

I thought it may be helpful to give you a little more insight from my perspective.

Many people have no idea that Indians on some reservations fall under a different legal system. If a major crime is committed and the US attorney accepts the case, it is taken into federal court rather than a state court. If the US attorney rejects the case, it goes back into the tribal court system.

This was incredibly important because the sexual assault of a child (even with clear physical evidence and a witness) could be sent back to tribal court where the maximum penalty was minimal (\$500 fine and 1 year in jail as I recall). Even more distressing was that no one could recall anyone getting the maximum penalty for any crime. The last I checked, cases of sodomy involving a male and female were being rejected by the US attorney because sodomy was defined as between male and male in the federal statutes.

The advocacy work that was done resulted in revisions to the legal codes and improvements within the tribal court systems. We saw an increase in education of tribal court employees, particularly tribal judges. There was even an exchange program of tribal judges between reservations when cases came forward where the judge was related to the person being tried. We saw many improvements within the legal systems still today we have a lack of supportive counseling services for sexual assault victims. IHS is underfunded and the reservation Indian populations tend to be indigent.

Making an effective impact requires more than a focus on punishment. People serve their time and then return to the community. Most of the time while incarcerated they receive little or no treatment for their behavior. Too many times there are complex relationships between the victims and perpetrators. The court system isn't designed to address these complexities.

Another area that many are unaware of is the extent of the isolation and many of the native communities. It takes true perseverance and commitment to serve under these adverse conditions. Some psychologists discount the contributions of paraprofessionals yet those paraprofessionals that have roots in the native communities are the ones that serve over the long haul. They have to deal with any social or behavioral health dilemma that walks through the door, oftentimes with little outside support. It doesn't matter whether they have the formal training or not, they are the only one available to address the needs. This is why I step outside the usual boundaries of psychology to support the training of the natural helpers in the remote communities.