



The Navajo Nation
Office of the President and Vice President

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**New Mexico's Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and
Relatives Task Force releases final report to Governor Lujan Grisham**

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – On Wednesday, Navajo Nation First Lady Phefelia Nez and the New Mexico Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Relatives Task Force (MMIWR) announced the completion and release of its final report to New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham and state legislators. The report reflects the task force's major findings and policy recommendations regarding the MMIWR crisis within tribal communities.

In March 2019, 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 and relatives in the state. The bill also includes an emergency clause for the immediate need for a response by the state.

“On behalf of the Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President, we extend our appreciation to Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham, the task force members, partners, and volunteers, who collaboratively gathered data, provided testimonies, analyzed data, and provided recommendations regarding the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Relatives crisis that affects each of our lives and tribal communities. It requires patience, unbreakable focus, and unconditional commitment to identify gaps and barriers that families, survivors, and victims’ encounter. Our work continues within each of our tribal communities, but together with faith and dedication, we can heal, restore, and reunite families,” said First Lady Nez.

During the announcement, New Mexico Indian Affairs Department Sec. Lynn Trujillo, stated that the report highlights the strength and testimonies of survivors and families, who shared their challenges and testimonies that helped guide the policy recommendations in the report. It also includes the collaboration of advocates, law enforcement, legislators, organizations, and community members.

According to the report, “the New Mexico Missing Persons Information Clearing House (2014-2019) has reported 986 missing person cases. Of this total, only 32 (3%) were classified as solved and 954 cases (97%) were unsolved. Of the unsolved cases, 92 (9.5%) are American

Indian/Alaskan Native. The percentage of unsolved cases are therefore likely higher for Native American residents of New Mexico than their overall share of the population in the state.”

Additionally, the report stated that there are significant discrepancies in the reported number of missing persons across datasets. In addition to the lack of resources, reporting can pose challenges because the NCIC’s forms do not have dedicated fields requiring tribal affiliation to be entered into the missing person report.

“In general, we understand that there are many barriers and lack of resources. However, we provided many recommendations that could help guide the initiative and reunite families. For example, we recognize that tribal courts and judiciary systems are often underfunded and under-resourced, which makes it difficult to enforce not only tribal laws, but also those at the federal level including the Violence Against Women Act and the Tribal Law and Order Act. With increased funding and more resources, tribal courts will be better equipped to enforce laws and hopefully deter crimes committed against our Indigenous mothers, sisters, daughters, and all relatives,” said First Lady Nez.

“As tribal nations, we also have to do our part to help in this fight. Today’s report also highlights the need for tribal legislative bodies to adopt laws and policies that help in this overall fight to protect our people,” she added, while noting that in 2017, the Navajo Nation Council amended the Navajo Nation’s criminal code to implement new provisions to deter human traffickers by criminalizing certain offenses, prescribing appropriate repercussions, giving priority to the investigation and prosecution of trafficking offenses, and protecting and providing justice to victims.

Under the Nez-Lizer Administration, the Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety is also working toward the creation of a Missing Person Unit that will have the personnel, funding, and resources to help find missing persons.

The MMIWR task force has worked to determine the scope of problems, identify barriers, and create partnerships to help improve processes for reporting and investigating cases of missing and murdered Indigenous relatives. To access the report online, please visit:

https://www.iad.state.nm.us/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/NM_MMIWR_Report_FINAL_WEB_v120920.pdf.

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