

Date of Hearing: July 16, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

SB 4 (Cervantes) – As Amended May 23, 2025

Policy Committee: Public Safety

Vote: 9 - 0

Urgency: No

State Mandated Local Program: No

Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill establishes the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons Justice Program (MMIPJP) within the Department of Justice (DOJ).

Specifically, this bill tasks the MMIPJP with:

- 1) Facilitating collaboration and acting as a liaison between tribal victims' families, tribal governments, and law enforcement agencies regarding cases involving missing and murdered indigenous people in California.
- 2) Providing technical assistance to law enforcement agencies engaged in investigating cases involving missing and murdered indigenous people in California.
- 3) Publishing data on the number of, and facts about, cases involving missing and murdered indigenous people in California, where appropriate.
- 4) Submitting, annually until January 1, 2028, a report to the Legislature regarding its fulfillment of the above duties, as specified.

FISCAL EFFECT:

Costs (General Fund) to DOJ, likely in the low millions of dollars annually. DOJ anticipates costs of \$1.4 million in fiscal year (FY) 2025-26, \$2.1 million in FY 2026-27, and \$1.9 million in FY 2028-29 for nine full-time positions in its Division of Law Enforcement, Victim Services Unit, Directorate Division, and Special Prosecutions Section, plus IT software costs and consulting services for the annual report. DOJ anticipates costs of \$2.3 million in FY 2029-30 and ongoing thereafter to maintain the above-described staffing levels for the MMIPJP and add two additional full-time positions in the department's Research Services Branch.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Background.** According to the U.S. Department of the Interior:

Native American and Alaska Native rates of murder, rape, and violent crime are all higher than the national averages. When looking at missing and murdered cases, data shows that Native American and Alaska Native women make up a significant portion of missing and murdered individuals.

The MMIP crisis refers to these disproportionately high rates of murder and disappearance of Indigenous people, whose cases are often unresolved, unsolved, or even unacknowledged outside of Indigenous communities. California has the largest population of Indigenous people in the U.S. However, despite growing awareness of the MMIP crisis, there is still a dearth of adequate data, investigative resources, and solutions to address this significant problem. According to the author:

It is an unfortunate truth that across the United States, including in California, there is an ongoing crisis of persistent violence levied committed against Indigenous people, especially women and girls...This bill will help provide a coordinated state response to MMIP cases, as well as shine a light on a crisis affecting our Indigenous communities that has not received nearly the attention it deserves.

- 2) **Prior Legislation.** AB 2279 (Cervantes), of the 2023-24 Legislative Session, was substantially similar to SB 4. AB 2279 was vetoed by the Governor, who wrote:

My administration continues to prioritize policies that increase collaboration between law enforcement and tribal communities to bring justice to those impacted. In partnership with the Legislature, we increased funding in this year's budget for the MMIP Grant Program, which has awarded millions of dollars to support tribes' efforts to identify, publicize, investigate, and solve MMIP cases. This measure is duplicative of those efforts and creates a new, unfunded grant program not included in the 2024 Budget Act...It is important to remain disciplined when considering bills with significant fiscal implications that are not included in the budget, such as this measure.

In 2024, under the MMIP grant program, the Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC) approved \$19.9 million in grant awards for 18 federally recognized Indian tribes in California. According to BSCC, these grants are used by tribes to “support efforts to identify, collect case-level data, publicize, and investigate and solve cases involving missing and murdered indigenous people.”

Among other state, federal, and tribal efforts, there is an Office of Native American Affairs (ONAA) currently within DOJ. According to DOJ's website, ONAA is responsible for advising the Attorney General on matters of importance to tribal governments and citizens; serving as a liaison between DOJ and federal, tribal, and state justice systems; and facilitating and promoting a statewide framework for state and tribal partnerships through coordination of intergovernmental services, programs, and technical assistance for justice-related issues. It is not clear to what extent ONAA is already working on issues pertaining to the MMIP crisis, or how ONAA and the MMIPJP would share these duties.