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Opening Statement of Chairwoman Carolyn B. Maloney Hearing on “The Neglected Epidemic of Missing BIPOC Women and Girls” March 3, 2022

Thank you. Chairman Raskin, I commend you for your leadership in calling attention to this tragic and underreported story. Congresswoman Kelly, thank you for the leadership role you have played on this issue and in developing this hearing. I also appreciate your willingness to fill in as Chair this morning.

Of the more than 250,000 women and girls reported missing in 2020, at least 40 percent were women of color. Despite making up a much smaller share of the overall U.S. population, Black, Indigenous, and Hispanic women are going missing at shockingly high rates.

They are also more likely than white women to fall victim to intimate partner violence and other crimes that contribute to missing persons cases.

Yet the data available to us today likely understates the problem. According to the Government Accountability Office, the total number of missing Indigenous women is unknown due to inadequacies in federal databases. Those databases also lack any data whatsoever on missing Hispanic women, who are included with white women in official federal counts. This tells me women of color are likely even more disproportionately represented among missing persons cases than we know, creating a significant blind spot for policymakers as we seek solutions to this problem.

Women of color who go missing or who are victims of crime are also not getting the assistance and attention they deserve.

This is a dire problem in my home of New York City. In Brooklyn, Natoya Stephens—a 29-year-old Black mom of two—has been missing since 2012, after an argument with her fiancée. Her loved ones are still seeking information on her whereabouts.

Leanne Marie Hausberg, a 14-year-old girl of Native American descent also from Brooklyn, has been missing since 1999 when she disappeared from her family’s apartment. To this day, her parents don’t have answers about what happened to her.

And earlier this year, we learned the tragic news that a 43-year-old Hispanic mother from my district in Queens—Yecely Sanchez—was found dead after going missing on New Year’s Eve. Her four children will now have to grow up without their mother.

I hope to learn more through this hearing about how we can do better by these women and the tens of thousands of others whose families and loved ones are still seeking answers.

At the very least, I hope we can identify solutions to the data gaps that exist so we can know the true extent of this problem.

In addition to the demographic information that is clearly lacking, there’s likely additional data we should be routinely collecting and examining. More information on who is going missing, the communities they

belong to, and what happened to them will help us direct the resources and attention necessary to better serve women of color who may be at risk.

In closing, I'd like to echo President Biden's call during his State of the Union speech Tuesday night for Congress to finally send him a bill to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act.

The House acted nearly a year ago, passing reauthorization legislation I co-sponsored on a bipartisan vote. Our bill would provide vital services to victims of the types of crimes that fuel missing persons cases. And it would address some of the challenges we'll be discussing today. I hope it can be signed into law soon.

Thank you to each of our witnesses for sharing your stories with us today. I yield back.

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