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# Suquamish Tribe Gears Up to Prosecute Non-Native Domestic Violence Offenders

*New law goes into effect April 10*

SUQUAMISH, WA. (April 9, 2019) – Beginning April 10, anyone caught assaulting an intimate partner on the Port Madison Indian Reservation could find themselves in Suquamish Tribal Court – whether they are Native American or not.

The Suquamish Tribal Council approved a new law on March 11 clearing the way for the Suquamish Tribal Prosecutor’s Office to charge non-Native American domestic violence offenders on the reservation.

“By enacting this legislation, the Suquamish Tribe is exercising its tribal sovereignty to protect Native American victims in this community,” said Suquamish Tribe Chairman Leonard Forsman. “This legislation is a step toward restoring the Tribe’s right to hold all offenders accountable.”

With a combined Native and non-Native population of about 7,600 people, Port Madison Indian Reservation spans 12 square miles in Kitsap County, Wash. and includes the towns of Suquamish and Indianola.

Tribal prosecutors could already charge Native offenders on the reservation, but because of previous court decisions, law enforcement efforts against non-Natives on tribal lands had been severely limited.

The 2013 Violence Against Women Act, or VAWA 2013, began to turn that around by allowing tribal courts nationwide to issue domestic violence protection orders against anyone – Native or non-Native – on reservation land.

Under the terms of a 2017 agreement between the Kitsap Sheriff’s Department and the Suquamish Tribe, tribal police were authorized to arrest non-Natives who violate state law on the reservation.

VAWA 2013 also authorizes tribal prosecution of domestic violence perpetrators in cases of intimate partner or dating violence when the victim is a member of a federally recognized tribe and:

- The perpetrator is employed by the Tribe or living within the bounds of the reservation, or
- The victim resides on the reservation.

With the resolution adopted in March, the Suquamish Tribe is asserting its rights under VAWA to prosecute non-Natives in Tribal Court. This means victims will now get full access to culturally appropriate tribal support services during all legal proceedings.

“People are more comfortable going to court in their own community, and knowing that people in the system understand tribal culture,” said Maureen Olson, a community victim advocate for Suquamish Tribe.

“People will no longer get away with abuse against Native women – they are going to be held accountable,” said Olson.

According to a 2016 Justice Department study, 40 percent of Native American and Alaskan Native women have been victims of physical and psychological violence in the past year, much of it domestic violence. The movement for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, which has been sweeping the U.S. and Canada, is a response to this epidemic of violence.

“This new law will help to combat the idea that non-Natives can commit crimes on the Port Madison Reservation without consequences,” said Suquamish tribal prosecutor Donna McNamara.

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**Suquamish leaders and staff available for comment include:**

Suquamish Tribal Chairman Leonard Forsman.  
Suquamish Tribal prosecutor Donna McNamara  
Suquamish Tribe domestic violence victim advocate Maureen Olson  
Suquamish Police Chief Michael Lasnier

**Resources:**

2016 DOJ Study [here](#)  
More info on 2013 Violence Against Women Act [here](#)  
Photo of Suquamish Tribe Chairman Leonard Forsman [here](#)

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