

H.F. 55 – Office for Missing and Murdered Black Women and Girls (2nd Engrossment)

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Overview

In the 2021 session, the legislature established the Task Force on Missing and Murdered African American Women to examine the causes of violence against African American women and recommend policies to address those causes. This bill establishes an Office of Missing and Murdered Black Women and Girls in the Office of Justice Programs, modeled on the recently established Office of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives. It also requires the BCA to issue alerts when a person is reported as missing and endangered.

Summary

Section 1, subd. 1 establishes an office dedicated to preventing and ending the targeting of violence against Black women and girls within the Officer of Justice Programs in the Department of Public Safety.

Subd. 2 directs the commissioner of Public Safety to appoint a director of the office who is a person closely connected to the Black community and who is highly knowledgeable about criminal investigations.

Subd. 3 establishes the duties of the new office, including facilitating research, collecting data, advocating for action by the legislature and state agencies to address violence against Black women and girls, proposing legislation, and maintaining communication with other departments and offices regarding cases involving missing Black women and girls.

Subd. 4 authorizes the office to coordinate with stakeholders, community members, state agencies, local law enforcement agencies, prosecutors, and survivors to fulfill its duties.

Subd. 5 directs the office to provide an annual report on its actions, data related to missing and murdered Black women and girls, and objectives for the coming year. Reports must be submitted by

January 15 each year to the chair and ranking members of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over public safety.

Subd. 6 authorizes the office to apply and receive grants from public and private entities for purposes of carrying out the office's duties under this section.

Subd. 7 establishes a grant program for the Office of Missing and Murdered Black Women and Girls to award grants to organizations providing services designed to prevent or end the targeting of Black women and girls. Requires reporting from grant recipients. Authorizes the office to coordinate with the Office of Justice Programs to administer the grants.

Subd. 8 states that the office, in performance of its duties, has access to confidential and private corrections, detention, and medical data maintained by an agency.

Section 2 directs the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension to operate an missing person alert program and requires issuance of an alert when a person is reported to be missing and endangered.

Section 3 appropriates \$1,248,000 each year of the biennium from the general fund to the commissioner of public safety to establish and operate the Office of Missing and Murdered Black Women and Girls. Of that amount, \$300,000 each year is for grants to community-based organizations, and \$948,000 each year is to establish and operate the office, of which \$50,000 each year must be used for a public awareness campaign.