

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

December 14, 2023

The Honorable Deb Haaland
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Haaland,

We write to you to follow up on our June 12, 2023, letter and to again report to you that the shortage of law enforcement personnel in South Dakota tribal communities continues to present a significant threat to public safety. Since the writing of our last letter, tribal law enforcement leaders have reported an increase in violent and drug-related crime. It is critical the Department of the Interior consider the severity of the current situation.

During our recent discussions with tribal leaders, it has become apparent that the public safety crisis is worsening. As discussed in our earlier letter, law enforcement leaders in Indian Country directly attribute the recent uptick in crime to police personnel shortages. On several reservations in South Dakota, only a handful of officers are tasked with patrolling millions of acres. Criminal entities are taking note of the lack of manpower and are directly targeting reservation communities. As a result, tribal law enforcement officers are encountering higher volumes of illegal drugs, including illicit fentanyl.

In the Department of the Interior's September 28 response to our original inquiry, Assistant Secretary Bryan Newland did not share any specific plans to allocate immediate resources. In addition, the response highlighted slight decreases in reported violent crimes from 2021 to 2022. This response seems to suggest the current crime situation is improving, which contradicts the experience of tribal law enforcement officials on the ground. As you are well aware, complex jurisdictional law in Indian Country can skew tribal crime data. The response letter also highlighted the lengthy hiring processes tribal police agencies must deal with when filling open positions. We encourage the BIA to search for any attainable steps to expedite hiring processes for tribal law enforcement officers.

The current situation presents a serious threat not only to tribal police officers, but also to all law-abiding citizens in reservation communities. In the last several months, at least three tribal governments in the state of South Dakota have declared a state of emergency in response to public safety threats. The current situation is causing other tribal leaders in the state to consider doing the same. In response to the police shortage, some residents of tribal communities have even resorted to establishing citizen patrols to look out for crime.

With the current set of circumstances in mind, we urge the Department of the Interior to coordinate with the Department of Justice and all other relevant federal partners to provide additional resources to tribal law enforcement agencies in South Dakota. We also ask the

Department of the Interior consult individual tribal leaders when attempting to find immediate solutions. If tribal law enforcement agencies in South Dakota do not receive immediate assistance, we fear reservation communities will continue to experience a surge in violent crime.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter

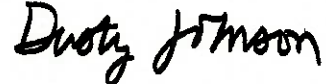
Sincerely,



M. MICHAEL ROUNDS
United States Senator



JOHN THUNE
United States Senator



DUSTY JOHNSON
Member of Congress

CC: The Honorable Merrick Garland, Attorney General
The Honorable Christopher Wray, Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation