



25th Navajo Nation Council

25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Naabik'íyáti' Missing and Murdered Diné Relatives Task Force brings federal manpower to assist with MMDR crisis on the Navajo Nation



PHOTO: MMDR Task Force Chair, Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty is helping to facilitate federal manpower to assist with MMDR cases on the Navajo Nation.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – On Thursday, Oct. 26, the 25th Navajo Nation Council Naabik'íyáti' Missing and Murdered Diné Relatives (MMDR) Task Force heard a report on the introduction of federal assistance to MMDR cases on the Navajo Nation.

“We learned that the U.S. Department of Justice has recently created five U.S. Assistant Attorney (AUSA) positions to regionally address the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons (MMIP) crisis across the United States including the Navajo Nation,” said Council Delegate and MMDR Task Force Chair Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Beclabito, Cove, Gad lí'áhi/ Tóko'í, Red Valley, Tooh Haltsooí, Toadlena/ Two Grey Hills, Tsé Ałnaózt'íí). “The AUSA will work with federal case agents on MMIP cases and local law enforcement. If a case crosses over any region or faces jurisdictional issues, a process is in place for the five AUSA's to collaborate.”

The AUSA for the Southwestern Region is Eliot Neal, who will transition to the Albuquerque N.M. office during the first quarter of 2024. Neal's region includes New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Colorado, and Nevada. In addition to investigating cases, he will participate in regional task forces and serve as a resource from the U.S. Attorney's Office. Neal has worked with the Mescalero Apache Tribe for the last two years as a tribal liaison assisting with missing persons cases.

As of October, the DOJ has assigned Neal six unresolved cases from the Navajo Nation. These cases range in dates from 1986 to 2021. The U.S. Attorney's Office, FBI, and other AUSA agents have previously reviewed the MMIP cases that are being assigned to the agents.

"This issue deserves and requires one hundred percent of our full-time attention. As we move forward, we'll identify what is needed. We'll shape our role, identify needs and do what is most helpful to have the greatest impact," said Neal.

Chenoa Bah Stilwell-Jensen, MMDR Community Advocate and prevention/intervention coordinator, suggested that a cultural safety training take place to assist with kinship protocols, cultural lifeways, reframing of verbiage, and nurturing language for families in grief or trauma. This cultural training will assist the AUSA when communicating with MMIP families and victims.

Stilwell-Jensen also presented a report on behalf of the Southwest Indigenous Housing Justice Collective (SIHJC) regarding transitional housing services for unsheltered relatives.

SIHJC's work is based on the United Nations Indigenous Declaration for Human Rights and housing rights and focuses on locating funding resources for all Indigenous tribes for domestic violence and emergency shelters, and mental and behavioral health resources.

SIHJC's community outreach incorporates cultural components for the transitional, indigenous unsheltered community, while providing educational resources surrounding human rights.

The Collective seeks financial options for tribes by reaching abroad, working, and learning about national funding that is available for individuals, groups, business owners, tribes and Indigenous communities that need non-tribal governmental funding. SIHJC also focuses on workforce training to provide skills for community members to build their own homes.

Stilwell-Jensen recommended that the National Indigenous Women's Resource Center (NIWRC) conduct trainings for Navajo Housing Authority (NHA), chapter officials, community program agencies and the Navajo Nation Council to gain insight on the various sources of funding available to Indigenous tribes.

"There are only three domestic violence shelters on the Navajo Nation. When a victim needs immediate emergency assistance, it is important to have funding proactively secured to place victims in safe housing," she said. "We need NHA to fund shelters and the emergency needs of our people. How do they get to a safe place or get a hotel coupon? NHA can apply for funding for these types of dire needs."

During the meeting, the Task Force confirmed the selection of three advisory representatives from Navajo communities to serve on the MMDR Task Force. Selections have been confirmed and will be announced at an upcoming meeting.

Task Force members in attendance were Chair Amber Kanazbah Crotty, Navajo Nation Police Department MMIP Liaison Reycita Billie, Judicial Branch Representative Laveena Begay, and Office of the Speaker Legislative Staff Assistant Sonlatsa Jim. Guests in attendance included Delegate Dr. Andy Nez and community advocate John L. Tsosie.

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