



September 6, 2022

Sent via Electronic Mail

The Honorable Patty Murray
United States Senate
154 Russell Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
United States Senate
511 Hart Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Dan Newhouse
United States House of Representatives
1414 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: JOINT FUNDING REQUEST FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT RESOURCES IN YAKIMA COUNTY

Dear Honorable Senators and Congressman,

The Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation ("Yakama Nation") and Yakima County Board of County Commissioners ("Yakima County") jointly and urgently request your assistance in securing additional law enforcement resources for both the Yakama Reservation and Yakima County. Specifically, we ask for your help in securing existing and future federal funding to (1) hire and equip additional law enforcement officers to police the significant territory within our respective jurisdictions, and (2) develop a regional crime lab to avoid the months-long backlog at the state crime lab.

Public safety is a top priority for both the Yakama Nation and Yakima County, but we lack the resources necessary to meet our public safety goals across our vast jurisdictions. Yakima County encompasses 2.75 million acres. The Yakama Reservation covers 1.4 million acres, more than 1 million acres of which overlap with Yakima County. Together, our jurisdictions represent the second largest County and largest Reservation in the State. Both the Yakama Nation Police Department and Yakima County Sheriff's Office lack the resources needed to effectively police our lands. Yakima County is experiencing increases in violent crime, property crime, and a continued rise in gang and drug-related activities. On nights and weekends, the Sheriff's Office has no more than three deputies to cover the entire southern half of the county, which includes the Yakama Reservation. The Yakama Nation contracted the federal law enforcement function within the Yakama Reservation mandated by statute and Article VIII of our Treaty, but we have seen flat federal contract funding and an increased federal regulatory burden for years. With inflation and increased

competition for officers, the Yakama Nation is losing officers every year. Our jurisdictions do not have the police assets to deploy on a daily basis to meet our communities' needs.

A regional crime lab is also a significant tribal/federal/state partnership opportunity to address the existing backlog at the state crime lab. Recently, the Federal Bureau of Investigations and U.S. Attorney's Office investigated the death of an enrolled Yakama Member within the Yakama Reservation. The Yakama Nation's custom and tradition is to bury our loved ones within three days of their death, but in this case the United States held onto the remains for two months. The decedent's mother called daily, struggling in her grief to understand why the United States would not release the remains and honor the Yakama Nation's burial rights. It was the state crime lab. The Assistant U.S. Attorney was concerned that he would not be able to prosecute without a toxicology screening, and there was a 10-12 month backlog on toxicology screenings at the state crime lab. Even after the decedent's case was moved to the front of the line, it took two months to complete. A regional crime lab could have brought the decedent's mother, and all those in our community who mourned the loss of their loved one, with closure in a way that honors our customs and traditions. For their part, Yakima County was recently dismayed to learn that an accused rapist was released by a judge because it took too long for the crime lab to process potential evidence in that particular case. This is illustrative of the larger problem Yakima County has faced due to the case backlog at the state crime labs. We ask that the federal government support Yakima County's vision for a regional crime lab in Central Washington.

As our elected representatives, we applaud your leadership on addressing the missing and murdered indigenous people crisis. Your legislative drafting, advocacy, and votes have brought a spotlight to this critical issue while mandating law enforcement collaboration that is already paying dividends as we protect our most vulnerable populations. We must do more. Our Yakima County and Yakama Nation officers are on the front lines of this crisis each day, and they are being asked to do more with less resources every year. We need more officers. We need more equipment. We need better infrastructure through a regional crime lab. Awareness, information sharing, and action plans are critical to addressing the missing and murdered indigenous people crisis, but those essential tools cannot succeed if we don't have the officers, resources, and infrastructure to use them.

To date, the Yakima County Sheriff's Office and Yakama Nation Police Department have sought to close the resource gap through collaboration. Our law enforcement assets are working together more closely than we ever have before out of sheer necessity. Our collaboration is borne out of our governments' shared dedication to the safety and health of our communities, and the stark realization that we can only mitigate our collective law enforcement resource losses through collaboration. We have taken this strategy as far as it can go. We simply need more resources. This joint ask is unprecedented for our governments, and is intended to highlight how critical the needs are for our communities.

Therefore, we ask that you assist us in securing federal funding for our respective law enforcement agencies to protect our communities, to ensure that our people can once again feel safe and secure in their homes and neighborhoods, and to support our economic and social progress and growth.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to your response and your assistance.

Respectfully,

Delano Saluskin, Chairman
Yakama Nation Tribal Council

LaDon Linde, Commissioner
Board of County Commissioners
Yakima County

Jeremy Takala, Committee Chairman
Law & Order Committee
Yakama Nation Office of Legal Counsel

Ron Anderson, Commissioner
Board of County Commissioners
Yakima County

James Shike, Comm. of Public Safety
Yakama Nation Police Department

Amanda McKinney, Chair
Board of County Commissioners
Yakima County

Robert Udell, Sheriff
Yakima County Sheriff's Office