

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

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INDIAN AFFAIRS

January 15, 2025

The Honorable Merrick Garland  
Attorney General  
U.S. Department of Justice  
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20530

The Honorable Deb Haaland  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Attorney General Garland and Secretary Haaland,

The Oglala Sioux Tribe (OST) is experiencing a serious breakdown in law and order. While tribal officials have dealt with public safety issues for several years, a recent series of violent crimes has created a desperate situation on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. The OST Department of Public Safety is critically understaffed and under-resourced, and federal assistance is essential to safeguard lives and restore order. Therefore, I urge federal officials to take any necessary steps to help reduce violent crime on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the OST Department of Public Safety has responded to an increasing number of calls for assistance. According to tribal leaders, the OST Department of Public Safety receives as many as 166,000 calls for police services annually. With only 33 patrol officers, OST law enforcement officials are unable to effectively address serious public safety issues.

The OST Department of Public Safety is also dealing with disproportionately high levels of violent crime. While almost all of the Great Plains Region is facing a public safety crisis, residents of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation are encountering the highest rates of violence. According to Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) crime statistics, 131 death investigations occurred on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation from 2013 to 2023.

A series of violent events on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation have put tribal members in an extremely dangerous situation. In late December, tribal officers responded to several violent crimes, including the fatal shooting of a juvenile and a double homicide. The OST Department of Corrections, already operating at full capacity, lacks the ability to house additional offenders, further compounding the crisis. As tribal law enforcement officials struggle to address public safety issues, many reservation residents are living in fear. In response to these violent events, tribal leaders declared an extended state of emergency on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation.

As you know, the federal trust responsibility obligates the United States to provide adequate public safety services in Indian Country. Throughout the past two years, tribal leaders have asked federal law enforcement officials for assistance on numerous occasions. Despite these efforts, there has been no substantial federal response to the public safety crisis.

The OST Department of Public Safety is in dire need of additional personnel, equipment and jail capacity. It is past time for federal officials to give this situation the attention it deserves. I encourage federal law enforcement agencies to act swiftly and decisively to address this crisis.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "M. Michael Rounds". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "M" and "R".

M. Michael Rounds  
United States Senator