

COMMUNITY PROSECUTION STRATEGY

District of South Dakota

The District of South Dakota has been an “Indian country district” since territorial days. What is now South Dakota is home to nine tribes that are commonly and collectively referred to as the “Sioux.” In the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty, all the land west of the Missouri River, in what is now South Dakota, was designated the “Great Sioux Reservation.” In 1889, the Dakota Territory was divided into the separate states of North and South Dakota. At the same time, the remaining land of the Great Sioux Reservation was divided into smaller, separate reservations for various Sioux tribes. These reservations, along with those created east of the Missouri River, exist today as nine distinct Indian reservations within the District of South Dakota.

South Dakota’s enabling legislation and state constitution disclaimed state court criminal jurisdiction for cases arising in Indian country. An effort by the state legislature to assert Indian country jurisdiction in 1961 was unsuccessful, and South Dakota remains a non-Public Law 280 State. Accordingly, the volume of federal criminal cases arising in Indian country is relatively high. Between 40-50 percent of the criminal caseload for the United States Attorney’s Office for the District of South Dakota (“USAO”) is comprised of Indian country offenses.

The District is rural in nature. It encompasses the entire state of South Dakota, which has a total of 77,116 square miles. Approximately 18 percent of land within South Dakota is designated as reservation or trust lands. Census data puts the state population at 886,667, and a conservative estimate places the number of Native American residents at 77,748 (8.77 percent). The vast majority of the Native American population resides on one of the District’s nine Indian reservations, each with its own history, culture, characteristics, and challenges.

Overview of Community Prosecution Strategy

The USAO’s Community Prosecution Strategy is an operational plan for improving public safety in South Dakota’s tribal communities. The USAO has a successful history of achieving tangible results in its Indian country prosecutions and bringing hope to victims, some of whom are among the most vulnerable members of our society.

These efforts have received renewed national attention through the Tribal Law and Order Act of 2010 and an ongoing Department of Justice-wide initiative designed to bring greater safety to Indian country. This Indian Country Initiative also seeks to place greater emphasis on addressing violence against women and children in tribal communities. Congress has passed legislation, including the Violence Against Women Act, which continues to recognize tribes’ inherent right to prosecute non-Indians for acts of domestic violence and sexual assault committed against Native Americans within their borders. Currently, two tribes (Standing Rock and Sisseton) are exercising some of this enhanced jurisdiction.

However, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to public safety in Indian country. Our Community Prosecution Strategy is designed to be flexible and reflect the unique characteristics of the District, the USAO, and each of the federally recognized tribes within the District. It is intended to focus on the particular needs of the communities we serve and implement the ideas and suggestions that have come directly from these communities.

The Community Prosecution Strategy focuses on having at least one Assistant United States Attorney (“AUSA”) assigned to each reservation, though in some instances multiple AUSAs are assigned to fit the needs of the communities we serve. These AUSAs work closely with tribal prosecutors and other members of the community to identify and address crime trends in that community. The AUSAs also meet on a regular basis with all law enforcement partners in the community (including tribal prosecutors, tribal police, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation) to ensure cases are being identified, investigated, and prosecuted, as well as to ensure cases are not slipping through jurisdictional cracks in the system.

Our strategy strengthens the relationship between federal and tribal prosecutors by occasionally appointing select tribal prosecutors to serve as Special Assistant United States Attorneys. When directed to do so by the tribe, these prosecutors can prosecute cases shoulder-to-shoulder with federal prosecutors in federal court. As part of this strategy, the USAO explores additional training and cooperative opportunities for South Dakota’s tribal prosecutors whenever available. The USAO has made its technology professionals available to tribal court systems so that existing technology can be reviewed and recommendations made for improvements in technological infrastructure. This has included structural and management audits when sought.

Government-to-Government Consultations with Tribal Leaders to Formulate a New Strategy

USAO personnel regularly meet with members of tribal communities, local elected officials, and law enforcement concerning law enforcement and coordination concerns, as well as ideas to improve public safety. These meetings have strengthened the relationships among those committed to the ideal that tribal communities must be made safer.

As a result of these meetings, new and innovative measures have taken shape. Some reservations have chosen to seek partnerships with state officials to battle the methamphetamine epidemic plaguing South Dakota. For instance, the Oglala Sioux Tribe signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Pennington County Sheriff’s Office, a milestone our office played a critical role in promoting. Most have held individual tribal summits, in partnership with federal and state authorities, where community members voiced their concerns, formulated plans to combat methamphetamine addiction and its effects on local communities, and in some instances, encouraged working cooperatively with local and state law enforcement. These efforts have recently expanded in an effort to find a cooperative approach involving all nine reservations.

Specific Components of Community Prosecution Strategy

1. Fostering an Ongoing Government-to-Government Relationship with Federally Recognized Tribes

United States Attorney: The United States Attorney serves as the primary point of contact with South Dakota's nine Indian tribes. To fulfill this responsibility and remain informed of tribal concerns, the United States Attorney travels to each reservation as needed, but at least annually. During these visits, the United States Attorney meets with community leaders, elected tribal leaders, tribal judges, tribal prosecutors, and tribal law enforcement personnel, among others.

Tribal Liaison: The United States Attorney has a designated Tribal Liaison whose chief responsibility is to foster government-to-government relationships with each of South Dakota's tribes. The Tribal Liaison, working directly with the United States Attorney, ensures regular communication between the tribe and the USAO.

The Tribal Liaison visits each reservation as needed to meet personally with those most affected by the need for greater public safety in Indian country. These visits include meetings with the Tribal Council, law enforcement, and open forum public meetings. Other duties include:

- Coordinate the prosecution of federal crimes that occur in Indian country;
- Consult with assigned AUSAs on long-standing multidisciplinary teams that combat child abuse and domestic and sexual violence offenses;
- Consult with tribal justice officials and victims' advocates to address any backlog in the prosecution of major crimes in Indian country in the district;
- Develop working relationships and maintain communication with tribal leaders, tribal communities, victims' advocates, and tribal justice officials to gather information from, and share appropriate information with tribal justice officials;
- As needed, consult with assigned AUSAs to coordinate with tribal prosecutors in cases in which a tribal government has concurrent jurisdiction over an alleged crime, in advance of the expiration of any applicable statute of limitation;
- Provide technical assistance and training regarding evidence gathering techniques and strategies to address victim and witness protection to tribal justice officials and other individuals and entities that are instrumental to responding to crimes in Indian country;
- Conduct training sessions and seminars to certify special law enforcement commissions to tribal justice officials and other individuals and entities responsible for responding to crimes in Indian country;
- Coordinate with the Office of Tribal Justice, as necessary; and
- Conduct other activities to address and prevent violent crime in Indian country as the United States Attorney deems appropriate.

Assistant United States Attorneys: AUSAs who have been designated to serve as points of contact for specific tribes assist the United States Attorney and the Tribal Liaison in the continuing effort to foster intergovernmental relationships with South Dakota's tribes. These AUSAs serve as initial points of contact for tribal prosecutors and law enforcement, most often in instances involving specific, ongoing prosecutions or investigations. The AUSAs assigned to each reservation are responsible for holding regular monthly meetings with their tribal partners to ensure matters arising in Indian country, with an emphasis on sexual assault and crimes against children, are being handled appropriately and expeditiously.

2. Improving Communications with Each Tribe, Including the Timely Transmission of Charging Decisions to Tribal Law Enforcement Officials

Performance Work Plans: To improve communication with tribal officials, Performance Work Plans ("PWP") for Indian country AUSAs reflect their critical and wide-ranging duties. The PWPs for tribal points of contact and other AUSAs who work in Indian country were amended to allow for the appraisal of an AUSA's efforts to communicate with tribal prosecutors and officials on topics related to public safety and about the status of Indian country matters referred to the USAO. Specifically, the PWPs include the following work plan standards:

- a. Assist in the development of multi-disciplinary teams to monitor child abuse cases in Indian country.
- b. When requested, provide and coordinate information and training to tribal leaders, law enforcement, and other appropriate tribal, state, local, and federal personnel on legal issues affecting Indian tribes.
- c. Handle contacts and correspondence with tribal officials professionally, promptly, and effectively, with an eye toward the USAO's strategic goal of improving public safety in Indian country.

Case Referral and Non-Prosecution Decisions: The USAO continues to work with tribal and state partners to determine the appropriate forum for the prosecution of criminal cases arising in and around Indian country. Circumstances arise when a criminal matter is sent to our office for review, but it is determined that for any number of reasons, the case should instead be brought in tribal or state court.

For instance, the USAO may exercise its discretion to decline to prosecute a particular case where, in its judgment, there is insufficient admissible evidence to obtain and sustain a conviction, or there exists a tribal resolution that satisfactorily meets the ends of justice and/or comports with jurisdictional parameters. Decisions in this regard will be guided and informed by the Principles of Federal Prosecution contained in the Justice Manual, the memorandum on Federal Prosecution Priorities from Attorney General Sessions, dated May 10, 2017, setting forth the Department Policy on Charging and Sentencing, and the memorandum from Deputy Attorney General Monaco, dated July 13, 2022, setting forth USAO guidance for Promoting Public Safety in Indian country.

The USAO continues its practice of providing written notice to tribal or state prosecutors when a case is being referred to that sovereign. Additionally, at the discretion of the AUSA and Office Supervisor in consultation with the Criminal Chief, the office provides an explanation of why the matter is not being prosecuted by the USAO. Situations may arise, however, where the interests of justice, including the privacy rights of the victim or the need to protect witnesses, prevents the USAO from providing a detailed reason as to why a case is not appropriate for federal prosecution. In these situations, in lieu of a more detailed letter, the AUSA will provide a short summary letter indicating why a particular decision was reached. Finally, AUSAs should keep both tribal and federal statutes of limitation in mind when making decisions on the disposition of matters.

It is the practice of the current U.S. Attorney to review all declinations emanating from investigations in Indian country. The U.S. Attorney must approve any proposed declinations that concern non-Indian defendants where the victim is the Tribe or an Indian person.

Annual Reporting of Crime Statistics and Declinations: On an annual basis, the USAO submits an annual report to DOJ's National Native American Issues Coordinator. The report details all declinations of alleged violations of federal criminal law occurring in Indian country that were referred to the USAO for prosecution. The report includes information on the types of crimes alleged, the status of the accused as Indian or non-Indian, the status of the victim as Indian or non-Indian, and the reasons for declining or terminating the prosecution.

Monthly Law Enforcement Meetings: The USAO continues to lead Multi-Disciplinary Team ("MDT") meetings with each tribe on a monthly basis to discuss investigations involving violence against children. Aside from these MDT meetings, AUSAs should conduct law enforcement meetings with tribal and federal officials to discuss and track reports of violence involving adult victims. These monthly law enforcement meetings include a review of all ongoing investigations involving cases of domestic violence and sexual assault.

Tribal Town Hall Meetings: The USAO occasionally hosts "Town Hall Meetings" or training symposiums throughout South Dakota. These meetings have focused on a range of topics, including violent crime, domestic assault, methamphetamine, tribal housing, gangs, and other areas of concern. Further, meetings take place with tribal leaders and public safety officials to discuss drug and violent crime trends and ways to effectively reduce those concerns. Federal, state, and local law enforcement officers are encouraged to attend those meetings. The USAO also holds recurring law enforcement officer training sessions in Indian country to provide updates or refresher training to law enforcement officers in Indian country. Topics have included search and seizure, search warrants, report writing, courtroom testimony, photography, evidence collection, relevant statutes, and best practices related to the investigation of firearm offenses, opioid overdoses, sexual assaults, and other violent crimes.

3. Missing or Murdered Indigenous People

In 2020, two separate federal laws were enacted to combat the issue of Missing or Murdered Indigenous People. Savanna's Act required the Department of Justice to strengthen

training, coordination, data collection, and other guidelines related to cases of murdered or missing Native Americans. The Not Invisible Act established an advisory committee on violent crime comprised of law enforcement, tribal leaders, federal partners, service providers, and survivors to make recommendations to the Department of Interior and Department of Justice for the handling of Missing or Murdered Indigenous People, among other things. Those recommendations were compiled into a report entitled, “[Not One More: Findings and Recommendations of the Not Invisible Act Commission](#).” The USAO’s First Assistant U.S. Attorney served on this committee.

A key component of these laws is the requirement that the USAO work individually with each of the nine federally recognized tribes in the District of South Dakota to develop community response plans and best practices for the reporting and investigation of/search for missing individuals. Meetings were therefore held to determine the availability of local resources and the needs of each tribe. The guidelines and response plans developed involve input from federal, tribal, state, and local county and city agencies to ensure a timely and appropriate response.

Under Savanna’s Act, United States Attorneys’ Offices were tasked with developing “regionally appropriate” guidelines to respond to cases of missing or murdered American Indians. The development of these guidelines involved input from federal, tribal, state, and local county and city agencies. In addition, all nine tribes in South Dakota were advised of the new guidelines, and their law enforcement agencies were provided with the full set of documents, which are deemed law enforcement sensitive. While each federal, tribal, state, and local law enforcement agency in the District of South Dakota that responds to and investigates missing Indigenous persons cases can develop their own guidelines, each agency is encouraged to follow the framework suggested by the USAO. The guidelines address (1) interjurisdictional law enforcement cooperation and protection order enforcement, (2) best practices for searching for missing persons, (3) standards on data collection, reporting and analysis, and identification and handling of human remains, (4) law enforcement agencies responsible for entering information into appropriate databases when Tribal law enforcement agencies do not have access to such databases, (5) improving law enforcement agency response rates and follow-up responses to missing persons cases, and (6) access to culturally appropriate victim services.

To further support this mission, the USAO pursued and obtained funding for a regional Missing or Murdered Indigenous Persons Assistant United States Attorney (MMIP AUSA) for the Great Plains Region, which includes North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Wyoming, and Alaska. This position is part of the Department’s MMIP Regional Outreach Program, the mission of which is to aid in the prevention of and response to missing or murdered Indigenous persons through the resolution of MMIP cases and through increased communication, coordination, and collaboration with federal, tribal, state, and local partners. MMIP AUSAs coordinate with USAOs (Tribal Liaisons and Indian country prosecutors) in their respective regions to address MMIP-related cases that arise in the districts; assist with MMIP-related communication with tribal partners and the development of Tribal Community Response Plans; support and assist USAOs and their Tribal Liaisons with updating and refining Savanna’s Act Guidelines; and assist in the prosecution of MMIP-related violations of federal law that occur in Indian country.

When South Dakotans go missing, we must work with our partners to ensure they do not remain missing, or worse. Unfortunately, not all missing person cases have a favorable outcome. The USAO remains committed to seeking justice for victims and holding perpetrators responsible for any murder committed within Indian country.

4. Cross-Deputization, Special Law Enforcement Commission Training, and a Tribal Special Assistant United States Attorney Program

Mutual Assistance Agreements: In an attempt to strengthen law enforcement effectiveness, upon request from interested tribes, the USAO encourages and facilitates the implementation of mutual assistance agreements among tribal, state, and local law enforcement agencies. When asked to do so, the USAO provides law enforcement training on jurisdictional matters involved in these mutual assistance agreements.

SLEC Training: The USAO encourages tribal, state, and local law enforcement officers to obtain Special Law Enforcement Commissions (“SLECs”) through the BIA. Law enforcement members possessing SLECs have broader authority to enforce federal criminal laws in tribal communities. Accordingly, wider use of SLECs increases the number of officers authorized to enforce federal law. In a given year, the Department of Justice’s National Indian Country Training Initiative organizes one or two SLEC classes and administers related testing sessions. AUSAs from the District of South Dakota frequently serve as instructors for these SLEC trainings.

Tribal Special Assistant United States Attorneys (“SAUSA”) Program: The USAO has implemented a tribal SAUSA program. Tribal prosecutors who are licensed and in good standing with the South Dakota Bar Association may apply to participate in this program if they receive the support of their tribal council. After completing a background check and the execution of a memorandum of understanding between the tribe and the USAO, the tribal prosecutor is cross designated as a SAUSA. In this capacity, the SAUSA may participate in grand jury proceedings and, potentially, try cases in federal court with an AUSA. Additional training is also available to tribal prosecutors who become SAUSAs. Historically, when such memoranda have been in effect, several reservations have had tribal prosecutors who have been cross designated.

5. Training for United States Attorney Staff and All Relevant Criminal Justice Personnel on Issues Related to Indian Country Criminal Jurisdiction and Prosecutions

In an effort to foster greater awareness of the unique cultural and historical characteristics of each tribe, the United States Attorney encourages annual training to increase familiarity with tribal history and culture for office personnel working on or affiliated with a particular reservation. Accordingly, the USAO has held various districtwide trainings to increase awareness of significant historical events and cultural practices related to Indian country. The USAO has also held districtwide retreats on the Crow Creek, Lower Brule, and Pine Ridge reservations. These trainings and retreats have brought our office a greater understanding of the communities we serve. The retreats have included a community-service aspect in which office staff has weather-proofed elders’ residences ahead of the harsh South Dakota winters, painted a youth community center, engaged in school outreach, and completed other tasks as requested.

6. Violence Against Women and Native American Children

The USAO is committed to prosecuting all provable cases of domestic violence where federal courts have jurisdiction. Procedures have been initiated in our office to ensure that cases involving domestic violence are evaluated in conjunction with tribal prosecutors to ensure that an appropriate resolution is achieved, whether in federal or tribal court. We have also expanded the responsibilities of the AUSA in our office designated as the Violence Against Women Coordinator. This individual is responsible for training AUSAs regarding the unique aspects of domestic violence cases. The AUSA also works with domestic violence shelters to ensure that these cases remain a top priority in the office.

Specific to sexual assault cases, the USAO encourages the Indian Health Service to provide adult victims with access to medical professionals who possess the necessary expertise to perform forensic medical examinations and who are available to testify, if necessary. The USAO also follows up with the Indian Health Service to ensure cases of sexual assault and domestic violence are being properly reported to law enforcement and prosecution authorities. We will also continue to examine existing memoranda of understanding and investigative guidelines that assign responsibility to various federal law enforcement agencies for investigating sexual assault cases to ensure there are no gaps in coverage or delays with investigations.

Domestic Violence Involving Non-Indian Offenders: Supervisory AUSAs, including the United States Attorney and Criminal Division Chief, review all matters of domestic violence perpetrated by non-Indians upon Indian victims in tribal communities. The prosecution of these matters remains a top priority in the District of South Dakota. To that end, the USAO accepts investigative reports directly from tribal police and BIA law enforcement without the necessity of FBI involvement.

Juvenile Justice: The USAO is dedicated to the prosecution of juveniles who commit serious criminal offenses or prey on innocent people as part of an organized gang in Indian country. The USAO is committed to the rehabilitative aspects of federal prosecution of juvenile offenders. The United States Attorney will consider any information or materials submitted by a tribe bearing upon the determination of whether a particular juvenile case should be certified and prosecuted federally or more appropriately handled at the tribal court level. The USAO recognizes that tribal prosecution may often be the most effective method of handling juvenile misconduct. The more severe the case, or the more recidivist the offender, however, the greater the odds the case will be prosecuted in federal court.

7. Supporting the FBI's Badlands and Northern Plains Safe Trails Drug Enforcement Task Forces

The FBI has been a leader in addressing crime in South Dakota's tribal communities. One particularly strong effort has been the creation of the Badlands & Northern Plains Safe Trails Drug Enforcement Task Forces, which operate in Indian country in the central and western parts of the state. The task forces are comprised of federal, tribal, state, and local law enforcement personnel. The mission of the task forces is to investigate drug conspiracies in South Dakota with an

emphasis on Indian country. Our office will continue to promote tribal involvement on the drug enforcement task forces and will continue to designate AUSAs to support them.

8. Individual Tribal Law Enforcement Assessment and Assistance

The USAO regularly communicates with all tribes in South Dakota to discuss specific law enforcement challenges, recognizing that the challenges that exist on one reservation may not exist on another reservation. The USAO works in partnership with the various tribes to identify potential issues and solutions. This Community Prosecution Strategy will not identify each issue and challenge faced by each of South Dakota's nine tribes, as these issues are unique and fluid. The USAO is available, however, to assess any tribe's law enforcement services and to make recommendations regarding potential strengths, weaknesses, or solutions. These assessments are often conducted by a management team from the USAO overseen by the United States Attorney.

9. Victim Services and Accountability

The District of South Dakota has three, full-time victim witness coordinators and one fact witness contractor. Victim witness staff provide services to victims of federal crimes on each of South Dakota's nine Indian reservations. The victim witness staff is responsible for ensuring victims are afforded their rights pursuant to the Crime Victims' Rights Act of 2005 and the Victims' Rights and Restitution Act of 1990.

Indian country crime presents unique challenges and communication with victims can be difficult. Whenever possible, victim witness staff accompany AUSAs to meet with victims to ensure victims fully understand their role in the process and the services available to them. The goal of the victim witness program is to ensure that victims are afforded their statutory rights and are treated with fairness, dignity, and respect.

10. Additional Components of the Community Prosecution Strategy

- The USAO has revised and initiated a proactive and aggressive file opening policy with respect to matters referred and cases accepted by the office. Reports of potential criminal activity received from non-law enforcement sources are reviewed with the appropriate law enforcement investigative agency to determine if the matter should be investigated and a file opened by the USAO.
- The United States Attorney will continue to meet with South Dakota's Attorney General, state's attorneys, tribal prosecutors, and tribal leaders to discuss the creation of mutual cooperation agreements and extradition agreements between the State of South Dakota and the tribes. As mentioned above, a more recent success is the MOU between the Oglala Sioux Tribe and the Pennington County Sheriff's Office. Similarly, the Crow Creek Sioux Tribe has entered into a cooperative agreement with the South Dakota Highway Patrol ("SDHP"), allowing the SDHP to augment the tribal police force enforcing tribal law when requested to do so by the tribal council. Building upon efforts that are already

under way, the USAO continues to facilitate this discussion while being sensitive to the unique status of Indian country.

- The USAO will work with the BIA to promote the full staffing of all assigned positions in Indian country in all aspects and facets of the criminal justice system, including police, courts, and corrections. Additionally, the office will work with the BIA to ensure that background checks for law enforcement personnel are handled in a timely fashion and encourage the immediate assignment of personnel to vacant positions.
- The United States Attorney previously served as the Chair of the Attorney General's Native American Issues Subcommittee ("NAIS"). Although this Subcommittee was disbanded in January 2025, the United States Attorney will continue to serve on Department-wide working groups related to Indian country so that public safety issues plaguing Indian country in South Dakota are brought to the attention of Department leadership. The United States Attorney will further communicate with tribal leaders regarding actions taken by Department leadership that have an impact on public safety in Indian country.
- The USAO recognizes the importance of properly documenting all time spent on Indian country matters to ensure these matters remain a priority within the office. Accordingly, annual guidance will be provided to office personnel on entering timely and accurate information on Indian country matters and cases into the CaseView case management system. The guidance will also direct office personnel to continue recording time spent on Indian country matters on a weekly basis under the appropriate categories in the USA-5 timekeeping system.
- The USAO aggressively seeks restitution from criminal defendants on behalf of victims of crime. This includes an office policy encouraging AUSAs to address the issue of restitution as part of the plea negotiation process and advocating for restitution for victims at sentencing. The USAO will continue to support a fully staffed and aggressive Financial Litigation Unit, which will pursue available legal remedies, including the potential of utilizing the Treasury Offset Program to obtain restitution for victims of crime. The USAO continually reviews existing policies and procedures to ensure that all available legal options are being pursued on behalf of victims of crime.
- The USAO will continue to seek new and innovative avenues for bringing tribal communities together with state and local communities to foster greater awareness and understanding.
- The USAO conducts an annual review of the Community Prosecution Strategy to identify areas of potential improvement and innovation.

Summary

The United States Attorney's Office for the District of South Dakota is dedicated to reducing crime and improving public safety in Indian country. This commitment is demonstrated by our annual review and assessment of programs, as well as through the time and resources devoted to prosecutions, training, and outreach. Above all, our Community Prosecution Strategy reflects the absolute priority we place on sustained communication and collaboration with the tribal communities we serve.

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These offices provide principal coverage for matters arising at the following reservations:

RESERVATION	USAO OFFICE
Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe	Pierre
Crow Creek Sioux Tribe	Pierre
Flandreau Sioux Tribe	Sioux Falls
Lower Brule Sioux Tribe	Pierre
Oglala Sioux Tribe (Pine Ridge)	Rapid City
Rosebud Sioux Tribe	Pierre
Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate	Sioux Falls
Standing Rock Sioux Tribe	Pierre
Yankton Sioux Tribe	Sioux Falls