

This week we are issuing a special addition to our weekly legislative newsletter because something so abhorrent has happened in the Montana legislature that it warrants specific attention. PPAMT regrets we did not bring this to your attention when this incident occurred last month. It is incumbent upon us to stand up for our fellow community members, especially members who are disproportionately impacted by government intrusion.

As you may know, last month anti-women's reproductive health Rep. Greg DeVries (R – Jefferson City) introduced a 'Personhood' bill (HB 302) that would amend our state constitution to ban abortion in Montana.

On February 14, Rep. DeVries made a variety of incendiary remarks in his opening statement for the bill on the House floor. In attempting to justify this extreme and unconstitutional bill, Rep. DeVries said:

*"My friends in the Indian caucus, abortion is a plague on Indian culture and the genocide against your own children. One cannot value and celebrate a culture if that culture is murdering a future generation."*

In response, eleven members of the Indian Caucus wrote a letter requesting the Speaker of the House publicly admonish DeVries for his repulsive comment, saying:

*"For Native Americans, genocide is our lived experience. The effects of the atrocities committed against our families and tribes continue to be deeply felt to this day. We have surviving family members who were ripped from their families as children and put into boarding schools in Montana. Genocide is not a talking point to be invoked by a non-Indigenous politician when it fits their personal agenda."*

Rep. DeVries' comments are offensive and a condescending effort both to stigmatize and shame Natives and restrict access to medical care. He has since apologized and only time will tell if he has learned anything from this experience.

HB 302 is an extreme overreach by government into the bodily autonomy and private lives of Montanans and its far reaching effects would impact abortion rights, contraception methods, and even in vitro fertilization. The damaging effects on Native communities would be even more pronounced due to already existing disparities in access to all forms of health care including mental and reproductive health care. PPAMT knows attacks on access to reproductive health care disproportionately impact people of color and those living in rural areas.

Our colleagues at Western Native Voice testified in opposition to HB 302 in the House Judiciary Committee and shared some important and eye-opening facts:

- Native women are 2.5 times more likely to experience rape over the course of a lifetime than non-Hispanic white women
- More than 4 in 5 American Indian and Alaska Native women have experienced violence in their lifetime
- More than half of AI/AN women have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime
- The murder rate of AI/AN women is almost 3 times that of non-Hispanic White women

We must all continue to fight against an extreme agenda that seeks to shame and control Montanans' bodies especially when racial and ethnic disparities across an array of health indicators exist. We must all continue to see and honor our patients, who want not only access to quality and affordable health care, but also access to healthy food, to live in communities free from violence, and movements centered on their lived experience.

**Please consider making a generous contribution to [Montana Native Vote](#) in Rep. Greg DeVries' name so we flood his mailbox with notifications that folks contributed in his name to this powerful organization which "inspires Indigenous action by educating and energizing voters, amplifying Indigenous voices, building power in our communities, and encouraging leaders to run for public office at county, state, and national levels."**

Sincerely, Martha, Laura, Rachel, Julia, Laurel, & Hillary-Anne

