

**REMARKS OF  
CHAIRWOMAN JESSICA ROSENWORCEL  
WOMEN EMPOWERING WOMEN FOR INDIGENOUS NATIONS  
PRIOR LAKE, MINNESOTA  
JULY 31, 2024**

Hello, WEWIN! It is an honor to join you today. Let me start by introducing myself. My name is Jessica Rosenworcel and I am the Chairwoman of the Federal Communications Commission in Washington. I am the first woman in history confirmed to serve in this role. There are two things that fill my days at the FCC: technological innovation and acronyms. I am an expert on both. But with respect to the last subject, let me say I have never come across a better acronym than WEWIN. It is memorable, positive, and succinct. But ever better is the work you are doing. So let me thank you for your advocacy to improve the lives of Indigenous women.

During my time at the FCC, I have visited reservations and met with Tribal leaders and representatives from across Indian Country. We have talked about community, culture, and connections that help build a digital future that works for everyone.

Today, I want to talk to you about something we touched on in some of those conversations. I want to talk about what we can do at the FCC to help address the crisis of missing, murdered and Indigenous women and girls, and more broadly, the crisis of missing and endangered persons in Native communities.

I know you are wondering what the FCC has to do with any of this. After all, we are experts in communications and technology and the intersection with this crisis is not clear from the start. But stick with me.

When a loved one goes missing the distress is urgent and intense. It is an impossible mix of hope and despair. We hope for a swift return, so that they come home unharmed and with a chance to restore some measure of normal. But we also despair because resources may not follow, and fear emerges that maybe your loved one does not matter enough or that you will not be lucky enough to make a breakthrough in the critical day or two following their disappearance.

It could break you. I know, just thinking about it as a mother, it is too much. I am fortunate that I only imagine.

But I am here today with a reason for hope.

One week from now, the FCC will vote to make it easier to use television, radio, and wireless phones to sound the alarm about missing and endangered persons. This will save lives in communities across the United States. I traveled here to be with you today because I wanted you to know that this is happening. I also wanted to say thank you. The action the FCC is taking next week is in direct response to a call sent out by Native communities after enduring a crisis of the missing for far too long.

You know the facts, but they bear repeating. The Bureau of Indian Affairs estimates that there are more than four thousand cases of missing and murdered American Indian and Alaska Natives that are unsolved. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the numbers missing are more than two and a half times their share of the United States population.

Here is another fact. One of the most effective initiatives we have had to assist with the recovery of endangered kids are AMBER Alerts. AMBER Alerts have been around for nearly three decades. They tell us on television, radio, and wireless phones when a child goes missing. So many young people have been safely found as a result of these alerts. In fact, in one of our Tribal consultations on this issue, a participant shared that her Tribe had issued eight AMBER Alerts and in all eight instances the missing child was successfully recovered. AMBER Alerts demonstrate that there is a way to raise awareness when someone goes missing and increase the odds that we safely find them.

But for an AMBER Alert to go out, a missing person has to be 17 years old or younger. And roughly one in three missing persons reports are for adults. We are talking 188,000 people last year who went missing. But we do not have a tool on par with AMBER Alerts to raise awareness and assist with recovery efforts of those 18 and older. I think it would make difference if we did. Because while only one third of those who go missing are adults, they account for 70 percent of people who are never found.

That brings me to next week at the FCC. We will vote to create a new code in our emergency alert systems for television, radio, and wireless phones. This new capability—the “Missing and Endangered Persons” or MEP alert code—will help us sound the alarm when adults are missing and endangered, help raise awareness, and support recovery.

In developing this proposal, we received so many comments. The most powerful testimonies came from Tribal communities. Their input—including from government-to-government consultations held between Tribal communities and our Office of Native Affairs and Policy—provided a voice for the murdered and missing. The stories they told were heart wrenching. Let me quote from one in particular.

“Behind each of these [missing person] statistics is a precious life—a mother, a daughter, a sister, a friend—ripped away from their loved ones and community. And these cases are likely underreported and misclassified. The causes behind this crisis are complex and rooted in a long history of marginalization, discrimination, and systemic failures.” It goes on to talk about how a lack of resources, jurisdictional challenges, and sometimes apathetic responses from authorities that make it possible for perpetrators to act with impunity. As a result, “families are left to grapple with the unimaginable anguish of not knowing what happened to their loved ones.”

We can do more. Next week, we will vote to create this new MEP code. It is change you demanded and deserve.

I want to close by acknowledging the National Congress of American Indians for their work to bring this issue to the attention of the FCC. I also want to thank the many commenters from Tribal communities who spoke with us and offered their thoughts, ideas, and support. But I especially want to thank Loris Taylor of Native Public Media who was instrumental in this effort, pressing us to understand the plight of missing and murdered Indigenous people and urging us at the FCC to recognize we have the power to do something about it.

Thank you for having me here today. Thank you for letting me describe the work we are doing to make sure that adults who go missing can be found. And with the MEP code I have absolutely introduced another acronym into our work at the FCC. But this is one I hope we can all embrace because it is going to save lives.