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Audit



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Memorandum

To: Bryan Mercier
Director, Bureau of Indian Affairs

From: Nicki Miller *Nicki Miller*
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Subject: Final Audit Report – *The Bureau of Indian Affairs' Missing and Murdered Unit Must Improve Its Case Intake Process and Victim Services*
Report No. 2024-CR-019

This memorandum transmits our audit report on whether the Bureau of Indian Affairs' Missing and Murdered Unit had internal controls and processes in place to ensure effective and efficient case management and complied with applicable standards.

We will track open recommendations for resolution and implementation. We will notify Congress of our findings, and we will report semiannually, as required by law, on actions you have taken to implement the recommendations and on recommendations that have not been implemented. We will also post a public version of this report on our website.

If you have any questions about this report, please contact me aie_reports@doioig.gov.

Audit**The Bureau of Indian Affairs' Missing and Murdered Unit Must Improve Its Case Intake Process and Victim Services**

The U.S. Department of the Interior established the Missing and Murdered Unit (MMU) as a component of the Bureau of Indian Affairs' (BIA's) Office of Justice Services (OJS) to analyze and solve missing, murdered, and human trafficking cases involving American Indians and Alaska Natives.

Objective

To determine whether MMU had internal controls and processes in place to ensure effective and efficient case management and complied with applicable standards. Specifically, we assessed whether the controls in place ensured the intake process for case referrals was efficient and analyzed how MMU allocated and spent its funding for the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons Initiative.

Recommendations

We make eight recommendations that, once fully implemented, will help BIA more effectively manage MMU.

Five recommendations are implemented, one is resolved, and two are unresolved. We identified one resolved recommendation as significant.

Risk Areas

Health & Safety



Tribal Nations & Insular Communities

Findings

We found that as of November 2024, MMU had 83 open cases and 394 pending referrals—284 referrals, or 72 percent, were received between 2020 and 2023, with the remaining 110 received in 2024. Several factors contributed to this backlog of referrals. For instance, MMU agents had unmanageable workloads. National Institute of Justice cold case management best practices emphasize that investigators should be assigned investigative duties only, but many aspects of the initial screening are administrative rather than investigative. We found agents must set aside time away from their open cases to conduct extensive research on the large number of referrals assigned to them, which contributed to referrals continuing to linger and remain unaddressed for a long period of time. MMU also did not have established timeframes for assessing referrals. Finally, despite BIA's efforts to recruit personnel and allocate funding for MMU operations, the unit continued to face staffing and recruitment challenges and has operated below full staffing capacity.

In addition, we found MMU did not consistently provide victims the services required under its own standard operating procedures and those that may be required under the Victims' Rights and Restitution Act.

During our audit, we also noted that OJS used carryover funding initially allocated to MMU to purchase law enforcement vehicles for other OJS agencies.

Impact

Failure to implement adequate internal controls, follow cold case best practices, and ensure adequate staffing has weakened MMU's ability to effectively process referrals and provide mandated services. This inefficient case referral process has led to delays in processing referrals. In addition, by not adequately staffing the Victim Services Program and not consistently referring victims for support as required by its own procedures, MMU could deprive individuals of their rights under the Victims' Rights and Restitution Act, leaving them without the services to which they may be entitled. We also note that difficulties in hiring have led to the use of funds allocated to MMU for more general BIA law enforcement purposes, some of which seemingly do not relate directly to MMU goals. Without reforms to improve staffing and case management, MMU will continue to face challenges in its ability to fulfill its responsibility to serve victims, their families, and Tribal communities.

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Introduction

Objective

Our objective was to determine whether the Bureau of Indian Affairs' (BIA's) Missing and Murdered Unit (MMU) had internal controls and processes in place to ensure effective and efficient case management and complied with applicable standards. See Appendix 1 for our audit scope and methodology.

Background

According to a Congressional Research Service report, Indigenous peoples globally face disproportionate levels of violence—for American Indians and Alaska Natives, 84 percent of women and 82 percent of men have experienced violence in their lifetime.¹ As of June 2023, of the 23,300 missing persons listed in the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System, 820 (3.5 percent) were identified as American Indians and Alaska Natives, despite this group representing only 1.1 percent of the population.² According to its website,³ BIA estimates that there are approximately 4,200 missing and murdered cases that have gone unsolved, stating that these investigations “remain unsolved often due to a lack of investigative resources available to identify new information from witness testimony, re-examine new or retained material evidence, as well as reviewing fresh activities of suspects.”

Missing and Murdered Unit

In 2019, Executive Order No. 13898, *Establishing the Task Force on Missing and Murdered American Indians and Alaska Natives*, sought “to enhance the operation of the criminal justice system and address the legitimate concerns of American Indian and Alaska Native communities regarding missing and murdered people—particularly missing and murdered indigenous women and girls.” According to the U.S. Department of Justice, this task force, named Operation Lady Justice, focused on meeting with Tribal leaders and communities, improving law enforcement response, reviewing research and data collection, and developing an outreach campaign.

Building on the work of the task force, the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) announced the formation of the MMU on April 1, 2021. The announcement indicated that the unit's mission would be to prioritize American Indian and Alaska Native missing persons and homicide cases, coordinate resources, and provide closure to victims⁴ through enhanced victim services.⁵ In fiscal year (FY) 2022, OJS allocated funding for this unit through its Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons (MMIP) Initiative.⁶ MMU uses the Victims' Rights and Restitution Act (VRRRA) of 1990, as amended, to guide its services to victims.⁷

¹ Cong. Rsch. Serv. Report No. R47010, *Missing and Murdered Indigenous People (MMIP): Overview of Recent Research, Legislation, and Selected Issues for Congress* (July 3, 2023).

² *Id.*

³ Indian Affairs, *Missing and Murdered Indigenous People Crisis: Violence Against Native Americans and Alaska Natives far exceed national averages*, <https://www.bia.gov/service/mmu/missing-and-murdered-indigenous-people-crisis>.

⁴ The Victims' Rights and Restitution Act defines a “victim” as any entity, including institutional and family members, that has suffered direct harm as a result of a crime. In this report, we adopted the same terminology.

⁵ DOI, Press Release, *Secretary Haaland Creates New Missing & Murdered Unit to Pursue Justice for Missing or Murdered American Indians and Alaska Natives* (Apr. 1, 2021), <https://www.doi.gov/news/secretary-haaland-creates-new-missing-murdered-unit-pursue-justice-missing-or-murdered-american>.

⁶ Bureau of Indian Affairs, Budget Justification, FY 2022.

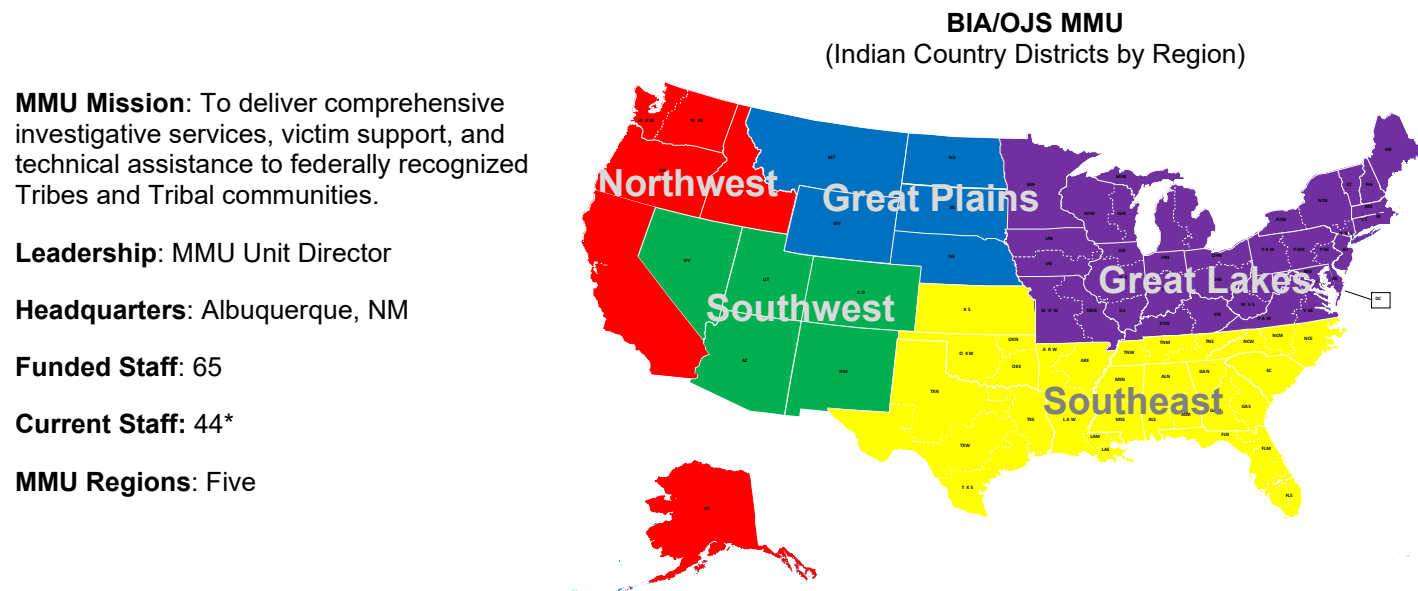
⁷ Victims' Rights and Restitution Act of 1990, Pub. L. No. 101-647, 104 Stat. 4820. Congress passed this Act to direct Federal agencies engaged in criminal investigations and prosecutions to “make their best efforts to see that victims of crime are accorded the rights described” in the Act. In a summary and legal analysis of 18 U.S.C. § 3771, the Congressional Research Service stated, “Congress had enacted a series of individual victims' rights provisions as well as a general aspirational federal statute, 42 U.S.C. § 10606, directed to the performance of federal officials. Section 10606 was accompanied by a statement of the sense of Congress encouraging similar action by the states and by specific directions to the heads of the various federal law enforcement departments and agencies for implementation, both of which remain in effect.” Cong. Rsch. Serv. Report No. RL33679, *Crime Victims' Rights Act: A Summary and Legal Analysis of 18 U.S.C. § 3771* (updated June 8, 2021).

MMU's core responsibilities include gathering intelligence on missing and murdered cases, reviewing and prioritizing cases for investigative assignment, coordinating external resources to support investigations, assigning and investigating cases, and collaborating with stakeholders to analyze and resolve cases involving missing, murdered, and trafficked American Indians and Alaska Natives.

MMU focuses on solving unresolved homicide, long-term missing person, and human trafficking cases involving American Indians and Alaska Natives. MMU teams also assist with "acute cases"—cases that are more recent.⁸ MMU can proceed with an investigation only if the original investigating agency agrees to MMU's involvement and MMU has jurisdiction over the case. MMU jurisdiction covers those cases that occurred within Indian Country as defined by 18 U.S.C. § 1151 and where the lead law enforcement agency and/or Tribal Government having authority requests or accepts assistance from MMU.⁹ MMU procedures provide that it will accept only those cases in which the victim or involved person is considered an American Indian or Alaska Native under Federal guidelines and either (1) involves homicide, human trafficking, a reported acute¹⁰ or long-term missing person, or long-term unidentified human remains within Indian Country jurisdiction; or (2) has a nexus to Indian Country and a nexus to the crimes listed above (e.g., proactive measures to combat such crimes).

MMU is headquartered in Albuquerque, New Mexico, with staff located in 26 field offices across 15 States. Figure 1 provides an overview of the regional structure of MMU.

Figure 1: MMU at a Glance



* As of October 2025.

Source: OIG figure developed using BIA region data.

⁸ According to MMU's *FY 2024 Year End Report*, an acute murder case is "a homicide regarded as reasonably recent or newly discovered and in the beginning stages of investigation." Acute missing person cases are those characterized by sharpness or severity of sudden onset.

⁹ Non-jurisdiction cases are those incidents that occur outside of Indian Country that involve an American Indian or Alaska Native victim and where the Tribal Government and/or lead investigating agency with authority requests or accepts the assistance of MMU. Non-jurisdiction cases can be accepted on a case-by-case basis.

¹⁰ According to the *MMU Standard Operating Procedures Manual*, the appropriate jurisdictional agency conducts the initial investigation for acute missing person reports; MMU is a secondary responding agency to these cases. Exceptions may apply with supervisory approval.

MMU is led by a Unit Chief responsible for stakeholder collaboration, policy development, and overall performance along with a Deputy Unit Chief and four regional Agents in Charge (RACs) stationed in Vancouver, Washington; Rapid City, South Dakota; Phoenix, Arizona; and Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, who oversee MMU agents and field operations. According to MMU, as of October 2025, staff who support the agents and RACs include:

- Four program analysts who maintain the intake logs for referrals, complete requests for information from the agents (such as providing information on a suspect), and meet with the RACs every 45 days to ensure the log data match the information in the Incident Management, Analysis, and Reporting System (IMARS).¹¹
- Two program specialists (law enforcement) who handle administrative and programmatic responsibilities such as ensuring payments are appropriate, ordering uniforms, and entering contract and evidence equipment information into the Financial and Business Management System.
- Two victim specialists who meet with the agents, victims, and other points of contact to ensure these individuals have the resources and contact information they need.
- Two evidence technicians who use specialized equipment such as crime scene mapping stations and ground-penetrating radar to help process crime scenes and collect evidence.

OJS funds MMU through the “Law Enforcement Special Initiatives” and “Criminal Investigations & Police Services” subactivities. According to OJS, this funding, which OJS describes as part of its MMIP Initiative, has nearly tripled since FY 2020—increasing from \$5.9 million in FY 2020¹² to \$16.9 million in FYs 2022 through 2024 (see Figure 2). In the Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying the Consolidated Appropriations Act, FY 2022, Congress provided a \$5 million increase to hire 20 additional investigative personnel for MMU. According to BIA, the unit had 27 agents as of October 2025.

Figure 2: MMIP Initiative Budget Allocation

BIA Budget Line Item	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	Initiative Component
A0J30: Criminal Investigations & Police Services	\$1,402,930	\$3,443,215	\$3,443,215	\$3,443,215	\$3,443,215	AAKL003000: Missing & Murdered Unit Organization
A0J33: Law Enforcement Special Initiatives	\$2,030,000	\$6,050,000	\$11,050,000	\$11,050,000	\$11,050,000	
	\$2,500,000	\$2,500,000	\$2,500,000	\$2,500,000	\$2,500,000	AAKL007700: Advanced Training Center (North Dakota)
	\$5,932,930	\$11,993,215	\$16,993,215	\$16,993,215	\$16,993,215	Total MMIP Initiative Budget Allocation

Note: BIA allocates funding between MMU and the Advanced Training Center.¹³

Source: OIG reproduction of BIA OJS table.

¹¹ IMARS is a computer system designed to support law enforcement efforts by providing a centralized platform for data collection and reporting.

¹² BIA allocated funding to the MMIP Initiative prior to the formal announcement of the creation of MMU in April 2021.

¹³ In 2020, the Indian Police Academy opened the Advanced Training Center to provide specialized training in criminal investigation, drug enforcement, and basic and specialized training programs to Indian Country law enforcement agencies. The center partners with Federal agencies and nonprofits to coordinate training and deliver specialized programs, including those focused on advanced crime scene processing and missing persons.

Investigation Standards and Practices

The U.S. Government Accountability Office provides standards, known as the “Green Book,” to guide the internal control mechanisms of Federal agencies. The Green Book recommends that Federal managers establish control activities designed to meet organizational goals and mitigate operational risks. It emphasizes that managers should implement these activities through policies, procedures, and mechanisms that enforce directives and address emerging risks. MMU uses internal control mechanisms outlined in its multiple standard operating procedures (SOPs) that guide the implementation of its goals for investigations, the referral intake process, and victim services.¹⁴

The National Institute of Justice provides guidance for cold case management through its *National Best Practices for Implementing and Sustaining a Cold Case Investigation Unit*, describing 23 best practices for developing and operating cold case units.¹⁵ These best practices emphasize the need for a clear and efficient intake and referral process, appropriate resource allocation, and thorough case screening to ensure that only viable cases are pursued.

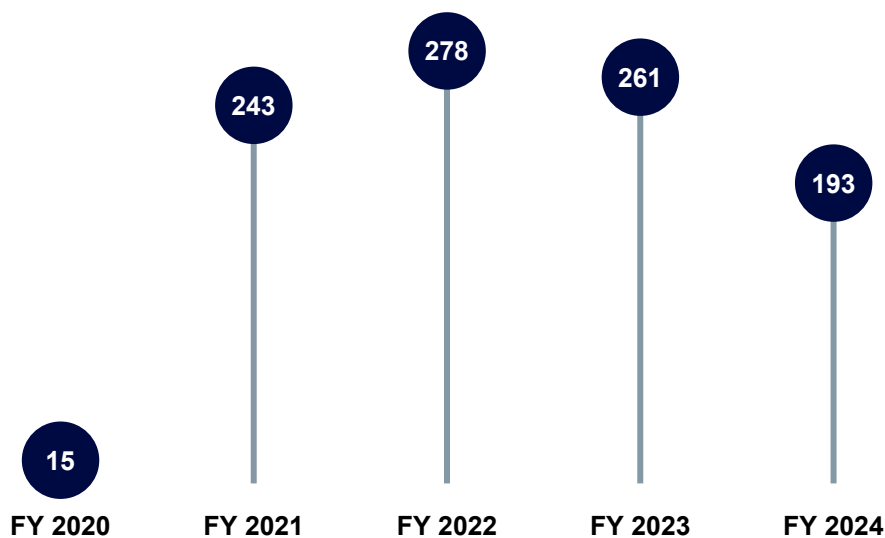
MMU Intake Process

MMU’s involvement in a case begins when it receives reports of incidents, classified as referrals, that may involve unidentified human remains, missing persons, cold murders, or others. MMU receives referrals from multiple sources, including:

- The original law enforcement investigating agency, such as Tribal police.
- Outside agencies, including nongovernmental organizations.
- Community members.

From FY 2020 through FY 2024, MMU reported receiving 990 referrals for acute and long-term death and missing person cases (see Figure 3). MMU reported that it received 193 referrals during FY 2024, closing 69 of them along with 29 referrals received prior to FY 2024.

Figure 3: MMU Referrals Received FYs 2020-2024



Source: OIG chart developed from data in MMU’s *FY 2024 Year End Report*.

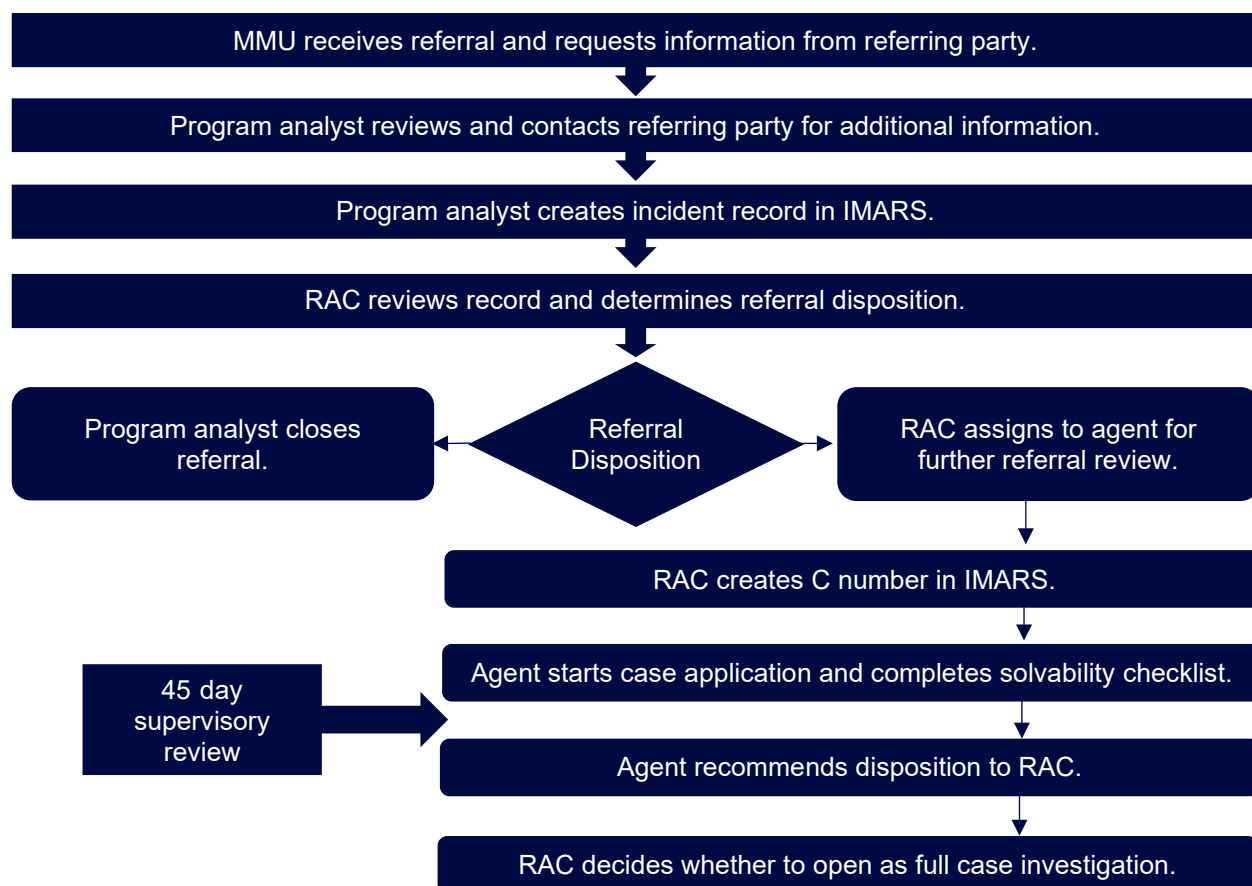
¹⁴ Our review focused on analyzing policies and procedures related to MMU’s cold case management.

¹⁵ The National Institute of Justice states on its website that it is “the research, evaluation, and technology agency of the U.S. Department of Justice and is dedicated to improving knowledge and understanding of crime and justice issues through science.” <https://nij.ojp.gov/about>

MMU uses its Intake Process SOP to guide how it screens referrals to determine if MMU will accept the case (see Figure 4 for a process map). The Intake Process SOP describes the information MMU needs for each referral and who needs to gather and review the validity of this information. In general, MMU program analysts conduct the initial screening by contacting the party who made the referral and gathering the data. The program analyst has two days to input the referral information into the intake log, which is a spreadsheet used to track the referrals. If the reporting party responds with the necessary information, the program analyst then generates a number and record for the incident in IMARS.¹⁶ This record is then routed to the RAC for further screening to determine if it should be closed or assigned to an agent for additional analysis. The RAC reviews the information and contacts the law enforcement department that may have an existing case related to the referral. If a case exists, MMU offers assistance; if it does not exist, MMU will provide an official case referral to that department. MMU will assess investigative authority to offer investigative assistance. If MMU determines it has authority and the law enforcement department accepts MMU's offer of assistance, the RAC then assigns the referral to an agent for additional screening. MMU does not have a required timeframe for the RAC review.

The agent's screening process for opening a case from a referral, called a "case application," is described in the *MMU Standard Operating Procedures Manual*. The information from the BO number/incident record is linked to a new file¹⁷ in IMARS; it is then the agent's role to recommend whether or not it should be opened as a case. This review process requires the assigned agent to conduct extensive investigative followup to determine solvability (using a "solvability checklist") before making a recommendation for opening a full case investigation. MMU may choose not to open a case if it lacks jurisdiction or if the law enforcement agency that has jurisdiction declines MMU assistance, or both. While the agent's review process is tracked through a 45-day supervisory review, it does not have a set timeframe. When the agent has completed the case application, it will be returned to the RAC for his or her review and approval.

Figure 4: MMU Referral Processing Map Summary



Source: OIG chart developed from MMU data.

¹⁶ A BO Number is a report number that is generated within IMARS. This number is used to label a police incident report or investigative activity.

¹⁷ The number generated is referred to as a "case number" or "C number."

MMU Victim Services Program

MMU established a Victim Services Program (VSP) “for victims and families that special agents are working with to solve long-term missing or homicide cases.”¹⁸ According to MMU’s Victim Services SOP, victim specialists work with victims to provide case updates, mental health resource information, legal process guidance, and other necessary services. By doing so, VSP fulfills MMU’s requirements under VRRRA, which states that “a responsible official” from the investigating or prosecuting agency must provide certain services to victims, including, for example:

- Informing the victim of the right to receive victim services.
- Informing the victim where medical and social services may be obtained.
- Assistance with contacting service providers after a crime is reported or identified.
- Providing the victim the earliest possible notice concerning the status of the investigation, arrest and charging of an offender, the scheduling of court proceedings, the release or detention of an offender, the acceptance of any plea or rendering of a verdict, and the sentence imposed, including the offender’s possible detention release date.

¹⁸ Indian Affairs, *MMU’s Victim Services Program: Supporting Victims and Families*, <https://www.bia.gov/mmu/victimservicesprogram>.

Results of Audit

We found that MMU did not have adequate controls and processes in place to ensure effective and efficient case management and compliance with best practices and its own SOPs. Specifically, MMU did not have efficient intake procedures, established timeframes for assessing referrals, manageable workloads, and sufficient staffing. The ongoing staffing shortages within MMU have had a direct negative impact on its ability to meet its mission. Additionally, we found that MMU agents did not always contact victim specialists, as required by MMU's procedures. These specialists play a key role in explaining the legal process, offering emotional support, and ensuring victims are informed about case status. Finally, we noted that OJS used funding allocated for MMU staffing to modify and purchase vehicles for other OJS units.

MMU Did Not Address Case Referrals Efficiently

The National Institute of Justice's guidance describing best practices for developing and operating cold case units recommends that a cold case unit should "assign investigators to investigative duties only." It specifies that units should assign noninvestigative staff tasks such as scanning documents and entering data into case management systems; conducting case reviews and reporting any potential leads or gaps; and checking records and performing database searches on witnesses and suspects. In addition, the best practices state that agents should not actively investigate more than five cold cases at any given time. These best practices also emphasize the need for a clear and efficient intake and referral process, thorough case screening to ensure that only potentially solvable cases are pursued, and appropriate resource allocation.

MMU's Intake Process SOP states that the program analyst conducts the initial screening, which the RAC then uses to determine the merit of these new referrals. The SOP notes that the RAC will decide to either close a referral or assign it to an agent to initiate the MMU case application process, which involves the completion of a solvability checklist to help determine if it should be opened as a case. If a case application process is initiated, the SOP states that the RAC will create a case file C number in IMARS and assign it to an MMU agent.

According to MMU, it had 83 open cases and 394 open referrals as of November 2024. Of these, 284 referrals (or 72 percent) were received between 2020 and 2023 and remained in MMU's referral screening process.¹⁹ Factors that contributed to the backlog in referral processing include MMU's:

- Inefficient intake procedures.
- Absence of established timeframes for assessing referrals.
- Excessive and unmanageable workloads for existing agents.
- Staffing shortages.

While the National Institute of Justice recommends that investigators be assigned only investigative duties, we found that MMU requires agents to complete tasks in screening these potential cases that may be better assigned to noninvestigative staff, such as determining if the victim is an American Indian or Alaska Native. The program analysts perform initial referral screening, which involves gathering a limited amount of information. Although an agent can request additional help in conducting screening activities, we found that requiring agents to conduct noninvestigative tasks is inconsistent with the best practices guidance. Moreover, because agents then had to balance noninvestigative work and open cases, referrals tended to be delayed in processing.

¹⁹ When we expressed our concerns about MMU's timeliness in addressing referrals, MMU advised us that it updated its Intake Process SOP to address those concerns. We reviewed the revised SOP as part of our recommendation closure process.

We also found that MMU did not have an established timeframe for screening referrals and many referrals remained in the screening process years after they were received. For comparison, we noted that *The Attorney General Guidelines for Domestic FBI Operations*, like MMU's guidance, delineates between preliminary and full investigations—the former of which “may be initiated on the basis of any allegation or information indicative of possible criminal or national security-threatening activity.”²⁰ The latter requires “more substantial factual predication” to initiate. Unlike MMU's guidance, the Attorney General Guidelines establish time limits for completion of preliminary investigations. Specifically, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI's) preliminary investigations process must be concluded within six months, unless a Special Agent in Charge approves a six-month extension.

We noted that MMU's agents' workloads were unmanageable. Although MMU agents were typically assigned an average of 4 cold cases—which is within the National Institute of Justice's suggested limit of no more than 5 cases—agents were also assigned an average of 14 referrals.²¹ While we recognize that the work required to solve an open case differs from that required to review a referral, agents still must set aside time away from their open cases to conduct extensive research on the large number of referrals assigned to them, which contributes to referrals continuing to linger and remain unaddressed for a long period of time. This is contrary to best practice guidance that emphasizes the need for a clear and efficient intake and referral process.

The excessive workload placed on agents is further exacerbated by MMU's staffing shortages—specifically, its inability to recruit and retain staff in many positions. While MMU is funded for special agents, evidence technicians, victim specialists, and other support positions, several positions remain vacant or unfilled, impeding the unit's ability to meet its mission. As of October 2, 2025, MMU stated that 21 positions remained unfilled, including vacant positions for 4 special agents, 3 evidence technicians, 3 victim specialists, a law enforcement specialist, a law enforcement assistant, and a program analyst.²² In addition, it stated that there were eight active hiring actions in place.

BIA has identified MMU recruitment and retention as an ongoing issue, with BIA HR staffing levels contributing to difficulty in hiring open MMU positions. BIA leadership has stated that congressional funding has increased faster than they have been able to recruit additional MMU staff, and, as a result, the unit has struggled to “grow into its budget.” MMU has taken several measures to address staffing shortages, including in-person recruitment efforts at Tribal colleges, cultural events, job fairs, and other gatherings with significant Indian Country representation. Additionally, MMU stated it had planned to expand its recruitment presence to other venues, including law enforcement events and State fairs, in FY 2025. However, as of October 2025, these efforts had not yielded the staffing level MMU requires to fully implement its mission.

Additionally, according to MMU personnel, retaining special agents within MMU has proven to be particularly challenging. MMU faces competition from other Federal agencies, such as the FBI, that offer higher level GS-13 positions compared to MMU's GS-12 journeyman-level positions. The disparity in compensation and career progression has led to turnover within MMU. Furthermore, MMU has experienced lapses in hiring actions for open positions, with some positions remaining vacant for extended periods. Specifically, during our audit, we found that four open MMU positions had been pending for more than 100 days, including three funded special agent positions with their status marked as “Needs Advertisement.”

The inefficient referral intake practice, lack of timeliness measures, excessive agent workloads, and ongoing staffing shortages within MMU have had a negative impact on its ability to meet its mission and have resulted in delays in processing referrals. Without effectively managing its intake process, MMU is not operating in accordance with best practices and its own standard operating procedures, which are designed to enhance the effectiveness of cold case investigations. MMU's inability to process referrals efficiently hampers the unit's mission of resolving cold cases and thereby increasing the chances of providing justice to victims.

²⁰ *The Attorney General's Guidelines for Domestic FBI Operations* (Oct. 2008).

²¹ One agent stated he was currently working on a combination of 60 cases and referrals.

²² According to MMU, the evidence technician, victim specialist, law enforcement specialist, law enforcement assistant, and program analyst positions were subject to the hiring freeze; special agents and investigators were not subject to the hiring freeze.

Recommendations

We recommend that BIA:

1. Develop and implement a plan to address the backlog of pending referrals that were received between 2020 and 2024.
2. Update Missing and Murdered Unit policies and procedures to incorporate intake and agent workload best practices, such as assessing the solvability checklist to identify tasks that can be conducted by other staff and reserving the core investigative functions to the investigators.
3. Provide training to personnel regarding the case intake process to ensure that only potentially solvable cases that meet the Missing and Murdered Unit's case criteria are assigned to agents.
4. Establish a timeframe within the Missing and Murdered Unit's procedures for when a referral should be reviewed to determine if it should be opened as a case or closed.
5. Develop and implement a plan, in conjunction with BIA HR, that includes specific timeframes to ensure all vacant positions are filled promptly.

MMU Did Not Ensure Victims Received Required Services

The VRRRA requires that “a responsible official” from the investigating or prosecuting agency must provide certain services to victims, including, for example:

- Informing the victim of the right to receive victim services.
- Informing the victim where medical and social services may be obtained.
- Assistance with contacting service providers after a crime is reported or identified.
- Providing the victim the earliest possible notice concerning the status of the investigation, arrest and charging of an offender, the scheduling of court proceedings, the release or detention of an offender, the acceptance of any plea or rendering of a verdict, and the sentence imposed, including the offender's possible detention release date.

MMU carries out this mandate through its VSP. MMU has two SOPs that guide how agents and victim specialists interact with victims: the Victim Services SOP and the *MMU Standard Operating Procedures Manual*. After MMU completes the intake process and assigns an agent to a case, the *MMU Standard Operating Procedures Manual* requires the agent to contact an MMU victim specialist within his or her region and prepare to conduct initial in-person outreach with the victims. In addition, the Victim Services SOP requires the agent, at the time of their contact with the MMU victim specialist, to provide the victims' information and points of contact to the victim specialist so the specialist can start tracking the case.

Once involved with a case, victim specialists coordinate with the agents to determine what followup information to provide to victims and how often the victim specialist will provide updates. In addition, VSP staff responsibilities include:

- Explaining the legal complexities involved as a case progresses toward prosecution in Tribal and Federal courts and helping victims understand why certain details cannot always be disclosed during an open investigation.

- Advocating for victims by ensuring investigators recognize and address their needs throughout the process. The goal is to hold suspects accountable and bring justice and closure to victims.
- Facilitating information sharing when the identified next of kin or family contacts change due to extenuating circumstances.

We identified shortcomings in the services VSP provided. While MMU's guidance mandates that agents contact victim specialists to assist with victim outreach, information dissemination, and case support, we found this did not consistently occur.

Specifically, we reviewed 17 cases with VSP staff to determine if an agent should have been in contact with the victim services staff member. We found that in 8 of 13 cases (62 percent),²³ the agent should have contacted VSP staff pursuant to MMU's procedures but did not. During our interviews, staff discussed reasons VSP had not been contacted as required. For example:

- One agent said he does not always refer cases to VSP, citing lack of support.
- An agent in one region said they may use Tribal victim services to provide victim services, noting VSP staffing shortages.
- Another staff member stated that because there are only two victim specialists to cover the entire country, the agents used other victim programs due to geographic closeness and availability of services.

According to numerous staff, MMU's VSP has been understaffed, with only three victim specialists—one supervisor and two specialists—covering four regions. MMU acknowledged the staffing shortages and stated that it added victim specialists in Albuquerque, New Mexico; Billings, Montana; and Vancouver, Washington, in 2021.

It is VSP's responsibility to update victims on case developments and progress. When MMU agents fail to contact victim specialists, victims do not receive critical information about their case or the legal process, are not properly informed about case developments, and are not aware of the progress of investigations. Without referrals, victim specialists remain unaware of the need to provide assistance, and victims that could benefit from their services go unsupported. Additionally, MMU's victim specialists told us that when an agent uses Tribal victims' services instead of VSP, MMU cannot ensure victims receive the requisite services or that appropriate confidentiality is maintained since VSP would not be involved in the process.

Lack of timely and consistent victim support may undermine the well-being of victims. The services MMU victim specialists provide are intended to help victims navigate the legal and emotional challenges they face after a crime. These specialists play a key role in explaining the legal process, providing mental health resources, and ensuring victims are informed about case progression. The absence of these services may leave victims without crucial resources and assistance.

²³ In the remaining cases, either an agent contacted VSP or a had valid reason under which it was not required.

Recommendations

We recommend that BIA:

6. Train all personnel regarding their responsibilities on the updated guidelines and requirements under the Victims' Rights and Restitution Act to ensure they fully understand their roles and obligations.
7. Require Regional Agents in Charge to document, during the 45-day supervisory case review, that agents have referred cases to the Victim Services Program or to provide a rationale if an agent has not made a referral.
8. Develop and implement a plan for the appropriate staffing of the Victim Services Program to ensure compliance with the Missing and Murdered Unit's standard operating procedures and ensure that victims and families receive the support they may be entitled to under the Victims' Rights and Restitution Act.

Other Matters

MMU's persistent staffing shortage has limited its ability to fully use its budget; this challenge, when coupled with the multiyear nature of its funding, has resulted in substantial carryover funds being redirected to other law enforcement units.²⁴

A BIA official told us that MMU is staffed at "just a little over 50 percent," meaning that MMU has not used a significant portion of its funds for personnel.

MMU's inability to fully staff the unit has resulted in carryover funds being redirected toward more general purposes, most notably vehicle purchases for other OJS units. Specifically, OJS obligated more than \$15 million in MMU carryover funds to purchase and modify vehicles for BIA law enforcement officers in units other than MMU with the justification that these resources could be used for law enforcement personnel who may respond to MMIP cases. Figure 5 shows the MMU budget allocations and funding obligated for units other than MMU.

Figure 5: MMU Budget Allocations and Other Unit Obligations

FY	Total MMU Allocations	Other OJS Obligations Using MMU Allocations	% MMU Allocations Used for Other Units
2021	\$9,493,215	\$1,411,634	15
2022	\$14,493,215	\$7,350,404	51
2023	\$14,493,215	\$6,436,499	44
Totals	\$38,479,645	\$15,198,537	39%

Source: OIG analysis of information BIA provided.

Even if these other funding uses are generally beneficial for OJS and its law enforcement needs, we emphasize that the resources are not being directed to MMU's specific and important mission.

²⁴ According to the Congressional Research Service, multiyear funds "represent budget authority available for obligation for a definite period spanning more than one fiscal year." Cong. Rsch. Serv. Report No. R48087, *Appropriations Duration of Availability: One Year, Multi-Year, and No-Year Funds* (June 7, 2024).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

We found that MMU did not have adequate controls in place to efficiently manage case referrals and did not always comply with best practices and its own SOPs. Specifically, we found inefficient intake procedures for referrals, an absence of established timeframes for assessing referrals, unmanageable workloads, and insufficient staffing within the unit, resulting in delays in case referral processing. Specifically, MMU's case referral intake process did not align with a National Institute of Justice best practice for cold cases—that agents be assigned only investigative duties with all other operational activities delegated to support staff. Instead, we found that the case intake process burdened agents with duties better delegated to other staff. The process, along with MMU's inability to fully staff the unit, resulted in heavy agent workloads, including an average of 4 open cold cases and 14 open referrals per agent.

We also found that MMU agents did not always refer victims to VSP as required by its own SOPs. The current state of victim services within BIA's MMU is inadequate and does not meet VRRRA requirements. VSP's understaffing and MMU's failure to consistently refer cases to VSP potentially left victims without support.

Furthermore, we noted that issues such as staffing shortages coupled with the multiyear nature of MMU's funding have contributed to the annual carryover of unused funds and those funds being used for vehicle purchases for other OJS staff.

We make eight recommendations that, once fully implemented, will help BIA more effectively manage MMU.

Recommendations Summary

We provided a draft of this report to BIA for review. BIA concurred with all eight recommendations. We consider Recommendations 2, 3, 4, 6, and 7 implemented, Recommendation 1 resolved, and Recommendations 5 and 8 unresolved. We determined that Recommendation 1 is significant, and we will report it as such in our semiannual report to Congress in accordance with the Inspector General Act.²⁵ Below we summarize BIA's response to our recommendations, as well as our comments on its response. See Appendix 2 for the full text of the BIA's response.

We recommend that BIA:

1. Develop and implement a plan to address the backlog of pending referrals that were received between 2020 and 2024.

BIA Response: BIA concurred with the recommendation and stated that as of April 9, 2026, BIA's MMU Deputy Unit Chief and the RACs completed a comprehensive review of all referrals received from 2020 through 2024 across the unit's four regions. As a result of this review, BIA assigned referrals to agents for further evaluation or potential case initiation, closed referrals in accordance with MMU SOPs, and placed some referrals in pending status to be opened as agent caseloads allow. According to BIA, its updated timelines (discussed in more detail in Recommendation 4) "enhance consistency, improve operational efficiency, and support effective case management across the MMU."

In subsequent correspondence, MMU said it established an internal referral tracking spreadsheet covering all referrals since the unit's inception to document each referral, support full and timely screening by RACs, and facilitate appropriate assignment or placement in pending/inactive status when

²⁵ The Inspector General Act of 1978, 5 U.S.C. § 405(b), requires inspectors general to prepare semiannual reports summarizing OIG activities during the immediately preceding six-month periods ending March 31 and September 30. It also states that these semiannual reports shall include an identification of each "significant recommendation" described in previous semiannual reports on which corrective action has not been completed.

staffing limitations require. MMU stated that the estimated completion date for assignment to an agent or closure of the 2020 to 2024 referrals is July 30, 2026.

BIA provided a revised July 30, 2026 target implementation date, however, we have not yet received support for this recommendation's implementation.

Status: Resolved. We will track implementation under Recommendation No. 2024-CR-019-01.²⁶

OIG Comment: This recommendation will be implemented when MMU provides evidence that the pending 2020 to 2024 referrals have been assigned to an agent or closed. We determined this recommendation is significant and will report it as such in our semiannual report to Congress.

2. Update Missing and Murdered Unit policies and procedures to incorporate intake and agent workload best practices, such as assessing the solvability checklist to identify tasks that can be conducted by other staff and reserving the core investigative functions to the investigators.

BIA Response: BIA concurred with the recommendation and stated that it has updated its SOPs, requiring RACs to complete an initial screening of all referrals within 10 business days to determine whether they should be closed or assigned to an agent for further evaluation. If a case is assigned, the agent must conduct an investigative assessment and prepare the solvability factors for the RAC's final determination within 30 days. BIA stated that these procedural updates "establish a more efficient, consistent, and accountable process" for managing referrals. BIA said that these procedures have "resulted in a measurable reduction in the number of required referral reviews assigned to agents, allowing them to dedicate more time to substantive investigative work."

In subsequent correspondence, BIA also stated that administrative and data collection tasks are performed by program analysts to reduce noninvestigative workloads. BIA said it has retained the solvability matrix as an agent responsibility with RAC supervisory review and streamlined it to essential factors only. BIA further stated that it will likely implement panel-based intake and standardized processes to improve referral routing, case assignment, and workload balance in the future.

Status: Implemented. No action is required. Closed under Recommendation No. 2024-CR-019-02.

OIG Comment: After BIA responded to our draft report, it provided us a copy of its policy and procedure updates that incorporate intake and workload best practices, assign administrative tasks to analysts, reserve core investigative functions (including solvability determinations) to agents, and codify time-bound intake steps in SOPs.

3. Provide training to personnel regarding the case intake process to ensure that only potentially solvable cases that meet the Missing and Murdered Unit's case criteria are assigned to agents.

BIA Response: BIA concurred with the recommendation and stated it delivered mandatory training on the updated case intake procedures, including referral screening, evaluation, closure requirements, and use of the solvability matrix. BIA further stated that it will hold this training annually and include it in onboarding.

Status: Implemented. No action is required. Closed under Recommendation No. 2024-CR-019-03.

OIG Comment: After BIA responded to our draft report, it provided documentation demonstrating that it delivered training on April 17, 2026, that met the intent of our recommendation and established annual and onboarding training expectations.

²⁶ The numbering convention we use to track recommendations is the report number followed by sequential recommendation digits.

4. Establish a timeframe within the Missing and Murdered Unit's procedures for when a referral should be reviewed to determine if it should be opened as a case or closed.

BIA Response: BIA concurred with the recommendation and stated that it "updated its SOPs to incorporate clear time requirements for the case intake process." Specifically, BIA said the RAC:

[M]ust complete the initial review of each cold case/murder referral within 72 hours for cold cases and immediately for an acute missing person case. Following this initial review, the [RAC] has ten business days to either assign a cold case/murder referral to an agent for further evaluation and potential case initiation or to formally close the referral in accordance with MMU guidelines. . . . Once a cold case/murder referral is assigned, the reviewing agent has thirty days to conduct a comprehensive assessment and submit a case application recommending whether the matter should be opened as a case or closed, consistent with the updated SOPs.

According to BIA, these enhancements have improved efficiency and adherence to intake timelines.

Status: Implemented. No action is required. Closed under Recommendation No. 2024-CR-019-04.

OIG Comment: After BIA responded to our draft report, it provided documentation demonstrating that it established clear, time-bound referral review requirements in MMU procedures.

5. Develop and implement a plan, in conjunction with BIA HR, that includes specific timeframes to ensure all vacant positions are filled promptly.

BIA Response: BIA concurred with the recommendation and stated that MMU is undergoing restructuring and refocus of MMU's primary responsibilities, which may affect the number of Federal positions and therefore vacancies. It further stated that "all BIA MMU positions that are going to be filled by federal employees are currently completed." According to BIA, the remaining positions will be converted and filled by Tribal law enforcement funded through MMU task force operations; if a BIA position becomes vacant, MMU will work diligently to fill it. BIA also said that its HR office "is implementing significant internal changes to better address ongoing staffing shortages and improve recruitment and hiring processes across the organization."

BIA stated it completed corrective actions associated with the recommendation.

Status: Unresolved. We will follow up with BIA regarding resolution of Recommendation No. 2024-CR-019-05.

OIG Comment: Although BIA stated this recommendation has been addressed, we found that BIA's actions to date have not fully met the intent of our recommendation. Specifically, our recommendation refers to a plan developed with BIA HR that includes specific timeframes to ensure prompt filling of vacant positions. The response and the supporting documentation describe existing hiring process steps but did not provide timelines. Even though BIA's response states that it has filled all or most Federal MMU positions, our report identified weaknesses in the hiring process and accordingly recommended development of a plan to address these issues prior to future vacancies to assist BIA in timely hiring. While BIA stated that remaining vacant positions will be filled by Tribal law enforcement, but we did not receive a plan that provides specifics on the number of vacancies and timelines for the conversions.

This recommendation will be resolved when BIA agrees to develop a plan created in conjunction with BIA HR that includes specific, measurable timeframes to fill vacancies.

6. Train all personnel regarding their responsibilities on the updated guidelines and requirements under the Victims' Rights and Restitution Act to ensure they fully understand their roles and obligations.

BIA Response: BIA concurred with the recommendation and reported that all MMU staff participated in a mandatory in-service training on April 17, 2026, covering staff responsibilities and statutory requirements under the VRRRA, along with “updates on the revised MMU SOPs, and MMU 45-Day Case File Review Form, which now incorporates required documentation of MMU Victim Services notifications and related communications.”

Status: Implemented. No action is required. Closed under Recommendation No. 2024-CR-019-06.

OIG Comment: After BIA responded to our draft report, it provided documentation demonstrating that it delivered the April 2026 VRRRA training, including a description of the training session and screenshots of the training invitation, recording, and attendee list.

7. Require Regional Agents in Charge to document, during the 45-day supervisory case review, that agents have referred cases to the Victim Services Program or to provide a rationale if an agent has not made a referral.

BIA Response: BIA concurred with the recommendation and stated it updated the MMU SOPs “to establish clear requirements for documenting victim services notifications” and revised the 45-Day Case File Review Form “to include a dedicated section for documenting notification to the MMU Victim Services Program.” According to BIA, the RAC is responsible for ensuring compliance, and if notification has not been made, both the assigned agent and the RAC must provide an explanation in the form’s comment section. BIA further stated, “This enhancement strengthens accountability, ensures consistent documentation, and supports adherence to victim services obligations across the MMU.”

Status: Implemented. No action is required. Closed under Recommendation No. 2024-CR-019-07.

OIG Comment: BIA provided the revised 45-Day Case File Review Form that includes a field to document whether the case has been referred to VSP and a notes section to document rationale if an agent has not made a referral.

8. Develop and implement a plan for the appropriate staffing of the Victim Services Program to ensure compliance with the Missing and Murdered Unit’s standard operating procedures and ensure that victims and families receive the support they may be entitled to under the Victims’ Rights and Restitution Act.

BIA Response: BIA concurred with the recommendation and stated MMU is “going through restructuring and refocusing of the primary responsibilities” and that “all MMU positions that are going to be filled are currently completed at this time.” It further clarified, “if a position does become vacant, the MMU will work diligently to fill any vacant positions within the MMU Victim Services Program.” According to BIA, “These efforts will ensure the MMU remains in full compliance with federal regulations and procedures and that victims and families receive the [VRRRA] services and support to which they are entitled.”

BIA stated it completed corrective actions associated with the recommendation.

Status: Unresolved. We will follow up with BIA regarding resolution of Recommendation No. 2024-CR-019-08.

OIG Comment: Although BIA stated this recommendation has been addressed, we found that BIA’s actions taken to date have not fully met the intent of our recommendation. Specifically, BIA did not demonstrate that it developed a plan or more generally assessed whether this staffing level is appropriate to meet its mission. While BIA stated that, after restructuring and refocusing of primary responsibilities, all MMU positions that need to be filled are completed, our report found that VSP has not been able to provide critical victim services and that understaffing was one of the causes of this issue.

This recommendation will be resolved when BIA agrees to develop a plan to help it evaluate the appropriate VSP staffing and implement a corresponding staffing plan, if necessary. It will be implemented when BIA provides evidence of the evaluation and development of a plan.

Appendix 1: Scope and Methodology

Scope

We audited whether MMU, a component of BIA's OJS, effectively managed its case management process and complied with applicable standards from 2021 (when the unit was formed) through March 31, 2024.

Methodology

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

We assessed whether internal control was significant to the audit objective. We determined that BIA's control activities and the following related principles were significant to the audit objective:

- Management should demonstrate a commitment to recruit, develop, and retain competent individuals.
- Management should identify, analyze, and respond to risks related to achieving the defined objectives.
- Management should design control activities to achieve objectives and respond to risks.
- Management should implement control activities through policies.
- Management should externally communicate the necessary quality information to achieve the entity's objectives.

We tested the operation and reliability of internal controls over activities related to our audit objective. Our tests and procedures included:

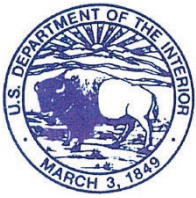
- Gathering and reviewing information about MMU's programs and management of its systems.
- Researching background information on the MMIP crisis that has disproportionately affected American Indians and Alaska Natives.
- Obtaining and reviewing applicable laws and regulations related to the creation of MMU and associated task forces, law enforcement jurisdiction, victims' rights, and Federal budgets and appropriations.
- Analyzing policies and procedures related to IMARS—DOI's law enforcement records system used by MMU.
- Reviewing MMU's policies and procedures designed to guide agents in processing case referrals.
- Analyzing MMU's intake data sheet—the formal case log containing information on case referrals—with data current as of November 2024.
- Conducting interviews with MMU Headquarters personnel in Albuquerque, New Mexico; Region 4 personnel in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; and a RAC.
- Interviewing staff at the Indian Police Academy's Advanced Training Center in Devil's Lake, South Dakota.

- Interviewing OJS Support Services and BIA HR officials responsible for MMU operations within the Office of Human Capital Management.
- Sampling and reviewing 17 of 136 cases opened between January 1 and November 14, 2024, to determine if they were referred to VSP as required.

We received information from MMU that was initially presented as computer-generated data. However, after discussions with MMU and a review of the information, we determined that the data were manually entered into system fields and provided to us. As a result, we did not rely on computer-generated data for this audit.

Appendix 2: Response to Draft Report

BIA's response to our draft report follows on page 20.



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS
Washington, DC 20240

June 8, 2026

Memorandum

To: Nicki Miller
Acting Assistant Inspector General for Audits, Inspections, and Evaluations

From: Bryan K. Mercier
Director, Bureau of Indian Affairs

Subject: Management Response to Recommendations in OIG's Draft Report, *The Bureau of Indian Affairs' Missing and Murdered Unit Must Improve Its Case Intake Process and Victims Services* (No. 2024-CR-019)

Digitally signed by
BRYAN MERCIER
Date: 2026.06.08
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The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the U.S. Department of the Interior Office of Inspector General (OIG) Draft Audit Report – *The Bureau of Indian Affairs' Missing and Murdered Unit Must Improve Its Case Intake Process and Victims Services*. BIA leadership takes the mission of the Missing and Murdered Unit (MMU) very seriously and remains fully committed to strengthening the efficiency and effectiveness of the case referral process, as well as ensuring that victims and their families receive the services and support, they are entitled to. Providing high-quality investigative services and robust victim support to the Indian communities we serve is a fundamental priority for the Bureau.

This memorandum transmits the BIA management's response to each of the audit recommendations, plans for corrective actions, and documentation of corrective actions taken thus far. Our responses are listed below:

Recommendation 1: Develop and implement a plan to address the backlog of pending referrals that were received between 2020 and 2024.

Actions Taken: IA Management concurs with the recommendation. When the MMU was expanded in 2020, the BIA OJS leadership at the time failed to implement the case referral, review and evaluation process that was developed and approved as part of Operation Lady Justice (OLJ). The new administration has begun refocusing the MMU back on its primary responsibilities. As of April 9, 2026, the MMU Deputy Unit Chief and the Regional Agents in Charge completed a comprehensive review of all referrals across the four regions. This review resulted in several actions: referrals were assigned to agents for additional evaluation or potential case initiation; referrals were closed in accordance with MMU Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs); and some referrals were placed in pending status to be opened as agent caseloads allow. This effort ensured consistent application of MMU procedures and supported the timely progression of matters through the intake and assessment workflow.

The Deputy Unit Chief and the Regional Agents in Charge will continue to oversee the workflow to maintain timely movement, transparency, and accountability across all regions. In alignment with the updated MMU SOPs, new timelines have been implemented to prevent future backlogs and strengthen the intake, review, and assignment processes. Regional Agents in Charge now have 72 hours to complete the initial review of each referral, and ten business days to either close the referral or assign it to an agent for further evaluation. Once assigned, the reviewing agent will have 30 days to determine whether a case should be formally opened or the referral closed.

These updated timelines enhance consistency, improve operational efficiency, and support effective case management across the MMU.

Responsible Party: MMU Unit Chief, Deputy Unit Chief, and Regional Agents in Charge

Target Date: Completed

Recommendation 2: Update Missing and Murdered Unit policies and procedures to incorporate intake and agent workload best practices, such as assessing the solvability checklist to identify tasks that can be conducted by other staff and reserving the core investigative functions to the investigators.

Actions Taken: IA management concurs with the recommendation. The MMU has updated its SOPs to designate the Regional Agents in Charge as the officials responsible for conducting the initial intake review of all cold/murder case referrals. This initial review must be completed within ten business days, during which the referral must either be closed in accordance with MMU SOPs or assigned to an agent for further evaluation.

When a cold case/murder referral is assigned for case intake review, the designated agent will conduct a comprehensive assessment and prepare the corresponding solvability factors for the Regional Agent in Charge's final determination. Agents will have thirty days to complete this assessment. These procedural updates establish a more efficient, consistent, and accountable process for managing incoming referrals.

The revised intake and workload management procedures have been fully implemented and have already resulted in a measurable reduction in the number of required referral reviews assigned to agents, allowing them to dedicate more time to substantive investigative work. MMU management will continue to monitor referral routing, review timelines, and caseload distribution to ensure the updated workflow remains efficient, consistently applies the solvability checklist, and supports sustained balance and accountability across all regions.

Responsible Party: MMU Unit Chief, Deputy Unit Chief, and Regional Agents in Charge

Target Date: Completed

Recommendation 3: Provide training to personnel regarding the case intake process to ensure that only potentially solvable cases that meet the Missing and Murdered Unit's case criteria are assigned to agents.

Actions Taken: IA management concurs with the recommendation. All MMU Regional Agents in Charge have received training on the updated cold case/murder intake procedures, including referral screening, evaluation, and closure requirements. These process improvements have significantly reduced the number of referrals requiring assignment to agents, thereby increasing operational efficiency and promoting more consistent application of MMU intake standards.

This training will be held annually as part of MMU's in-service program and new staff onboarding. As outlined in the MMU SOPs, this training reinforces the required steps for reviewing, screening, and determining whether referrals should be assigned for further evaluation or formally closed in accordance with established criteria.

Responsible Party: MMU Unit Chief, Deputy Unit Chief, and Regional Agents in Charge

Target Date: Completed

Recommendation 4: Establish a timeframe within the Missing and Murdered Unit's procedures for when a referral should be reviewed to determine if it should be opened as a case or closed.

Actions Taken: IA management concurs with the recommendation. The MMU has updated its SOPs to incorporate clear time requirements for the case intake process. Under the revised procedures, the Regional Agent in Charge must complete the initial review of each cold case/murder referral within 72 hours for cold cases and immediately for an acute missing person case. Following this initial review, the Regional Agent in Charge has ten business days to either assign a cold case/murder referral to an agent for further evaluation and potential case initiation or to formally close the referral in accordance with MMU guidelines. The acute missing person cases are assigned immediately.

Once a cold case/murder referral is assigned, the reviewing agent has thirty days to conduct a comprehensive assessment and submit a case application recommending whether the matter should be opened as a case or closed, consistent with the updated SOPs. These enhancements have resulted in a significant reduction in the number of referrals requiring assignment to agents for review, improving efficiency and strengthening adherence to intake timelines.

Responsible Party: MMU Unit Chief, Deputy Unit Chief, and Regional Agents in Charge

Target Date: Completed

Recommendation 5: Develop and implement a plan, in conjunction with BIA HR, that includes specific timeframes to ensure all vacant positions are filled promptly.

Actions Taken: IA management concurs with the recommendation. The MMU is currently undergoing a restructuring and refocus of the primary responsibilities of the MMU which may affect the number of vacant federal full-time employee (FTE) positions. At this time, all BIA MMU

positions that are going to be filled by federal employees are currently completed at this time. The remaining BIA positions will be converted and filled by a Tribal law enforcement position funded through the MMU to become part of the task force operations as initially designed when the cold case offices were created in 2020 under OLJ. However, if a BIA position does become vacant, the MMU will work diligently to fill any vacant positions within the MMU program.

In addition, the Bureau's Human Resources office is implementing significant internal changes to better address ongoing staffing shortages and improve recruitment and hiring processes across the organization. Addressing OJS staffing gaps remains a top priority for the administration.

Actions Planned: Completed

Responsible Party: BIA Administration and MMU Unit Chief

Target Date: Completed

Recommendation 6: Train all personnel regarding their responsibilities on the updated guidelines and requirements under the Victims' Rights and Restitution Act to ensure they fully understand their roles and obligations.

Actions Taken: IA management concurs with the recommendation. All MMU staff have participated in mandatory in-service training on Friday, April 17, 2026. This training covered staff responsibilities and statutory requirements under the Victims' Rights and Restitution Act (VRRRA). The session provided a refresher on key VRRRA provisions and delivered guidance on the updated MMU Standard Operating Procedures related to MMU Victim Services, including notification procedures associated with newly onboarded cases.

In addition, the training provided updates on the revised MMU SOPs, and MMU 45-Day Case File Review Form, which now incorporates required documentation of MMU Victim Services notifications and related communications. This action plan has been fully implemented, and MMU leadership will continue to monitor compliance to ensure consistent application of these requirements across the unit.

Responsible Party: MMU Unit Chief, Deputy Unit Chief, and Regional Agents in Charge

Target Date: Completed

Recommendation 7: Require Regional Agents in Charge to document, during the 45-day supervisory case review, that agents have referred cases to the Victim Services Program or to provide a rationale if an agent has not made a referral.

Actions Taken: IA management concurs with the recommendation. The MMU has updated its Standard Operating Procedures to establish clear requirements for documenting victim services notifications. In conjunction with these SOP updates, the MMU 45-Day Case File Review Form has been revised to include a dedicated section for documenting notification to the MMU Victim Services Program.

Under the updated process, the Regional Agent in Charge is responsible for ensuring compliance with all victim services notification requirements and for verifying that appropriate notification has occurred. If notification has not been made, both the assigned agent and the Regional Agent in Charge must provide an explanation in the comments section of the 45-Day Case File Review Form. This enhancement strengthens accountability, ensures consistent documentation, and supports adherence to victim services obligations across the MMU.

Responsible Party: MMU Unit Chief

Target Date: Completed

Recommendation 8: Develop and implement a plan for the appropriate staffing of the Victim Services Program to ensure compliance with the Missing and Murdered Unit's standard operating procedures and ensure that victims and families receive the support they may be entitled to under the Victims' Rights and Restitution Act.

Actions Taken: IA management concurs with the recommendation. With the MMU going through restructuring and refocusing of the primary responsibilities of the MMU, all MMU positions that are going to be filled are currently completed at this time. However, if a position does become vacant, the MMU will work diligently to fill any vacant positions within the MMU Victim Services Program. The MMU has implemented and will continue to implement operational improvements to better serve the Indian communities we support. These efforts will ensure the MMU remains in full compliance with federal regulations and procedures and that victims and families receive the Victims' Rights and Restitution Act services and support to which they are entitled.

Responsible Party: BIA Administration and MMU Unit Chief

Target Date: Completed

If you have any questions, please contact BIA OJS Director Charles Addington at charles.addington@bia.gov.



OFFICE OF
INSPECTOR GENERAL
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

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