



Big Horn County Attorney

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Aequitas et Veritas

PRESS RELEASE

INVESTIGATION AND PROSECUTION TASK FORCE TO BE ESTABLISHED TO ADDRESS ALL SUSPICIOUS DEATHS AND SUSPECTED HOMICIDE INVESTIGATIONS IN BIG HORN COUNTY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 1, 2019

Big Horn County Attorney's Office Will Take Direct Supervision of All Investigations of Suspicious Deaths or Suspected Homicides under State Jurisdiction

Hardin, MT —

A Message from Big Horn County Attorney Jay Harris:

Tragic and unnecessary deaths, along with reports of missing persons, are major alarm signals to a community in crisis. Big Horn County continues to experience the various devastations that methamphetamine and alcohol abuse present. These problems are known by our local law enforcement to be direct precursors to missing and lost members of our Community. Unfortunately, substance abuse and the resulting despair and anti-social or criminal thinking it creates is a long-standing and multi-generational dynamic in our Community. Protecting the safety and restorative ability of our Community in the face of such challenges places great demands on local criminal justice resources, at times beyond what can be addressed effectively unless we in elected and appointed office ensure best efforts are made through enhanced intergovernmental coordination and cooperation.

Accordingly, as County Attorney I am announcing the formation of a Big Horn County Missing/Murdered Persons Investigation and Prosecution Task Force. This Task Force will follow the model established by the Big Horn County Child Abuse Investigation and Prosecution Task Force in 2017, and will involve active case studies and policy review conducted by local, tribal, State and federal partners in order to better investigate and prosecute actual cases through continuous review and revision of local best practices. Under the auspices of the Missing/Murdered Persons Task Force, the Big Horn County Attorney's Office will take direct supervision over all investigations in Big Horn County which relate to suspicious deaths. It may be unprecedented in Big Horn County for the County Attorney to take such an active role, but our Community finds itself in unprecedented times.

The establishment of a Missing and Murdered Persons Task Force will guarantee best efforts are always made to provide closure to families in need of healing and to ensure maximum proactivity in our efforts to effectively address the alarm signals exhibited by those most at risk. The Big Horn County Sheriff's Office is in support of these efforts and the Board of Commissioners are looking to enact a resolution declaring support for such a task force.

The ongoing issues surrounding the missing and murdered person awareness movement, along with the rise in suspected and known instances of human trafficking in and near Indian country are well publicized and must remain firmly in our daily thoughts and calculations. The recent public demonstration on the steps of the Big Horn County Courthouse should be viewed as a rebuke of any status quo that does not fully accept the call to action that our Community in crisis presents. The Missing and Murdered Persons Task Force is being established to serve as a rebuke, as well, of any such status quo. A continuous goal of our Community should be strong, dutiful law enforcement and proactive and engaged public prosecutors. As it pertains to our Community in crisis, there cannot be a crisis of confidence in criminal justice. Big Horn County will do its duty.

For justice.

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