

What is Savanna's Act?

On October 10, 2020, Savanna's Act, 25 U.S.C. § 5702, was signed into law as a bipartisan effort to improve the federal government's response to missing or murdered American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/AN). Specifically, the Act's goals are to:

- (1) clarify the responsibilities of federal, state, tribal, and local law enforcement agencies with respect to responding to cases of missing or murdered AI/AN;
- (2) increase coordination and communication among federal, state, tribal, and local law enforcement agencies, including medical examiners and coroner offices;
- (3) empower tribal governments with the resources and information necessary to effectively respond to cases of missing or murdered AI/AN;
- (4) increase the collection of data related to missing or murdered AI/AN men, women, and children, regardless of where they reside; and
- (5) increase the sharing of information among federal, state, and tribal officials responsible for responding to and investigating cases of missing or murdered AI/AN.

What Does Savanna's Act Require?

To achieve the goals of Savanna's Act, all United States Attorneys are required to develop regionally appropriate guidelines to respond to cases of missing or murdered AI/AN. Although prosecutors in U.S. Attorney's Offices do not themselves investigate missing cases, they nevertheless can help assist law enforcement entities involved in missing or murdered AI/AN cases. The guidelines therefore serve as a resource for law enforcement entities serving Arizona's 22 culturally and geographically diverse federally recognized tribes.

On June 21, 2022, the United States Attorney's Office for the District of Arizona (USAO-AZ) adopted the Savanna Act Guidelines for this district. The USAO-AZ Guidelines focus on five areas:

- (1) Inter-jurisdictional law enforcement cooperation;
- (2) Best practices for conducting missing persons searches;
- (3) Data entry, collection, and analysis on missing persons and unidentified human remains;
- (4) Improving law enforcement agency response rates and follow-up responses; and
- (5) Ensuring access to culturally sensitive victim services.

What's New?

Throughout 2022 and 2023, the USAO-AZ has consulted with tribal leaders; tribal, federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies; medical examiners; urban AI/AN groups; and others. In addition to the 2022 Listening Conference and 2023 Four Corners Indian Country Conference, the USAO-AZ also participated in the U.S. Department of Interior, Not Invisible Act Commission Hearings in Northern Arizona to hear from victims' families and other stakeholders. Renewing our commitment keeping the Guidelines current, this year's revisions include:

- (1) Expanding the definition of "next of kin" to account for the unique cultural context of a particular tribe to ensure broader notification and information-sharing for victim families;
- (2) Streamlining the process for the return of human remains, when appropriate, to the families in a timely and culturally sensitive manner;
- (3) Integrating NamUS information into multi-disciplinary team (MDT) meetings; and
- (4) Incorporating the criteria for assistance from the U.S. Marshal Service Missing Child Unit when endangered runaways are reported missing.