domestic violence. Another study analyzing over 39 children found that physical abuse of school-aged kids tripled between March and September 2020. What is going on here is that schools are opportunities, are places where people who care about our children, they can catch a child who is in a vulnerable place. And, unfortunately, because of those prolonged, protracted school closures—in particular, this is school-aged kids' closures because we don't see in some of the data the same impact on toddlers, on young kids who are not in public schools, for example—but those school-age kids, that is where, I think, a lot of them fell between the cracks. There is plenty of data and information about the learning loss that we have seen, the emotional toll that these pandemic closures have had. And so I think it is also interesting that we are seeing the impact on children, on women, on vulnerable populations when it comes to domestic violence during the pandemic.

Ms. MACE. How do we reduce victimization of, specifically, women and girls of color? How do we move forward and do what is right by these victims?

Ms. ONWUKA. It is complex. I have heard that word mentioned before. When it comes to those who are experiencing violence, No. 1, education. I talked about it earlier. According to the CDC, attachment to school is a factor that protects a young person against dating violence, for example. So making sure that women, young girls, teenagers are going to school, in-person learning. It is not just about education, as important as that it is. It is about ensuring they don't fall through the cracks. I mean, I think there is also a role for civil society to play. There are organizations, grassroot organizations, that are in neighborhoods building strong families, investing time being mentors to young people who could potentially, you know, not just fall through the cracks, but find themselves in criminal enterprises by no choice of their own, sometimes by

choices of their own thinking that they are leaving for a better life. And so civil society plays a role there.

And I do think that when you talk about law enforcement, there has to be a place where our law enforcement has the resources, they need to really look for these cases. And it is sad that we have so many cases that, I think, law enforcement doesn't always take it seriously. But I think if you have special domestic violence training where law enforcement agents are spending time understanding what is going on in the household, there is evidence to suggest that that kind of training is helpful in getting some sort of help to victims and ensuring that they don't continue to be victimized.

Ms. MACE. Thank you, and our time is up. I yield back.

Ms. KELLY. Thank you. I would now like to recognize the chair of the full committee, Chairwoman Maloney.

Chairwoman Maloney. Thank you so much, Robin Kelly. Before we can grapple with the epidemic of missing and murdered women of color, we need to get our arms around the scope of the problem that is currently impossible because of gaps in Federal data collection. As I noted my opening statement, existing Federal data excludes missing Hispanic and Latino women and girls altogether. Mr. Bischoff, your organization has really done the best job in collecting data on missing girls by racial background, including Hispanic and Latino girls. I would like to put a graph of the data you have collected up on the screen.

[Chart.]

Chairwoman MALONEY. And can you tell us about the epidemic of missing girls, what we are not capturing in governmental data?

Mr. BISCHOFF. Thank you, Congresswoman Maloney. We actually do capture Hispanic/Latino information within our data. I know that varies across many organizations depending on what they are going to collect. We do have that. Just to give you the number and back to that chart, about 19.5 percent of our cases were Hispanic/Latino. It kind of goes in trend with that chart on certainly a population that very much needs services and assistance as well. We recognize that through our work. About half of our case managers are Spanish speakers. We have language line services to communicate in 230 different languages, and a majority of our publications are written in both English and Spanish to reach out to that community as well and engage with our resources.

Chairwoman MALONEY. OK. I want to ask you; do you have any data on what happens to these missing girls and women? Do they go into sex trafficking? Are they murdered? What happens? Do you track what happens or, if someone is found, the outcomes? I know you work on it. Do you capture what happens?

Mr. BISCHOFF. Yes, ma'am, we do, but, honestly, in our area in working with social service children in care, when they are recovered, that is one of the gap areas that we constantly are working to improve. At times, we don't receive exactly what the recovery information was, although our case managers work daily to try and receive it because we know that information is valuable, valuable for situations like this, valuable to go into making the system better. We work to pull that information as best we can, but, unfortunately, it is either not provided to us always or not available at the

time when we are talking with social workers at the time the recovery is taking place. We do have quite a bit of data in that area, though, when it relates to missing, murdered, child sex trafficking. We have got an entire team dedicated to the issue of child sex trafficking, and they do amazing work, but we are happy to have—yes, ma'am?

Chairwoman MALONEY. Mr. Bischoff, what percentage goes into sex trafficking? And congratulations on the work that you have done. You have filled in gaps where the government has not been. How many have gone into sex trafficking would you estimate or does your organization believe are sex trafficked, and how many are kidnapped?

Mr. BISCHOFF. According to our 2021 data, about 1 in 6 were likely victims of sex trafficking. When our case managers are working the case, they are showing indicators. That is where the “suspected” comes from. There are indicators saying something else is going on here with this child in care. So 1 in 6, I believe, is the number that you are looking for when it comes to child sex trafficking.

Chairwoman MALONEY. And what about kidnapping young people? What percentage is kidnapped?

Mr. BISCHOFF. So non-family abductions is about one percent of our data. What many of us were raised on as far as standing on the street corner and being abducted, that still very much happens today but certainly not to the degree that it did back in the 1980's and 1990's. However, one area that we are beginning to very much focus on is online enticement.

Chairwoman MALONEY. Wow.

Mr. BISCHOFF. The case may look like—

Chairwoman MALONEY. My time is almost up.

Mr. BISCHOFF. I am sorry. Yes, ma'am.

Chairwoman MALONEY. I just want to ask what steps can Congress take to help with the data gaps, or do you think your group can handle it? And what can we do to protect women and girls?

Mr. BISCHOFF. The U.S. Congress took an important step with the passing of the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act, and, more recently, the Families First Prevention Services Act. However, there are gaps. That legislation requires a report to us. It doesn't outline the information that needs to be provided, such as a photo, or recovery information, or ongoing collaboration. Additionally, the need for some type of centralized reporting. Thankfully, this is already included in the most recent version of the Frederick Douglass Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act, which we had the chance to provide input to. So thank you very much for that.

Chairwoman MALONEY. OK. Thank you. I yield back.

Ms. KELLY. Thank you. And now I will recognize myself for five minutes. And, again, I want to thank Ms. Foster and Mr. Wilkinson for sharing your stories.

The Senate has recently announced a compromise to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act, which passed the House last year. Ms. Charley, I would like to start with you. The VAWA reauthorization compromise includes closing jurisdictional gaps on trib-

al lands. What would this mean for the communities you help serve?

Ms. CHARLEY. Thank you for that question. Right now, the majority of tribes throughout the United States are not able to prosecute non-native offenders. What that means is someone who is not tribal can come onto tribal land, commit these crimes, and not be held accountable through the tribal judicial system. What the new iteration of VAWA does is allow tribes to have expansive jurisdiction on some of these issues, including trafficking, and stalking, and sexual violence. It is through the Violence Against Women Act and the Tribal Law and Order Act that we seek justice for our own communities.

Ms. KELLY. And it also includes housing protection, safe housing, and economic security provisions for survivors. So how might these provisions help women leave their abusive partners before the average 7th attempt to leave?

Ms. CHARLEY. Sure. So we know that women and victims of violence are able to leave their circumstances when they have resources, when they are well resourced. So all of these provisions within the Violence Against Women Act go to directly support our survivors with wraparound services.

Ms. KELLY. The Ashanti Alert Act was passed in 2018 to close the loophole for young persons over the age of 17, young missing persons who are too old to have an AMBER Alert issued. In the HBO documentary, *Black and Missing*, there were several heart-breaking moments when family members were forced to wait a certain amount of time before a missing person alert could go out. Sometimes families were told their loved one was not covered by existing alert provisions, such as if they are classified as a runaway and not a missing person. Ms. Wilson, you touched on this in your opening statement. Why is it that black girls and other girls of color are more frequently classified as runaways than missing persons?

Ms. WILSON. Thank you for that question. We believe that they are classified as runaways because their lives don't seem to matter as valuable as others, and we are trying to change that narrative. To know that 9 out of 10 young women or girls that are reported missing are classified as a runaway is really an injustice to them and their families. And because of that, they are not getting the AMBER Alert, and they are not getting any media coverage at all. And you saw Kennedy High's case in the docu-series where she was actually a victim of sex trafficking, but law enforcement classified her as a runaway.

Ms. KELLY. And if you can elaborate on why such alerts are crucial to the search for a missing person and what impacts their effectiveness.

Ms. WILSON. OK. Well, time is of the essence. If we can get this information out through alerts instantaneously, then the public can be involved and be vigilant in searching for the missing loved one. As time goes off, valuable clues are lost, and it becomes harder and harder to find that missing individual.

Ms. KELLY. Finally, I would like to ask about my Protect Black Women and Girls Act. My bill would establish an interagency task force that would, first, examine the conditions and experiences of

black women and girls in education, economic development, healthcare, labor and employment, housing justice, and civil rights. Second, it would promote community-based methods for mitigating and addressing harm and ensuring accountability; and third, study societal effects on black women and girls. Ms. Wilson, what would you hope to see come out of this interagency task force, and where do you think it should start?

Ms. WILSON. Well, it can start in so many places. There are so many issues or reasons why people of color reported missing are going missing: economics and, you know, housing. There are so many systemic issues. I think that we can just pick one really and just delve deeper into it, but it is also about education and having the resources needed within our community so that we can protect those that are most vulnerable.

Ms. KELLY. Thank you. And, Mr. Bischoff, I would ask you to answer as quickly as possible.

Mr. BISCHOFF. I am sorry, ma'am. Can you please repeat the question one more time?

Ms. KELLY. What do you hope to see come out of the interagency task force, and where do you think it should start?

Mr. BISCHOFF. The solving of missing child cases, specifically, it all has to deal with collaboration. Any time we can have legislation go forward where there is open collaboration between the key components to focus on finding the missing child, once we accomplish that and we have the right people talking, we have good results in the end, most often.

Ms. KELLY. Thank you. My time is up, and I would like to recognize Mr. Mfume.

Mr. MFUME. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I want to thank you also for your work on the bill that you just mentioned that is before the U.S. Congress on missing girls and women. It is absolutely critical that this legislation gets passed, and I appreciate your leadership and your sponsorship in that regard. I also want to thank Chairman Raskin. Jamie, you know we are all unified in wishing you a quick recovery and having you back here again but thank you as the chair of this subcommittee for helping to convene us so that we could have this discussion today. And, of course, Chairwoman Maloney, thank you as chair of the full committee.

Like everyone else, my heart goes out to the witnesses, to those who have testified, to those who have lost family members. This whole notion of black, brown, multiracial, indigenous girls, women, and children is an issue that I think that the American public does not understand the full scope, width, and breadth of. We hear about it, we are shocked, it haunts us, and then the next day in the news cycle there is another story, but not the story about the missing person, a story about something else, and we go on. And, again, that magnitude and that scope is not particularly captured.

As a father and a grandfather, I have absolutely no idea, Ms. Foster or Mr. Wilkinson, what either of you have gone through. You know, we try, as those not affected, to remember or to put ourselves in your shoes, and we think we can, but, honestly, we really cannot. We have no idea. And for me, it was always my worst nightmare watching my own sons grow up, believing one day that

something could happen to them, or my granddaughters, that something could, in fact, happen to them.

We thought, many of us when we were shocked in 1979 with the Atlanta child murders that nothing like this could happen in our country. And they weren't just child murders. They were children who were missing, also who were not reported. It was a horrible set of events like the events that we stumble onto in the news every now and then where some deranged person has decided to go out onto the streets and to kill women of the streets, and to dismember them, and to move on, and many of them had multiple victims. And oftentimes we don't find out about it until it is too late, way, way down the road. So I think those sort of disappearances and those sort of murders call our attention, I think, back to why this is so very important.

And, Mr. Wilkinson, in your case, believe me, I first heard about this in 2017. I saw the appearance that you did two years later on *The View* with respect to your daughter, Akia. I know that four weeks ago, the state's attorney in the city made an arrest. Like you, I am wondering also if there is enough evidence there for a conviction. And, you know, I don't want to say it was a blessing, but it is certainly an opportunity for me. I wasn't in the Congress in 2017. As you know, my predecessor, Elijah, was here, and I am just glad to be here now to be able to followup on this. Years ago, when, as a Member of Congress in 1994, we passed the Violence Against Women Act, many of us thought after having voted for that, that we had taken a giant step forward, and we had. The fact that it is still unauthorized or not reauthorized for this year pains me, and I think it pains a lot of other people.

So I do have to say something about the news media here, and I don't expect any of you to indict them, but, you know, I have real problems with what I don't see in the news. Years ago, when I was a kid, there were three stations, you know. If you didn't get it there, you didn't get it, but now we that have a plethora of stations, dozens and dozens reporting the news, and a news cycle. It is not just 9 to 5, but 24 hours. I can't for the life of me understand why situations of missing women and missing children are not more reported in all of that time block than they are now. And I agree with the witnesses that that sort of reporting puts pressure back on local officials to do all that they can and to use their resources. And so if newsrooms, and news directors, and assignment editors, and others hear us, the plea today is please use your resources to help publicize these cases that are happening all over the country against people who are defenseless so that your pressure on law enforcement and others, but particularly making the public aware, will go a long way to help us getting to where we need to be.

And law enforcement, I believe, like you have said and I am going to repeat since I am out of time now, that there has got to be a prioritization of cases, that there has got to be a shorter response time, that there has got to be an effort, a deliberate, intentional effort, in the first 48 hours to use all available resources at your disposal to be able to put pressure on the perpetrators and to help push us toward solving many of these crimes.

Madam Chair, I would yield back. I didn't have questions, but I had a comment, and I appreciate the opportunity to be able to express it.

Ms. NORTON. [Presiding.] The gentleman yields back, and those were important comments that we needed to hear.

My question is for Ms. Foster. First, I want to thank you so much for your presence at this hearing and to let you know that you have all of our sympathies. It is hard for any of us to imagine what you have been going through, so I am going to ask you some questions about your experience which will enlighten us and make us know what we should do. And I ask you to answer as much or as little as you feel comfortable with. Ms. Foster, what happened when you realized that your daughter was missing, especially when you spoke to law enforcement? Did they give you any guidance about what you were supposed to do as a family member with someone missing? What happened first when you realized she was missing, and what was the reaction or the guidance of law enforcement?

Ms. FOSTER. Well, the first thing that I imagined was children missing or kidnapping, in my mind, and it sounds like something that you would hear on the news or see in a movie, but those headlines in my mind became reality on May 2, 2016. And I endured the longest hours of my life waiting, hoping, and praying for my children, for their safe return. I was in shock, and I reached out to law enforcement, and the communication between law enforcement and myself was little to none. And trying to get word out that an abduction had occurred became difficult because the resources on the reservation were none, and so I had to reach out to social media on Facebook and make a report or post that my children had been abducted.

Ms. NORTON. It must have been especially hard trying to navigate the jurisdictional issues between tribal enforcement and local area enforcement. How did that impact your case?

Ms. FOSTER. It impacted it a lot because when I needed help with the resources, they weren't available for my family on the reservation. The Navajo Nation had been given twice the opportunity to implement an AMBER Alert system, and they failed to do so, so that caused a strain on the search for a quick search for my children when we put that first word out to law enforcement. I felt like that the commitment for public safety on the reservation wasn't there, and I was in a cry for help at that time when I needed help and there was none.

Ms. NORTON. Well, now, how did the media treat your case? Did Ashlynnne get any attention from the media either in print or on television?

Ms. FOSTER. Yes. I was very grateful for the response that I received from social media. Family and friends reached out and shared my message, and they reached out to law enforcement off reservation. They called 9-1-1. We do have 9-1-1 calls that are from law enforcement off reservation that we had an emergency and that we needed help, we had missing children. Unfortunately, due to jurisdictional laws, outside agencies were not able to help us until they received that OK from law enforcement on reservation. And, unfortunately, we didn't receive that help until 12 hours after the abduction of my children.

Ms. NORTON. Finally, have you considered any laws that might be changed or added that could have been of assistance to you?

Ms. FOSTER. At the time, I think when you are a parent and this kind of a shock hits you, it is something that we never ever hoped that we would have to experience, and myself, like many other families, were not prepared for the events that had unfolded so suddenly. And I thought of the need for public safety, and I felt that I needed to have the justice system redone to make it a safer place for our communities. We lacked an AMBER Alert on Indian Country, and I voiced my concern and started grassroots efforts to get one established. And I just felt a great need to voice my concerns for the immediate problems that we face on indigenous country that affect our women and girls.

Ms. NORTON. Oh my goodness. Thank you for being so open and helpful to this committee.

The next five minutes to Representative Ocasio-Cortez.

Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ. Thank you so much, and thank you to all of our witnesses here today for shedding light on such an important issue. We have a crisis of missing and murdered indigenous and black women in the United States. Today I want to discuss part of this crisis that is all too often overlooked but whose evidence shows that there is a very meaningful connection here: the correlation between fossil fuel extraction sites and abductions and murders of indigenous women across the United States. We are very lucky to have Ms. Angel Charley here with us today to start that conversation.

Ms. Charley let's start at the top. Can you draw a brief and introductory picture of how fossil fuel extraction efforts expose indigenous women to physical and often sexual violence? Why is it that oil, gas, and fossil fuel extraction sites have such a high correlation of violence and abduction against native women?

Ms. CHARLEY. Thank you for that question. The fossil fuel industry creates man camps or temporary settlements that often exist right outside the borderlands of indigenous communities. As I stated earlier, many tribes do not have tribal jurisdiction over non-native offenders, which a majority of these oil workers are. We know that when these man camps or temporary establishments are created, that there is an increase in violence and, particularly, sexual violence against our native women.

Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ. So when there is an in fossil fuel extraction-sites that is placed on a reservation, and those oil company workers go to the reservation and have that site, if they commit a crime and commit violence against indigenous women, you are saying that they essentially escape jurisdiction from having a clear path to accountability because of where these sites are happening. Is that correct?

Ms. CHARLEY. That is correct.

Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ. Wow. Ms. Charley, am I right to understand that companies building these oil pipelines are often ruthless in their resistance against protesters and sometimes even encouraging violence against them?

Ms. CHARLEY. That is correct.

Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ. And we are seeing some of this getting backed up with state legislatures, especially after Standing Rock

and other places, authorizing and almost legalizing the use of violence against fossil fuel protesters, correct?

Ms. CHARLEY. That is correct.

Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ. And is it correct that these companies often work directly with local police departments to subdue protests in this matter, sometimes going so far as to pay local police departments directly for their overtime?

Ms. CHARLEY. Yes.

Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ. So what we are seeing here is that local police departments on fossil fuel extraction-sites that are placed strategically on reservations and native lands, those fossil fuel companies pay local police departments to protect their extraction-sites, even when workers are raping and murdering indigenous women?

Ms. CHARLEY. Yes.

Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ. Can you tell us how this collaboration between law enforcement and fossil fuel companies puts indigenous women, in particular, at heightened risk of abduction and murder?

Ms. CHARLEY. This is a continuation of state violence against indigenous women.

Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ. Thank you, Ms. Charley. I know this is a very difficult topic to discuss, and I thank you so much for your testimony today, and I think what we see here is that the data speaks for itself. Just this February, pipeline workers associated with the development of Line 3 were arrested for sex trafficking. The ACLU of North Dakota also reported that 411 missing, murdered, and indigenous people were kidnapped or murdered in states affiliated with pipeline projects, and that 10 percent of these cases occurred in counties where the Keystone Pipeline alone is proposed to be built.

Ms. Charley, in your testimony, you stated that the root inaction that families face is the devaluation of indigenous lives since the onset of colonization, so I want to end by turning it over to you. What would you say is the most important thing that can be done now to address the problem of missing and murdered indigenous women?

Ms. CHARLEY. Tribal nations need to be able to fully prosecute the crimes which happen in our communities. We need VAWA legislation passed. We need extractive industries out of our communities. We know that what happens to our land happens to our women and happens to our bodies. It is an injustice on the part of the U.S. Government to have these institutions unregulated in our communities.

Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ. Thank you very much.

Ms. NORTON. Thank you very much for those important questions and the responses. I recognize myself for five minutes.

Every person who goes missing is a tragedy, but there is a notable difference in the way law enforcement tends to treat white women and women of color. This question is for Ms. Wilson. Black and brown women are often viewed as somehow responsible for their situations while white women are viewed as vulnerable victims. For example, disappearances of black and brown adults are frequently associated with criminal activity, and black and brown kids are seen as runaways. So, Ms. Wilson, why, in your view, are black women and girls treated so differently by law enforcement,

and how does this disparate treatment affect black communities? First, why are they treated differently, then how does that kind of disparate treatment affect black communities and the disproportionate rates we see of missing black and brown girls?

Ms. WILSON. Well, thank you for that question. We notice, and we hear this from families all the time, that black and brown girls are not seen as victims, and, oftentimes, they are adultified. So the perception is that whatever happens to them, they deserve it, and because they come from a poor or impoverished, marginalized community, that sort of deviant behavior is acceptable, and that is what happens there. And the Black and Missing Foundation, we are trying to change that narrative, that these are mothers, and daughters, and sisters, and grandparents that are missing at an alarming rate. And, again, classifying a missing person or a child as a runaway, you know, no one seems to care because they are getting what they deserve because they left home voluntarily, but we really need to look at the underlying issues. Why are these children, these girls leaving home? What is happening in the home, and, ultimately, what are they running away to because we know that many of them are lured into sex trafficking.

Ms. NORTON. Oh my. Mr. Wilkinson, you have my sympathies as well for the loss of your daughter. I can't say enough about that. And I know this is tough, but I would like to ask about your experience with law enforcement when she went missing. How did law enforcement treat your daughter's case?

Mr. WILKINSON. From the onset of my daughter's case, it seemed to me to be joking, not saying that they were not doing their jobs. However, in the unfortunate demise of my daughter, her case was not reported until four days later after she was expected to have gone missing, which added an additional trauma and maybe additional support in finding her.

Ms. NORTON. How come it took four days?

Mr. WILKINSON. She wasn't reported missing until four days after she was suspected of gone missing by her family. She went missing on May 3, but she wasn't reported missing until May 7 because she wasn't able to be contacted, but it wasn't until her baby shower when she didn't show up that she was reported missing. But then again, and even after she was reported missing, the police seemingly didn't get involved until a month later when her child—her unborn son is what we believe now—was not found to be born in any hospital. And that is when the Baltimore City Police Department, they actually calculated that foul play had been involved in her missing status. So four days on top of a month calculated, that 48 hours or 72 reporting period was already out the window.

The lack of judgment, again, as Ms. Wilson has already stated, that our loved ones are considered runaways was thrown at us as well. So people of color are getting it on both sides of the fence, law enforcement and judicial system. And in this case, in my daughter's case, a five-year stint to find her, to find the person that did this to her, has just exacerbated our frustrations.

Ms. NORTON. Thank you, Mr. Wilkinson, for being so open with us.

I recognize Mr. Mfume for five minutes.

Mr. MFUME. Thank you again, Madam Chair. Mr. Wilkinson, I don't want to belabor this. I realize that both with you and Ms. Foster, reliving these moments and memories is not the best thing, but I have to tell you that I am really deeply troubled by the fact that your daughter, Akia—and I want to call her name and I hope that others continue to call her name—didn't show up for her own baby shower. There is a report that she is missing, and law enforcement doesn't take it seriously until 30 days or so after that because she was pregnant and because there was no proof of a baby being born in a hospital in a certain radius. Then it became, I am led to believe, something that they were involved in. Is that right?

Mr. WILKINSON. Yes, sir.

Mr. MFUME. OK. This is why I said earlier that this hearing is so very important because we who are here, and those of you who are there, and the others who are participating and watching, we have got to keep reminding people again of the breadth and the scope of this problem in our country. Ms. Charley, I would like to ask if you would share with the committee any similarities or any differences that your coalition has identified in the media's treatment of missing indigenous women.

Ms. CHARLEY. Thank you for that question. In my testimony earlier, I shared the experience of a mother who I met with last week. Her daughter is actively missing. She is receiving phone calls weekly from the investigating detective. What she continues to do is get out in public and advocate for herself at rallies. It is communities. The missing and murdered indigenous women crisis is a grassroots movement, meaning people are in the streets marching. They are holding their own rallies or pulling together media efforts on our own, and this is where the stories are told. Media is not coming to our communities and asking these questions. We are seeking these opportunities and demanding them.

Mr. MFUME. Thank you. And Madam Chair, in the time left, I would like to ask Mr. Bischoff if he would take a moment to comment on this whole issue of family and peer support for families that are experiencing missing or exploited children. And if you could talk a bit about what the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children is doing or offering in that regard, I would appreciate it.

Mr. BISCHOFF. Yes, sir. Thank you and thank you for the question. We have an entire Family Advocacy Division who works with the parents, with the family of the missing child, and working to ensure that the environment that the child is returned home to hopefully safely, hopefully quickly, is appropriate and the family is set up for reunification, especially in the time of long-term missing child cases. Some of our cases that our Family Advocacy Division is working to support are, at times, long-term missing children where there has been a period of time between the last time the family had seen the child and today. So they work with the family to ensure that the family has the right things to say and the right support services to carry on.

Another area that we have is our Team Hope, which is a group of volunteers, parents who have suffered either formally or currently a missing or an exploited child, and they engage with the family as well because they can speak on the same level. They

know the emotions. They know the strains that the family is going through, and they can help the family work through these emotions, once again, to keep the family together because the family is going to be the most important, second to the child, to make sure that the child returns to a good environment and the family stays together.

Mr. MFUME. Thank you very much, Mr. Bischoff. Madam Chair, I am just sitting here kind of frustrated having served in this body for 10 years and then leaving for 24 and coming back and seeing that so many of the issues that plagued this Congress in this country are still with us and unresolved. So, again, I want to commend Chairman Raskin and all the members of this subcommittee who are absolutely devoted to trying to find a way to make sure that that sort of thing is not replicated or duplicated 10, 15, 20 years down the road by pushing this Congress to do whatever we can in our power after hearing this testimony to make real changes. I yield back. Thank you very much.

Ms. NORTON. Thank you, Mr. Mfume, and thank you for that historical perspective as well.

Finally, I want to recognize Mr. Raskin to close out of this hearing for his five minutes.

Mr. RASKIN. Well, thank you very much, Congresswoman Norton, and, Congressman Mfume, thank you for those very stirring and moving words that you just gave us, both on the historical perspective, as Ms. Norton says, but also about what this means to fathers, and mothers, and families. Mr. Wilkinson's testimony is absolutely searing as is Ms. Foster's, and it is an excruciating thing to contemplate from the standpoint of mothers, and fathers, and brothers, and sisters, and other family members.

But Mr. Mfume reminds us that, you know, this is not like a peripheral issue. It is so often treated as kind of a marginal thing. It is like a detail, and this is why we have organized political society. You know, if you read the social contract philosophers, like Hobbes, and Locke, and Rousseau, the whole idea is that we enter into a civil society because our bodies, our property, our families will be safer and more secure than we would be just out in a state of nature. And yet the social contract is not working if we are losing hundreds of thousands of women and girls every year, and if that has a disproportionate effect on minority communities, then it is that much more of a rupture of the basic social contract. If Mr. Wilkinson is still with us, I just wanted to ask him one question, which is, does he see grounds for optimism in terms of society, those of us in government, addressing this problem meaningfully.

Mr. WILKINSON. I do. However, my concern is that it is not happening fast enough. The resources that are needed are not being provided fast enough, that the people on this panel are not seeing the results fast enough, that our black and indigenous people or women of color are being violated faster than the resolution can be presented to it. So yes, but no in the same statement.

Mr. RASKIN. All right. Well, we will take that with some cautious optimism that things are moving the right direction but far too slowly, and we all need to redouble our efforts both to galvanize national attention to the problem and then to make these legislative changes we have been talking about today. I thank you, Ms. Nor-

ton—Madam Chair—for filling in there, and I thank all of our witnesses today for participating in a really important hearing. I yield back.

Ms. NORTON. Well, thank you, Chairman Raskin. All of us are hoping for you. You are looking good, so I think that is a good sign, at least from here.

In closing, I want to thank our panelists for their very important remarks. They have been very helpful to the committee. I want to commend my colleagues for their participation and their important questions in this conversation.

With that and without objection, all members will have five legislative days within which to submit additional written questions for the witnesses to the chair, which will be forwarded to the witnesses for their response. I ask our witnesses to please respond as quickly as possible.

Ms. NORTON. This hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:29 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

