

Oregon HB 2625 Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women

Testimony by Jillene Joseph, Executive Director of Native Wellness Institute
Read by Shalene Joseph, Indigenous 20 Something Project Co-Founder and
Coordinator, Native Wellness Institute

Greetings. My name is Shalene Joseph, I work for the Native Wellness Institute and I am here today to read the testimony of our executive director, Jillene Joseph who is in an Oregon tribal community doing important work at the moment.

In gratitude, I acknowledge the land that I stand on as the original territory of the bands of the Kalapuya who resided throughout the Willamette Valley and called this city, Chemeketa- the meeting place. Thank you for this opportunity to speak on behalf of Indigenous women whose voices and lives have been silenced forever and whose family members continue to grieve.

To fully understand the importance of and need for House Bill 2625, we have to understand the impacts of colonization by European settlers who, because of their white superiority, labeled Indigenous people as “savage.” This label is key to understanding the genocide and dehumanization of Indigenous people as is evident in the U.S Declaration of Independence where we are called out as “Merciless Indian Savages.”

This label contributes to the continued erasure of Indigenous people and in particular, our women. Patriarchal attitudes, policies and practices are at the foundation of many systems in our State as well as our Country; therefore, when our Indigenous women go missing or murdered, there is little attention given. As a State, we have to connect the dots all the way back to colonization to genocide to dehumanization to erasure so we can better understand how colonialism is still at play today and specifically to better understand how violence impacts Native American women.

HB 2625 is a beginning step to paint an accurate picture through research and data, as well as to build trust and better relationships with and between tribes, urban Native communities, local law enforcement and the Commission on Indian Services so that together along with the Department of Justice, the reporting, identification and investigation of missing Native American women and girls in our state can be thoroughly addressed.

I applaud Oregon’s effort as it bolsters what is happening nationally and shines the light in a dark place.

Thank you Representatives Sanchez, Fahey, Power and Wilde and your colleagues for caring for every Oregonian and for helping to bring awareness to the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women’s awareness movement and for helping to make our people visible.