

My name is DeNette Perry. I am the Executive Director for the Bering Sea Women's Group. Our agency provides services to victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and other violent crimes. I have been in this position for over two and half years. I have worked with women and children for the last ten years in either the domestic violence field or family development field.

Domestic Violence is not only devastating to the families experiencing it; it has a negative effect on the community, economy and the nation as whole. Alaska is number one in RAPE and HOMICIDE of Women, according to the violence policy institute.

It is estimated that domestic violence costs this country billions in lost wages and medical treatment. It is imperative that we as a nation commit the necessary resources to combat domestic violence.

For the last thirty years the communities, law enforcement, judicial system, health care system, mental health community, and the domestic violence advocates have worked toward minimizing and/or ending domestic violence with mixed results.

Domestic Violence is a complex issue and no one approach will end this scourge on our communities. Our response needs to be all encompassing and complex as the issue itself.

One concern I have within the Bering Strait Region is our lack of a community response team, whose sole purpose is to review domestic violence cases. A community response team has the ability to provide a seamless safety net for domestic violence victims and a deterrent for some offenders, however it is only effective if all parties are included in the process. Additionally, it must be said that research has shown this may not be an effective deterrent for offenders with previous involvement with the criminal justice system, but may be effective with first time offenders and newly identified victims.

In order for a community response team to be effective in our region, we must have the adequate resources to dedicate the time and energy to this endeavor. It has been my observation that the court system lacks adequate personnel levels, law enforcement lacks adequate training and staffing levels, domestic violence agencies also lack the adequate funding and staffing levels, and this is truly glaring in the outlying villages.

I have spoken with many women, and there seems to be a consistent theme in most of their stories, they perceived there is a bias in the court system, law enforcement and other helping agencies against Native Alaskans. It is for this reason that it is imperative that the issue of domestic violence is addressed at the local level. This could be possible with following actions.

The VPSO program is grossly under funded. The people in these positions have a difficult job in a difficult environment, they lack the necessary support needed to do their jobs well. They are grossly underpaid and should have salaries and training comparable to their counterparts in other law enforcement agencies.

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There is a need for a commitment from the state and federal government to establish tribal courts in villages. And to ensure there is continual funding and training for tribal court personnel.

Additionally, there should be a domestic violence program in each village, so that residents have easy access to personal, medical and legal advocacy in an environment that feels safe and secure to them.

We also need to take a look at the mandatory arrest laws, there is research that has shown this is not an effective deterrent to domestic violence in communities of people of color. This is also true for traditional batterers intervention programs. Some research has shown that traditional batterers intervention programs may have the opposite effect, which may increase beliefs that violence against women is acceptable. What may be more appropriate is the use of healing circles and peacemaking circles. Some tribes in Canada have utilized these models with success. I have attached more information on these models with my written response. This too must be done at the local level.

Now with all this said, and if all these things I have mentioned were in place, we will still have those who will continue to commit the act of domestic violence. In those cases it is imperative we provide support to the victims and ensure their safety. It is my belief that this is not only done with law enforcement, the judicial system, mental health, health care, and victim advocacy systems, but we must ensure that victims have economic justice as well, so that victims will have the resources needed to ensure the safety for themselves and their families as well.

In conclusion, I have suggested some approaches to the issue of ending domestic violence. The point is that the "one size fits all" approach is ineffective. We must use various approaches that are appropriate to the community in question and the individuals involved, only then may we start to see an increase in the safety of people in violent situations, and a decrease of violence as a means to solve conflict.

## Resources

**Family Group Decision Making Project Implementation Report:**

<http://social.chass.ncsu.edu/jpennell/fgdm/ImpReport/index.htm>

**Manual for Coordinators**

<http://social.chass.ncsu.edu/jpennell/fgdm/Manual/TOC.htm>

**Evaluating Community Coordination**

<http://www.vaw.umn.edu/documents/vawnet/ccr/ccr.html>