



April 16, 2019

On Justice for Jessica Alva

Today, relatives and allies from across Northern California gathered to stand for justice for Jessica Alva, an Indigenous woman whose life was stolen by domestic violence. Her death has been misclassified as a suicide, and her abuser walks free. SBI Board member Morning Star Gali, who was a friend of Jessica's, is leading efforts to demand justice for Jessica, and read the following statement on behalf of SBI today:

Sovereign Bodies Institute is a community-based center for research on gender and sexual violence against Indigenous peoples, and the home for the Missing & Murdered Indigenous Women's Database. As an organization headquartered in Northern California, with many staff and partners in the Bay Area, we are disturbed and outraged by the San Francisco Police Department's response to the death of Jessica Alva.

Jessica was a loving mother. Based on our data, Indigenous mothers are nearly two times more likely to be murdered than other Indigenous women who go missing or are killed. There are thousands of children across Indian Country who have been forced to grow up without their mothers, due to this violence, without any additional supports or programming to account for the effects of this loss; we are deeply sad to know that Jessica's children will now experience this as well.

Jessica was a member of the Bay Area Native American community, and was Indigenous to Northern California. She is now one of 135 MMIWG cases we have identified across the state, over 75% of which occurred in Northern California. Her story is one of the many that make California one of the states among the top 5 with the highest number of MMIWG cases, alongside Washington, New Mexico, Arizona, and Montana.

Jessica was a victim of brutal domestic violence. She is one of 461 MMIWG cases that we have documented as tied to domestic violence. Of those 461 women and girls, many, like Jessica, were failed by the system. Within that dataset, there are stories of protection orders denied, failures for law enforcement to respond in a timely manner, abuse within foster homes, victim blaming within court responses, and serial abusers who, like Jessica's abuser, are taught by the system that there are no consequences for beating Native women.

Jessica is a victim of systemic neglect by law enforcement and policymakers. Notably, we filed a public records request for information on MMIWG cases in San Francisco with the police department in July 2018. A few months later, we received correspondence stating that there are 15 documented MMIWG cases in San Francisco, but that they would not be able to provide us any information, because the state Dept. of Justice's system didn't allow for a search. We were not told how many of these 15 cases are missing or murdered, and were not given any

information on who these women or girls were. We have since continued to follow up for additional information, and have not been provided anything by SFPD. Contrary to SFPD's statements, the state DOJ did conduct a search, and provided us information on missing Native women and girls in the state. The data they provided us shows cases in San Francisco that are not listed publicly on any missing persons website, and both the report and these websites are lacking at least one documented case of a missing Native woman in the city. What these experiences tell us is that there are serious gaps in communication between various agencies responsible for handling MMIWG cases in California, and that SFPD does not currently hold itself accountable for providing information on this violence to the public in a manner consistent with the law.

Perhaps most shockingly, of the 135 cases we have identified, only 7 have information on alleged perpetrators available to the public, and only 1 of those alleged perpetrators has actually been charged. Jessica Alva, Khadijah Britton, Andrea White, Nicole Smith, Heather Cameron, Jennika Suazo, Andrea DeLaroute, Norma Eagle...all of these cases are examples of Northern California's lack of justice for MMIWG, and show us that the people responsible for the violent deaths of our sisters often are not held accountable.

The majority of states with high rates of this violence have current state-level legislation on the issue proposed or enacted, but California has yet to take any action. From 2013 through 2015, the rate of MMIWG cases per year statewide increased by approximately 20% each year. In 2016, the rate of cases increased over tenfold, and in 2018, the rate increased by another 250%, representing a total increase of 850% in the last five years.

Native women and girls are going missing and being murdered at exponentially increasing rates. We like to imagine places like Northern California as peaceful, liberal, and safe. We like to imagine places like Northern California as the exception to these forms of violence. The sad reality is that the opposite is true—Northern California is an epicenter of violence against Native women and girls, and it's time we start asking the tough questions of our law enforcement and policymakers on what they plan to do about it. It starts with justice for Jessica.