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| |  | | --- | | 97,000 Black women and girls—40% of all missing persons—have gone missing or been murdered in the last year alone. But these individuals are often viewed as criminals or runaways rather than victims, a label that can harm efforts to find them.  “A lot of that really comes down to structural racism and sexism, and how society views Black women and girls and their importance,” [**Tiara Willie**](https://jhu.us3.list-manage.com/track/click?u=0a43ad874dbe00d8f0545cfef&id=5090c9efe0&e=8b71782d2d) says [in an episode of Public Health On Call](https://jhu.us3.list-manage.com/track/click?u=0a43ad874dbe00d8f0545cfef&id=ee8010d561&e=8b71782d2d). “It also influences the urgency of our criminal justice system to really help these families.”  In Minnesota, a new office—the [Missing and Murdered African American Women’s Task Force and Council](https://jhu.us3.list-manage.com/track/click?u=0a43ad874dbe00d8f0545cfef&id=ccf54ac584&e=8b71782d2d)—will coordinate forces across state lines to find and rescue missing Black women and girls, investigate cold cases, and support community-based organizations dedicated to these efforts.  The office’s existence is not only a game-changer, it’s also symbolic. “Black women and girls have largely been invisible in our society,” [**Kamila Alexander**](https://jhu.us3.list-manage.com/track/click?u=0a43ad874dbe00d8f0545cfef&id=d5839121f1&e=8b71782d2d) says. “The fact that Minnesota has codified this issue and raised it to the level of putting funding behind it, [contributing] other resources, raising attention, and saying that Black women and girls matter is immeasurable.”  Now, there’s a call for action on the national level. Last week, Willie and Alexander [convened an event in Washington, D.C. with civil rights leaders, social justice advocates, and academics](https://jhu.us3.list-manage.com/track/click?u=0a43ad874dbe00d8f0545cfef&id=f361b30bf8&e=8b71782d2d) where Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-MN) and Rep. Bonnie Watson Colman (D-NJ) announced [The Brittany Clardy Act](https://jhu.us3.list-manage.com/track/click?u=0a43ad874dbe00d8f0545cfef&id=716d9dc6c5&e=8b71782d2d). This legislation would establish a federal Office for Missing and Murdered Black Women and Girls.  Another major charge for the office would include developing federal policies to support cultural sensitivity training for law enforcement and other responders who interact with the families of missing people. Addressing the implicit biases that lead to mislabeling victims and survivors is a major factor in putting resources where they’re needed most.  “At the event, they shared a quote,” Willie says: “‘Black women have to be bleeding in order to be heard.’”  Watch the recording: [Erasure to Empowerment: An Educational Briefing](https://jhu.us3.list-manage.com/track/click?u=0a43ad874dbe00d8f0545cfef&id=2f2aa36799&e=8b71782d2d)  Listen to the podcast: [Missing and Murdered Black Women and Girls](https://jhu.us3.list-manage.com/track/click?u=0a43ad874dbe00d8f0545cfef&id=5f91782855&e=8b71782d2d) | |