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San Diego County MMIP Collaborative Holds First Convening Since MOU Signing

Tribal Leaders and Law Enforcement Partners Continue Working Together to Strengthen Response to Missing and Murdered Indigenous People

San Diego County District Attorney **Summer Stephan** joined tribal leaders and law enforcement partners November 9 at Pala Resort for the first convening of the San Diego County Missing and Murdered Indigenous People (MMIP) Collaborative since a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed in **May 2026** in Sacramento.

The convening, which was hosted and planned by the Pala Band of Mission Indians, marked an important step in continuing the partnership between the San Diego County District Attorney's Office, San Diego County Sheriff's Office, Pala Band of Mission Indians, Jamul Indian Village and Bureau of Indian Affairs to strengthen the response to missing and murdered Indigenous people cases.

The MOU established a framework for greater coordination, information-sharing and collaboration among tribal governments and law enforcement agencies. The partnership is intended to strengthen investigative efforts, improve communication across jurisdictions, build trust with Indigenous communities and ensure families affected by these cases receive meaningful support. The agreement formalizes a shared commitment to work across jurisdictions to investigate and solve cases involving Indigenous victims, including murder, missing persons—with a special focus on minors—kidnapping, and human trafficking.

"For far too long, missing and murdered Indigenous people have been treated as statistics rather than human beings whose lives matter," said Chairman Robert Smith, from the Pala Band of Mission Indians Chairman. "Behind every case is a family living with

unimaginable pain and unanswered questions. Our people deserve more than expressions of concern. They deserve answers, accountability and justice. This partnership is about making certain that no missing person is forgotten, no family is left to search for answers alone, and no Indigenous life is ever considered less worthy of protection."

"The MOU was an important commitment to our tribal partners and Indigenous communities, but our work does not stop with signing an agreement," DA Stephan said. "We are committed to building trust, strengthening communication and working together to improve investigations, encourage early reporting and provide meaningful support to victims and families. Justice for Indigenous victims is a shared responsibility, and this collaborative is an opportunity to turn that responsibility into action. To the families, survivors and advocates who continue to push for answers and justice, we hear you, we stand with you, and this work is for you. Every family deserves to know that their loved one matters and that their case will receive the attention and coordination it deserves, which is the purpose of this convening."

The convening provided an opportunity for participating partners to discuss shared priorities, strengthen relationships and continue identifying ways to advance the goals outlined in the agreement, which include:

- Enhancing public safety through coordinated, multi-agency investigations
- Ensuring comprehensive and collaborative casework
- Facilitating the prosecution of offenders and reopening cases when appropriate
- Building trust among law enforcement, tribal partners, and the community
- Promoting awareness and early reporting to law enforcement
- Providing appropriate and supportive victim services in MMIP cases

"The importance of entering into a formal agreement with San Diego's tribal governments to aggressively investigate cases where family members have gone missing cannot be overstated," Sheriff Kelly Martinez said. "The historical trauma Native American tribes have faced in the United States has created mistrust that must be overcome. As the Sheriff, I am committed to supporting San Diego's first people, and this is not just symbolism but a real step toward building trust and supporting our community."

"Protecting our people takes all of us," Chairwoman of the Jamul Indian Village Erica Pinto said. "I am grateful that our governments can work together with mutual respect and a shared commitment to justice, so that we can better serve families searching for answers about their loved ones. I thank District Attorney Summer Stephan for her leadership and partnership in moving this collaboration forward. Together, we must turn our commitments into action, ensuring American Indian families are heard and supported as we work to end the MMIP crisis."

The gathering took place during Native American Heritage Month, a time to recognize and honor the history, culture and contributions of Indigenous communities. It also serves as an important reminder of the ongoing need to address the MMIP crisis and support the families and communities impacted by it.

The collaborative plans to hold its second convening in March 2027, continuing discussions and advancing efforts to strengthen coordination and collaboration among its partners. The collaborative will continue working together to advance the goals of the MOU and strengthen the collective response to missing and murdered Indigenous people cases throughout the region.

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About the San Diego County District Attorney's Office

The San Diego County District Attorney's Office serves nearly 3.3 million residents in San Diego County and is the region's largest law enforcement agency responsible for prosecuting felony crimes. The office also protects the public through specialized units that address consumer protection, environmental crimes, human trafficking, elder abuse, and cybercrime. The District Attorney's Office works every day to pursue justice, protect victims, and ensure that San Diego County remains a safe place to live, work, and raise a family.