



The Navajo Nation
Office of the President and Vice President

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**First Lady Phefelia Nez attends first New Mexico
Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Task Force meeting**



PHOTO: Navajo Nation First Lady Phefelia Nez during the state of New Mexico's first Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Task Force meeting on Nov. 8, 2019 in Albuquerque, N.M.

ALBUQUERQUE – On Friday, Navajo Nation First Lady Phefelia Nez attended the state of New Mexico's first Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Task Force meeting in Albuquerque, N.M. The purpose of the meeting was to define goals, to develop a strategy for understanding the full extent of missing and murdered Indigenous women in the state of New Mexico, and to create a final report that meets the requirements of N.M. House Bill 278.

In March, New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham signed N.M. House Bill 278 into law to establish the task force to investigate the epidemic of missing and murdered Indigenous women

in the state of New Mexico. The bill also includes an emergency clause, showing the immediate need for a response by the state.

In October, First Lady Nez was appointed by Gov. Lujan Grisham to serve on the task force to assist in conducting a study to determine how to increase state resources for reporting and identifying missing and murdered Indigenous women in the state.

“Throughout Indian Country, we hear far too many stories of families and victims who experience this traumatic epidemic of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. We need to put a stop to it, and it begins with identifying barriers, collecting and analyzing data, and uniting with each other to protect our sacred Indigenous women and children,” said First Lady Nez.

The task force will also collaborate with tribal, state, and federal law enforcement agencies, victims, survivors, grassroots organizations, health services, women shelters, and many others to determine the scope of the problem, identify barriers to address the problem, and create partnerships to improve the reporting of and the investigation of missing and murdered Indigenous women.

“The issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women and children has not only affected families, but it impacts communities. As leaders, we must continue to advocate for safety and justice for Native women. Most importantly, we need to address efforts to restore balance, love, and harmony within Native homes and communities,” added First Lady Nez.

The task force is responsible for submitting a report of its findings and recommendations to Gov. Lujan Grisham and present it to the appropriate interim legislative committee before Nov. 1, 2020.

New Mexico Indian Affairs Department Secretary Lynn Trujillo will chair the task force along with New Mexico Department of Public Safety Secretary Mark Shea, and Kathy Howkumi of the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs Office of Justice Services.

The other members appointed by Gov. Grisham include:

- Beata Tsosie, Pueblo representative
- Sharnen Velarde, Jicarilla Apache Nation representative
- Bernalyn Via, Mescalero Apache Tribe representative
- First Lady Phefelia Nez, Navajo Nation representative
- Mathew Strand, representative of a statewide or local non-governmental organization that provides legal services to Indigenous women
- Linda Son-Stone, representative of an Indigenous women’s non-governmental organization that provides counseling services to Indigenous women
- Elizabeth Gonzales, representative of the Office of the Medical Investigator
- Becky Jo Johnson, an Indigenous woman who is a survivor of violence or who has lost a loved one to violence

The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Task Force will meet monthly until the completion of the report. For more information regarding House Bill 278, please visit:
<https://nmlegis.gov/Sessions/19%20Regular/final/HB0278.pdf>.

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