NAVAJO NATION
DIVISION OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 22, 2011

CONTACT: Rick Abasta
Public Information Officer
Phone: 928-871-6560
Fax: 928-871-7090
Email: rabasta@nndcd.org

First Lady Martha Shelly marches for the Violence Against Family Act

A contingent of 30 marchers walked from the Division of Public Safety to the Navajo Nation Council Chambers in a demonstration of domestic violence prevention. The Violence Against Family Act has been under amendments for over a decade and supporters are optimistic for Council approval. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

WINDOW ROCK-Navajo Nation First Lady Martha Shelly led a group of supporters who marched against domestic violence on the morning of July 20, 2011.

Shelly organized the march in support of the Violence Against Family Act. The Act was created to address the safety and protection of family members against violence.

The legislation was developed by the Navajo Nation Advisory Council Against Domestic Violence, which is comprised of members from the Division of Social Services, Shiprock Battered Families and Homeless Shelter, Judicial Branch, Division of Public Safety, and the Public Defender's Office.

Supporters marched from the Division of Public Safety to the Navajo Nation Council Chambers and included legislation co-sponsors Katherine Benally (Chilchibeto, Dennehotso, Kayenta) and Joshua Butler (To' Nanees' Dizi).

A contingent of 30 marchers carried a variety of signs. "Walk Against Domestic Violence" read one sign. Another read "Walk Against Child Support." The First Lady carried a sign that read, "Respect Women. Women Are Sacred."

Upon reaching the chambers, the group gathered in front to speak on the issue of violence against women and family members.

Lorena Halwood, director of Amá Doo Álchíní' Bighani Incorporated, said it was Stop Violence Against Women Day.

"However, it shouldn't be just today, it should be every day," Halwood said.

She encouraged supporters to be proactive and make domestic violence prevention their responsibility by speaking out to bring awareness.

First Lady Martha Shelly said she is a wife, mother and grandmother.

"The history of Violence Against Family Act legislation, Title 17, has been in amendment stage for the past 10 years," Shelly said. "Domestic violence issues have brought us here today."

She said advocating for traditional ways of life and restoring traditional teachings will restore peace and harmony within immediate clans, neighbors and families.

"Now, I handoff the Violence Against Family Act to honorable Katherine Benally and Joshua Butler to ensure the process on the legislative side for approval," Shelly said.

Benally said to a lot of people in tribal government, the Violence Against Family Act is a dangerous document to touch.

"Even the Council kept sending it back," Benally said.

She challenged her colleagues to approve the Act for immediate implementation, after more than a decade of indecision.

"We can no longer turn the other cheek because that side is bruised too," Benally said. "We waited too long for this.

"I want to thank Mrs. Genevieve Jackson for her efforts moving this legislation when she was a delegate," she added.

Jackson was a former council delegate for Shiprock.

Butler said it was a celebration for the Navajo Nation, now that the Act was ready to reach the Council floor for approval.

"I think the days of the 50s and 60s mentality are long gone," Butler said.

Butler said he was proud to be a co-sponsor of the Act and was confident the legislation will receive approval by the Navajo Nation Council.

Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly supports the legislation and said, "Let's get this legislation through. It's long overdue."

Information: www.navajonationcouncil.org

-30-