

Jerue. I am Athabascan from Interior Alaska.

I live in the village of Anvik, a small Deg Hit'an Athabascan community. Anvik has been my home for 22 years. My husband, Carl Jerue, has served as the Village Chief for over 23 years. We have four children, four grandchildren, and have helped raise many nephews and nieces. I work for the Anvik Tribe as the Social Services Director, and like so many other Alaska Native people, we do all that we can round the clock to take care of our families and communities. I have dedicated my life in rural Alaska for over 30 years working on violence against women, tribal child protection, and substance abuse.

Anvik is a geographically remote tribe with 275 citizens, to whom we have the responsibility of protecting and serving. We have an active tribal court. We are not on the state's road

system and travel in and out of the village by air, boat, or snow machine depending on the season, weather, and cost of transportation. Perhaps most importantly, Anvik has existed for generations independent from the United States and the State of Alaska. Our village receives little from the state. The government that operates in Anvik is our Village Council. The real question we answer every day is how do we govern and provide for our people and create a safe and healthy community despite the state.

When a woman in our village is beaten or raped, we respond to meet

the Village Chief's wife, and a tribal employee, I am commonly called out 24 hours, 7 days a week to respond to a domestic violence call or "disturbance" that too often involves guns. Fortunately, I have resolved situations so that no one has been seriously harmed.

Lack of Law Enforcement

What I'm about to share with you is not easy and brings up so much uneasiness, anger, shame, and frustration. This is what we face in our villages across the state, and it hasn't always been this way. We are working together in our villages,



Tami Jerue and (left to right) daughters Bryana Angulo, Devin Huffman, Elizabeth Jerue and son Chris Jerue in Fairbanks, April 24, 2014. Photo: Takenya Rosetta.

with each other across the state, and with our allies in the lower forty-eight to identify and remove the roadblocks to our safety. I ask you to join us and help to bring resolution and an end to violence against Alaska Native women. This is preventable and we can change what happens from here on forward.

For many years, Anvik had no local law enforcement, but in the last two years, because of a federal grant, we have been fortunate to have a Tribal Police Officer. We were also able to fill a long-vacant Village Public Safety Officer position, which is funded through the state. Many

citizens are not as privileged. Prior to having our officers, I experienced too many instances of a lack of response by the state troopers because of bad weather preventing travel in/out of the village. At other times, the troopers deemed the incident not to be an immediate danger. And other times, there was just no trooper available to respond to our need, no matter how serious.

We also don't have 911, and often have to call several trooper posts only to get voice mail or answering machines. If you have 911 or law enforcement in your community, stop and close your eyes and picture

what would happen if you did not have law enforcement in your community. How would you respond, especially where violence has been or the serious threat of violence will be committed? How would you respond if your mother had just been beaten by your father, as you and your brothers

and sisters were forced to watch and listen? How would you respond if you just found your cousin or good friend naked, violated, and unconscious?

Watching the violence and such a poor response from the state is very frustrating. It creates resentment within the village against the state and in turn a lack of trust and also at times a lack of cooperation with law enforcement. In the end, we know that while the state has the authority to respond, in reality it most often does not and cannot since it is not present in our village. State troopers are not real when

grant for law enforcement now, it might not in the future. The right to safety should not be a privilege for only those fortunate enough to have a grant writer to secure competitive, discretionary funds. The federal government has a trust responsibility to Alaska Native villages that it must and can uphold now. The lives of our mothers, sisters, daughters, and community are at risk. Human lives are at risk. These human lives are Alaska Native women, and yes, we deserve the same right to live in a safe community.

Local Control and Safety

Currently, when a crime occurs in which a woman is being beaten, the village responds to that cry for help, because she is our community member. As her relative and community member, we must stand with her. It is our responsibility, but this is a dangerous situation for the woman and for those protecting her and stopping the violence. Our village is the local government and it acts to protect our members. Recognizing this reality in all of our villages and restoring the legal authority of villages to respond to crimes and make decisions regarding the safety, health, and well-being of residents is an essential next step in addressing the issues of domestic violence, sexual assault, suicide, and substance abuse/alcohol-related deaths.

Villages need to exercise local control to respond to the violence. Alaska Native villages have not had adequate support to develop and sustain local responses to violence against women, especially supporting critical life-saving victim services. Formula funding to support the long-term development of local village-based justice responses is also important, as much as the policy reforms at the federal and state levels supporting local responses. Funding under the Violence Against Women Act and Family Violence Prevention and Services Act that has been available in the lower forty-eight has reached very few villages. Villages need their authority recognized and the resources and support from federal and state governments. Village-based responses to domestic violence and sexual assault should include, but not be limited to, the following: law enforcement, village courts, updated tribal laws on violence against women, safe shelters and housing, and sexual assault forensic and medical examinations.

The greatest legal barriers to the safety of Native women have been created by federal laws and policies that stripped the authority of our village to respond to

Statistics on Violence Against Alaska Native Women

According to the Indian Law and Order Commission report, Alaska Natives are disproportionately affected by crime, and these effects are felt most strongly in Native communities:

- Based on their proportion of the overall state population, Alaska Native women are over-represented in the domestic violence victim population by 250 percent; they comprise 19 percent of the population, but 47 percent of reported rape victims.
- On average, in 2003–2004, an Alaska Native female became a victim of reported sexual assault or of child sexual abuse every 29.8 hours, as compared to once every 46.6 hours for non-Native females. Victimization rates, which take account of underlying population proportions, are even more dissimilar: the rate of sexual violence victimization among Alaska Native women was at least seven times the non-Native rate.
- In tribal villages and Native communities (excluding the urban Native population), problems are even more severe. Women have reported rates of domestic violence up to 10 times higher than in the rest of the United States, and physical assault victimization rates up to 12 times higher.
- Between 2004–2007, Alaska Natives were 2.5 times more likely to die by homicide than Alaskans who reported “White” as their race, and 2.9 times more likely to die by homicide than all Whites in the United States.

Sources:

Justice Research Center, University of Alaska Anchorage: <http://justice.uaa.alaska.edu/research/index.html>

Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics:

2003 Annual Report (http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/VitalStats/Documents/PDFs/2003/annual_report/Web_Book2003.pdf)

2004 Annual Report (http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/VitalStats/Documents/PDFs/2004/annual_report/2004web_book.pdf)

Intimate Partner Violence Against Athabaskan Women Residing in Interior Alaska: Results of a Victimization Survey, by Randy H. Magen & Darryl S. Wood (<http://justice.uaa.alaska.edu/research/2000/0026.aknativewomen/0026.02.ahtna.pdf>)

Alaska Native Health Status Report, by Kyla Hagan & Ellen Provost, Alaska Native Epidemiology Center and Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (<http://www.anthc.org/chs/epicenter/upload/ANHSR.pdf>)

were then denied the resources to create a village-based justice system to keep our village safe. Local control is the alternative to a broken system that has not worked.

The Alaska Task Force to Increase the Safety of Native Women

At the Annual Convention of the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) in October 2013, our tribe along with other Alaska Native tribal governments submitted a resolution entitled Protect Alaska Native Women. The unanimously adopted resolution presents a framework for addressing the epidemic of violence against Alaska Native women. We look forward to leading the work as longtime advocates with our allies, including tribal coalitions, AFN, NCAI, and NIWRC, supporting us over the long term. By working together across the state to strengthen an alliance of advocates and leaders dedicated to identifying and implementing legal and policy reforms to increase the safety of Native women, we will end violence against Native women.

We have survived for thousands of years and will continue to survive. I ask for the sake of our women and children for the federal and state governments to do what's right. Do not turn your back to the glaring violence that is happening in our villages.

“Hear Our Voices Calling Out for Justice”
by Tamra “Tami” Truett Jerue
Social Services Director
Anvik Tribe

the Safety of Native Women

At the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) annual convention in October 2013, a resolution was unanimously passed to create a Task Force to Increase the Safety of Native Women. “Everyday I see domestic violence destroy part of our village . . . our future . . . the Task Force is finally a way for us to work together across villages and nationally to make the changes needed,” said Tami Jerue.

As the Alaska Native Task Force begins its journey to increase the safety of Alaska Native women, allies across the country and around the world stand ready to assist. At the Native Women’s Leadership Institute held in April in Seattle, Alaska Native advocates presented their concerns and issues. The participants by consensus agreed to respond to any call for action needed by their Alaska sisters. “We are committed to supporting any call to action that increases safety for Alaska Native women,” said Carmen O’Leary, Executive Director, Native Women Society of the Great Plains. “Changes are needed to support villages to strengthen local responses and accountability of offenders and of systems with the responsibility to protect women.”

The Task Force faces complicated legal challenges that are the foundation of the lack of response to the violence committed against Alaska Native women on a daily basis. Many of these issues were identified in the November 2013 Indian Law and Order Commission’s Report. “Native women and their families are depending on all of us to figure out how to end the violence and affirm their right to live safe from abuses,” said Tami Jerue. “How many more lives will be traumatized or lost before we make changes in laws, policies, and social norms?”

Increasing the safety of Alaska Native women depends on everyone working together to identify and reform a broken system that allows perpetrators to commit violence. Lessons learned from the past 11 years of the NCAI Task Force on Violence Against Women are guiding lights for the work facing the Task Force as it begins tackling urgent law and policy reforms impacting the safety of Alaska Native women.

In particular, the four principles of the NCAI Task Force that guided organizing efforts to birth the tribal provisions and amendments in VAWA in 2005 and 2013 are worth reviewing. These principles are consistent with one of the AFN’s major goals to “advocate for Alaska Native people, their governments, and organizations with respect to federal, state, and local laws.” The four principles are:

1. Recognition of the unique legal and political status of American Indian and Alaska Native tribal governments;
2. Addressing the barriers created by Public Law 280 impeding the full exercise of tribal responses to violence against women crimes;
3. Balancing the reform of federal and state justice systems’ responses to violence against women with strengthening of tribal beliefs and ways of living that respect women; and