



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Law and Order Committee addresses missing persons on the Navajo Nation

WINDOW ROCK – On Monday, the Law and Order Committee received a report from Meskee Yatsayte, and family members of missing persons, regarding cases of missing persons on the Navajo Nation. Meskee Yatsayte is the founder of the Navajo Nation Missing Persons Updates volunteer group, a group of volunteer advocates who distribute descriptive information of missing persons and assist families to find loved ones.

In her report to the committee, Yatsayte described how the number of missing persons on the Navajo Nation is increasing and questioned how the Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety is addressing the issue.

“As concerned Navajo citizens, we need answers from Navajo Nation Police Department regarding missing persons. Family members are not updated on their loved one’s investigations and if they do, they receive unprofessional responses and attitudes from NNPD. Families are concerned that nothing is being done to find their loved ones,” stated Yatsayte.

LOC member Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Low Mountain, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tachee/Blue Gap, Tselani/Cottonwood) said he sympathizes with the families of missing persons and questioned how NNDPS and the Office of the President and Vice President are working to address the increase in missing persons.

In response to the questions, NNPD chief of police Phillip B. Francisco reaffirmed that police officers and criminal investigators are doing their best to gather information and investigate the missing persons reports and assured that the families will receive updates within a week.

LOC vice chair Council Delegate Raymond Smith, Jr. (Houck, Klagetoh, Nahata Dziil, Tsé Si áni, Wide Ruins) stated that gathering information and investigating missing persons needs to be taken seriously by NNPD and Navajo communities.

“The timeframe of finding and investigating missing persons is crucial, which needs to be taken seriously and professionally by the police. This is why communities need police officers stationed in rural communities in case of emergencies. I also encourage community members to volunteer and organize search parties and chapters to open chapter doors for command centers. A collaborative effort is needed to find the missing persons,” said Delegate Smith.

Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Beclabito, Cove, Gadi'i'áhi/To'Koi, Red Valley, Tooh Haltsooi, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Tsé ałnáoz't'í), who serves as the chair of the Naabik'íyáti' Committee's Sexual Assault Prevention Sub-Committee, said that policy changes that promote the protection of Navajo children and women need to be acted on immediately at the tribal, state, and federal level.

"Our Navajo women and children are vulnerable and targeted for crime on the Nation. Trafficking has become a living problem on the Nation and we need to assure that our Navajo officers are properly educated and trained to deal with these circumstances. Policy changes can allow us to protect vulnerable individuals on the Nation," stated Delegate Crotty.

LOC chair Council Delegate Edmund Yazzie (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau) proposed two recommendations to address missing persons.

He directed the committee and the OPVP to place an ad in all local newspapers regarding missing persons in the Nation and to host a meeting with all surrounding off-reservation police departments and sheriff departments to address the rise in the number of missing persons.

The Law and Order Committee approved the report with a 3-0 vote with one directive.

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