

**STATEMENT OF  
COMMISSIONER ANNA M. GOMEZ**

Re: *Supporting Survivors of Domestic and Sexual Violence; Lifeline and Link Up Reform Modernization; Affordable Connectivity Program*, WC Docket Nos. 22-238, 11-42, 21-450, Report and Order (November 15, 2023).

Anyone can find themselves in an abusive situation, needing to exit. When survivors of abuse and their loved ones are looking for a way out, disentangling their cell phone – their lifeline to support – from an abuser is critical. Today, the Commission takes an important step to make it easier for survivors to exit safely.

At the direction of Congress, we require providers to separate the phone line of a survivor of abuse from the phone line of the abuser, when the survivor submits a completed request to separate the lines. Individuals that provide care for survivors of abuse can also request line separations that help the survivor.

Abuse occurs in many ways and our action today will provide relief for individuals facing a variety of abusive situations. For example, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), about 41% of women and 26% of men experienced sexual violence, physical violence, or stalking by an intimate partner during their lifetime.<sup>1</sup> The CDC also estimates that 1 in 10 people aged 60 and older (who live at home) experience elder abuse, including neglect and exploitation.<sup>2</sup>

I would like to highlight the plight of two communities facing specific situations of abuse – farmworker women and indigenous women.

Farmworker women report higher rates of Intimate Partner Violence than the general population.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, farmworker women are at particular risk for sexual harassment, assault, and rape on the job, with a study noting that 80% of farmworker women reported experiencing some form of sexual harassment.<sup>4</sup> This community is at risk, in part, because farmworkers often lack familiarity with their legal rights, live in remote places due to the nature of their work, and have little access to resources and transportation to reach support.

Especially during Native American Heritage Month, I would also like to shine a light on the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls across our nation. A 2016 study by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) found that 84.3% of American Indian and Alaska Native women have experienced violence in their lifetimes.<sup>5</sup> In 2022, the National Crime Information Center accounted for

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<sup>1</sup> CDC, *National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS)*, <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/datasources/nisvs/index.html> (last visited Nov. 15, 2023).

<sup>2</sup> CDC, *Fast Facts: Preventing Elder Abuse*, <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/elderabuse/fastfact.html> (last visited Nov. 15, 2023).

<sup>3</sup> Andrea L. Hazen & Fernando I. Soriano, *Experiences with Intimate Partner Violence Among Latina Women*, *Violence Against Women*, 13(6), 562–582 (2007), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801207301558>.

<sup>4</sup> Irma Morales Waugh, *Examining the Sexual Harassment Experiences of Mexican Immigrant Farmworking Women*, *Violence Against Women*, 16(3), 237-261 (2010), <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1077801209360857?journalCode=vawa>. This study examined sexual harassment experiences of Mexican immigrant farmworking women ( $n = 150$ ) employed on California farms.

<sup>5</sup> André B. Rosay, *Violence Against American Indian and Alaska Native Women and Men*, *NIJ Journal*, 277, 38-45 (2016), <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/violence-against-american-indian-and-alaska-native-women-and-men>.

5,491 reports of missing American Indian and Alaska Native women.<sup>6</sup> And, according to the CDC, American Indian and Alaska Native women experienced the second highest rate of homicide in 2020, with homicide being in the top 10 leading causes of death for this community.<sup>7</sup> These statistics are devastating.

Although a long-established government-to-government relationship between Native Nations and the United States government has affirmed the inherent right to self-government of Native Nations, a fraught history of evolving federal policy towards Native peoples has left a criminal jurisdiction gap exposing indigenous women to harm. This gap means that when a Native person is harmed by a non-Native person on a Tribal Land, it is unclear who can bring the wrongdoer to justice – resulting in perpetrators that can act with impunity. This criminal jurisdiction gap leaves Native women exposed and fuels the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

I thank Chairwoman Rosenworcel for incorporating edits into the item that highlight the important role that Tribal Governments and Tribal police departments can play in providing information to substantiate an individual's status as a survivor when requesting a line separation.

I would also like to acknowledge that in order for farmworker and indigenous women to be able to benefit from our decision today, we must reach them where they are. For that reason, I would like to encourage organizations that serve farmworker and indigenous communities such as Alianza Nacional de Campesinas, Justice for Migrant Women, the National Indigenous Women's Resource Center, and Native Hope, to help us get the word out. We look forward to collaborating with you so that women in your communities learn about how to request a phone line separation in order to retain their phones as they navigate exiting an abusive environment.

Finally, a heartfelt thank you to the staff of the Wireline Competition Bureau for your remarkable work on this life-affirming item.

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<sup>6</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), *2022 National Crime Information Center (NCIC) Missing and Unidentified Person Statistics*, at 5 (Feb. 2, 2023), <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/2022-ncic-missing-person-and-unidentified-person-statistics.pdf/view>.

<sup>7</sup> National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2016/2017 Report on Sexual Violence* (2022), <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/nisvs/nisvsReportonSexualViolence.pdf>.