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Joint meeting with federal officials focuses on the development of a sexual assault response plan for the Navajo Nation

Photo: SAPS/HEHSC members discussing tribal and federal processes regarding sexual assault on the Navajo Nation, in which over 60 participants from various sexual assault programs, federal programs, law enforcement, and health/assault prevention advocacy programs participated in the discussion on June 15, 2017 at Fire Rock Casino in Churchrock, N.M.

CHURCHROCK, N.M. – In a joint meeting held last Thursday, the Sexual Assault Prevention Subcommittee and the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee, along with representatives from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Attorney's Office, and various sexual assault programs, gathered to discuss a proposed sexual assault response plan for the Navajo Nation.

The proposed plan seeks to address sexual assault prevention, post-vention, data information sharing, legal processes, prosecution, victim services, and tribal/state/federal law enforcement roles to map out resources and understand the processes regarding sexual assault cases.

SAPS chair and HEHSC member Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Beclabito, Cove, Gadi'i'áhi/To'Koi, Red Valley, Tooh Haltsooi, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Tsé ałnáoz't'I'í) facilitated the meeting and said there is a need to continue the discussion in addressing sexual violence on the Navajo Nation and that the joint meeting serves as a starting point to advance the initiative.

"In receiving the data information from the FBI and U.S. Attorney's Office, the Navajo Nation needs to improve its response to sexual assault. If we are able to tap into all the resources available to us at the tribal and federal level, we can develop an effective sexual assault response plan," said Delegate Crotty. "The discussion starts with us as leaders, and I thank my colleagues who continue to participate."

The FBI and U.S. Attorney's Office provided reports to the SAPS and HEHSC regarding criminal and legal protocols in processing sexual assault cases, as well as data information relating to the New Mexico Navajo area. Victim services entities and sexual assault prevention organizations were also invited to participate.

SAPS and HEHSC member Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown (Chilchinbeto, Dennehotso, Kayenta), who also serves on the Arizona Human Trafficking Council, said that there have been occurrences of human sex trafficking on the Navajo Nation.

"There have been reported cases on the Navajo Nation of young Navajo girls being lured through social media by perpetrators promising them better lives, when in fact they are taken from our home lands and are forcefully sex trafficked. One of our main goals is to begin public education to bring awareness to this issue, and we need the full support of the FBI and federal attorneys," said Delegate Brown.

Delegate Brown said the Navajo Nation Department of Family Services would be holding a work session the week of June 19 to begin addressing trafficking on the Navajo Nation.

In January, the SAPS and HEHSC held a similar meeting with the FBI, U.S. Attorney's Office, and victim services entities in Arizona. Delegate Crotty said the next joint meeting regarding the sexual assault response plan would take place in Utah and will be announced at a later date.

"How do we create an environment where all three federal agencies work together? What we really want to push is how the U.S. Attorney's Office will have a Navajo Nation component, rather than three separate entities. We know it's a long-term goal, but it will be critical in developing an effective response to sexual violence," said Delegate Crotty.

The next SAPS and HEHSC joint meeting regarding the sexual assault response plan for Utah will be announced at a later date.

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