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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

MacDonald- Lone Tree And Yazzie Educate Federal Officials About Navajo Public Safety Issues

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Hope MacDonald-LoneTree and Edmund Yazzie, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Navajo Nation Council's Public Safety Committee, in the Nation's capitol advocated for greater resources for detention facilities, police manpower, and attacking the epidemic of methamphetamine in the Navajo Nation with top officials from the Department of Justice and the U.S. Congress last week.

Delegates MacDonald-Lone Tree (Coal Mine Canyon/Toh Nanees Dizi) and Yazzie (Thoreau) continue to make the case for more federal government resources for public safety.

MacDonald-Lone Tree and Yazzie met with Gena Tyner-Dawson, Senior Adviser to the Assistant Attorney General for Tribal Affairs at the U.S. Department of Justice. The Department of Justice is responsible for providing funding for new detentions facilities in Indian Country through the Correctional Facilities on Tribal Lands Program, according to MacDonald-Lone Tree.

MacDonald-LoneTree and Yazzie explained to the Department that the condition of Navajo detention facilities have deteriorated so severely that prisoners can only be kept overnight in three of the seven jails in the Navajo Nation.

The closure of the jails for health and safety reasons means that the Navajo Nation only has a total of 82 jail beds for the entire Navajo Nation and that many criminals are released due to lack of jail space. The delegates urged the Department to dedicate federal resources to help the Navajo Nation resolve this unacceptable situation.

"With only 82 prison beds in the Navajo Nation, dangerous criminals -- including murderers and rapists -- aren't incarcerated for their offense," MacDonald-Lone Tree explained. "This is wrong and an affront to the Navajo people. It's the federal government's moral responsibility to work with us to correct this injustice."

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MacDonald-Lone Tree also said to the federal officials that the Navajo Nation has increased the sales tax and dedicated the increase to a jail and court facilities fund. "The Navajo Nation has acted to address this dreadful situation; it is now time for the Federal government to meet its trust responsibility and join the Navajo Nation in addressing the desperate need for new detention facilities."

Chairperson MacDonald-LoneTree explained to all the federal officials that, according to the U.S. Attorney's Office in Flagstaff, Ariz. violent crime on the Navajo reservation is six times higher than the national average, and that the lack of detention facilities means that many criminals are back into the community.

She also said that all of the public safety challenges have grown worse due to the dangerous spread of methamphetamines in the Navajo Nation.

"All we ask is that federal government fully understands the deplorable status of the Navajo detention facilities and works with us to identify real solutions to bring adequate detention facilities to the Navajo Nation," MacDonald-Lone Tree said. "The Department of Justice -- and Members of Congress -- would certainly act swiftly if the problem was inadequate federal prison space. All the Navajo Nation wants is equality and justice from the federal government. Treat the safety of our families as you would your own."

She added that the "Navajo Nation families deserve to know their federal government values their safety."

"Funding only 82 prison beds for an area the size of the state of West Virginia sends a signal we aren't valued," MacDonald-Lone Tree said. "All we want is equality and justice from the federal government. Treat our families with the same respect as you'd treat your own."

The members of the Public Safety Committee express their greatest appreciation to Congressman Renzi for helping to arrange several of the recent visits, and for his continued support. They also convey their gratitude to Gena Tyner-Dawson from the Office of Justice Programs in the U.S. Department of Justice, for taking the time to hear of the Navajo Nation's needs and to Sen. Jon Kyl (R-AZ) and his staff for working on several initiatives to address the need for new public safety facilities.

The Public Safety Committee has met with numerous Members of Congress and Senators in recent weeks and we wish to express our sincere appreciation for the receptive attention and offers of assistance we have received from Senators Pete Domenici (R-N.M.), Jeff Bingaman (D-N.M.), and Orrin Hatch (R-UT); Representatives Ed Pastor (D-AZ), Tom Udall (D-NM), Heather Wilson (R-NM), Tom Matheson (D-UT), and Trent Franks (R-AZ); and from the Senate Indian Affairs Committee and the House Resources Committee, which have oversight over Indian issues in the U.S. Congress.