

## Opinion-Editorial

Newspaper editorial pages—both in print and online—are highly popular among readers. Opinion-editorials (op-eds) are longer than letters to the editor and afford the opportunity to delve more deeply into issues. An op-ed is your chance to influence opinions, affect policy, and highlight the work you or your organization is doing to support crime victims' rights.

One way to develop an op-ed is to research local crime coverage and important issues in your community. For example, does your community offer services for victims of human trafficking? How would a partnership between law enforcement and victim service agencies benefit your community? Use or adapt the sample op-ed on the following page or craft your own to highlight an issue local to your community.

### ***5 Elements of an Attention-Grabbing Op-Ed***

- Be persuasive. Include the latest research and structure a logical argument or rationale.
- Be confident. You are the expert in this field.
- Stay up to date on related events and the cultural conversations about them.
- Use plain language that a wide audience can understand.
- Keep your submission to 800 words or less.



**SUPPORT VICTIMS. BUILD TRUST. ENGAGE COMMUNITIES.**

## Sample Op-Ed Column

### **Missing and Murdered American Indian and Alaska Native Women & Girls**

On a May afternoon in 2016, Ashlynn Mike, an 11-year-old Navajo girl, accepted a car ride from a stranger. She never came home. Because of jurisdictional issues, an Amber Alert for Ashlynn wasn't issued until 8 hours after her family reported that she was missing. She was found dead the next day.

Ashley Loring Heavy Runner was last seen in June 2017 on the Blackfeet Indian reservation in Montana. Her family and friends spent a year searching for her on their own. In February 2018, about 9 months after Ashley's disappearance, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) joined the search. To this day, even with the help of the FBI, Ashley remains missing.

The stories of Ashlynn Mike and Ashley Loring Heavy Runner are not isolated incidents. They are part of a much broader trend of violence that disproportionately harms American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) women and girls. More than 80 percent of AI/AN women have experienced violence in their lifetime. More than half of AI/AN women have experienced sexual violence.<sup>1</sup> In 2017, homicide was the fourth-leading cause of death among AI/AN girls under the age of 20,<sup>2</sup> and in most parts of the country the rates of murder against AI/AN women have historically been three to four times higher than the rates of murder against white women.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, this violence is not confined to tribal lands: According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 78 percent of AI/AN people live outside of AI/AN areas.<sup>4</sup> All communities in *[insert name of your state]*, whether large or small, must be aware of the profound risks faced by AI/AN women here in our state, and pay greater attention to keeping Indigenous people safe.

National resources available for AI/AN people include the [Tribal Resource Tool](#), a searchable directory of services available for all AI/AN survivors of crime and abuse; the [StrongHearts Native Helpline](#) at 844-762-8483, which offers culturally appropriate support and advocacy on domestic, dating, and sexual violence; and the [National Center for Victims of Crime's VictimConnect Resource Center](#) at 855-484-2846. Another option is to contact our local tribal coalition, *[insert name and contact information of your local coalition]*, or one of *[insert name of your state]'s* domestic violence and sexual assault coalitions, such as *[insert names of local domestic violence and sexual assault coalition]*. These groups focus on coordinating victim services activities and collaborating with federal, state, and local organizations fighting violence against women and against Indigenous people.

The National Missing and Unidentified Persons System, known as NamUs, has free tools that families of missing persons can use to enter and search for case information, and connect with criminal justice professionals to assist in the search for their missing loved ones. Call their toll-free hotline at 855-626-7600, or visit their [Support for Missing Indigenous Persons Cases page](#).

Closer to home, *[list any additional local organizations and resources that work on issues surrounding missing and murdered AI/AN women]*.

As a community, our duty is to protect and support these victims and their families, and to push those in power to do the same.

<sup>1</sup> André B. Rosay, May 2016, *Violence Against American Indian and Alaska Native Women and Men: 2010 Findings From the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey*, Research Report, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, accessed January 22, 2021, [www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/249736.pdf](http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/249736.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019, "Leading Causes of Death - Females - Non-Hispanic American Indian or Alaska Native - United States, 2017." Accessed January 22, 2021, [www.cdc.gov/women/lcod/2017/nonhispanic-native/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/women/lcod/2017/nonhispanic-native/index.htm).

<sup>3</sup> See Table 1 in Mose A. Herne, Alexandra C. Maschino, and Anita L. Graham-Phillips, 2016, "Homicide Among American Indians/Alaska Natives, 1999-2009: Implications for Public Health Interventions," *Public Health Reports* 131(4): 597-604, accessed January 22, 2021, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177%2F0033354916662219>.

<sup>4</sup> Tina Norris, Paula L. Vines, and Elizabeth M. Hoeffe, January 2012, *The American Indian and Alaska Native Population: 2010*, Census Briefs, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, accessed January 22, 2021, [www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-10.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-10.pdf).

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