

## Sexual Exploitation of American Indian women and girls in Minnesota

### The Situation:

- American Indian females are sexually assaulted 3 times as often as other women, according to Amnesty International.
- The vast majority of perpetrators are *not* Native men.
- U.S. Department of Justice statistics reveal that approximately 70 % of sexual assaults against Indian women go unreported.
- Environmental conditions leading to vulnerability to predators exist on most of Minnesota's Indian reservations. Jurisdictional complexities are barriers to reporting and prosecuting sexual assault against American Indian women.
- The prevalence of high rates of gender violence, poverty, fractured social structures, social isolation, chemical dependency/mental illness and fetal alcohol spectrum disorders makes this population particularly at risk of sexual exploitation.

Anecdotal reports are growing of Native females being lured off Northern reservations and brought to Duluth and to the Twin Cities Metro to be prostituted. Duluth police confirm Native girls being removed from international freighters at port after having been raped repeatedly by the crews. The South Minneapolis Precinct where the Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center and the Division of Indian Work are located sees the highest percentage of arrests for prostitution of any district in the state, with a disproportionately high number being Native females. While the Human Trafficking Task Force Report to the Minnesota Legislature in 2007 identifies 342 Native women victimized in the state, we understand this to be a significantly under-representative number, and no clear data exists on the scope of sexual exploitation in Indian country.

### Our Response:

Four Native specific organizations in Minnesota are working to address the issue:

- We are seeking funding to conduct culturally appropriate, gender sensitive research into the scope of the problem. Having accurate data will enhance our ability to create effective prevention, intervention and prosecution strategies.
- Widespread sexual exploitation is a public health and public safety issue for Minnesota. According to the Minnesota Department of Health, in 2005 the state spent \$8 billion on sexual violence, most of that on sexual predators.
- We are working with Minnesota's tribes, law enforcement, and other Native agencies to educate, raise awareness, and build partnerships statewide.
- The Phoenix Project is a partnership with Minneapolis Police to defer juvenile girls at risk of sexual exploitation into culturally appropriate case management.

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