



The 24TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL
Office of the Speaker

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Navajo Nation Leaders bring awareness to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Relatives to the New Mexico Legislature

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: February 4, 2022



PHOTO: Madam Chair Amber Kanazbah Crotty, Vice Chair Carl Slater, and Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown advocate for MMIWR outside the east entrance of the New Mexico Roundhouse in Santa Fe, N.M.

SANTA FE, N.M. — Members of the 24th Navajo Nation Council were joined by families across the four corners region for a march to bring awareness to the increasing number of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Relatives (MMIWR) across New Mexico. State and tribal leaders listened to speeches from local organizers, advocates, and survivors before walking from the Santa Fe Plaza to the east entrance of the New Mexico Roundhouse in Santa Fe, N.M.

Around 100 people joined Madam Chair Amber Kanazbah Crotty, Chairman Daniel Tso, Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown, and Delegate Carl Slater for the half-mile march. A press conference was hosted by New Mexico Federation of Democratic Women Vice President, Rebecca Touchin, Fashion Designer Patricia Michaels, and local MMIW advocate Arlinda Begay.

“For far too long, it has been only our mothers, aunties, and grandmas that have been the investigators working to search, locate, and bring home our missing family members. We are here all the time volunteering and using our own money to bring attention to state leaders about this epidemic. Remember the names of those missing because we do, every birthday and holiday when they are not there. Our children go to school missing their mothers, they ask us why my brother was killed, or why grandma was taken. Our surviving families deserve a call from law enforcement,

an advocate to fight for them, and a government that has their back,” said Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Cove, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Red Valley, Tsé’atnáoozt’í’í, Sheepsprings, Beclabito, Gad’ii’áhi/Tó Ko’i).

Today, the legislature is considering Senate Bill 13 that establishes an annual event to support New Mexican families with missing relatives by bringing together federal, state, and tribal law enforcement to one location to assist families with filing and updating missing person reports, submitting DNA records to the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System, and opportunities to meet with investigators to discuss cases.

As of January, according to the Missing Persons Clearinghouse, there are 946 active missing persons and 20 unidentified persons reported across New Mexico in the National Crime Information Center.

“We are marching to share our support for Senate Bill 13 that will establish critical services for our Indigenous families to help them distribute information to media outlets about the cases of their missing relatives. The process of healing for our relatives is important, so this bill ensures families and our survivors have access to support groups, onsite counseling, traditional healers, and to victim advocates. Where are our Native men? We need to go back and teach our young men about the sweat lodge ceremonies and the sacredness of our female warriors. Our male coming of age ceremonies are as important as our traditional Kinaaldá female ceremonies. We are all the warriors behind our Indigenous movements and together, we will move forward with Hozhó,” said Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown (Dennehotso, Kayenta, Chííłchinbii’tó).

Overwhelming public support allowed Senate Bill 13 to be passed by the House, Government, Elections & Indian Affairs Committee with unanimous support earlier today. The legislation now moves onward to the House floor this week.

State Senator Shannon Pinto (D-3) is sponsoring Senate Bill 12 that will create a position for missing Indigenous persons within the New Mexico Attorney General’s Office. The bill also ensures effective case management with specialists trained in cultural competency, law enforcement reporting, and missing persons casework. Several tribal leaders will provide public testimony tomorrow for the bill before the Senate Judiciary Committee.

“We appreciate our sisters who have traveled here to speak loudly to the New Mexico Legislature on the importance of locating, bringing home, and seeking fair justice for our missing relatives. We hear you loudly that change must come to New Mexico and we will not be silent any more. This pandemic has hurt our communities but it has also brought us together with strength and determination. Your elected leaders hear you; we see you, and you are here as a movement that is heard loudly across Indian Country. No person should walk in fear and all perpetrators of violence and sexual assault must be brought to justice. My late grandfather Senator John Pinto was an example of persistence and never letting his guard down. We have a commitment to ensure our families find their loved ones and we never give up,” said Senator Shannon Pinto.

New Mexico Indian Affairs Secretary Lynn Trujillo leads the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Task Force that was created in 2019 by Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham. She added, “Indigenous people, particularly women, are missing or murdered at a rate much higher than non-Indigenous people. Senate Bill 13 is critically important to ensure we are doing everything possible

to bring our relatives home and ultimately bring justice and healing.”

Standing in front of the Roundhouse, Navajo Nation leaders were joined by State Senator Shannon Pinto, Senator Antoinette Sedillo Lopez, Senator Harold Pope, Senator Liz Stefanics, Representative Anthony Allison, and Rep. Wonda D. Johnson.

Council Delegate Carl Slater shared that Diné and Indigenous women continue to be targeted by high rates of violence. In response, Navajo, federal, and state authorities need to coordinate and support the families of victims and survivors. He added, “In order to restore harmony and begin the healing process for our families, criminal cases must fully be investigated and prosecuted. We must bring closure and healing to our missing relatives across Indian Country.”

The Navajo Nation Council supports the establishment of the Missing and Murdered Diné Relatives (MMDR) task force that is developing a framework for a proposed MMDR data institute and the development of a missing persons community action toolkit to empower communities. Madam Chair Crotty is a renowned advocate for Indigenous women, the elderly, young people, and the LGBTQ+ community.

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