



# 25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

**MEDIA CONTACT:**

nnlb.communications@gmail.com

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## **25th Navajo Nation Council Delegates participate in Angels vs. Drunk Drivers Walk to raise awareness against drunk driving**



**PHOTO:** Miss Navajo Nation 2022-2023 Valentina Clitso, Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty, and Delegate Eugenia Charles-Newton joined the Peshlakai family in an awareness walk to end drunk driving.

**Window Rock, Ariz.** - On Monday, 25th Navajo Nation Council Delegates Eugenia Charles-Newton (Shiprock) and Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Cove, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Red Valley Tse'al-naozt'i'i, Sheepsprings, Beclabito, Gadiiahi/To'Koi) participated in the Annual Angels Vs. Drunk Drivers Awareness Walk to raise awareness against drunk driving fatalities.

The walk was hosted by the Peshlakai Family on opening day of the 2023 Navajo Nation Council Summer Session beginning at the Window Rock fairgrounds to the Council Chamber, where they were welcomed by the delegates and public.

"Today is a beautiful day. This year there are more people than expected, which is great because we can reach more people. We are using our tragedy to keep both of my daughter's memory alive because they didn't die for no reason. It brings a tear to my heart, but it also brings joy because I get to speak their names, educate, and spread awareness of drunk driving. That is the goal," said Darlene Peshlakai.

Darlene and Dave Peshlakai continue to mourn a loss that any parent fears. Their young daughters, Deshauna and Del Lynn, were only 17 and 19-years-old when they were killed by a repeat

offender drunk driver on March 5, 2010. Just a few hours before, the family was together making their way home after they had spent the day together at a basketball game. In one moment, their lives were altered forever.

Thirteen years have passed, and the pain comes and goes, according to Darlene. Over time, she's learned to harness the abyss of emotions into advocacy for her children and for all who have been killed due to a drunk driver. Keeping Deshauna and Del Lynn on the minds and in the voices of many has ignited her determination to share awareness and work closely with law enforcement to help reduce drunk driving.

The family began community events such as awareness walks, motorcycle rallies, and speaking events. They have also partnered with the New Mexico Police Department to stage DWI checkpoints throughout the state, which have resulted in arrests of persons who were driving intoxicated. At these checkpoints, they distribute statistics and informational resources along with coffee tumblers and water bottles that have their daughters' names etched over angel wings. They give these gifts to humanize their daughters' stories so they are not merely a statistic.

"As leaders, we are going to take a stance against drunk driving and how it impacts the families, and how so many of us have been impacted," said Delegate Crotty, who also shared an emotional and personal story of her brother, who was killed by a drunk driver. The driver had eight previous DWI arrests, with the ninth leading to the fatality of her brother.

According to the 2020-2021 New Mexico Department of Transportation report, the number of fatalities in alcohol-related crashes increased from 145 in to 178, the highest number in at least a decade. The report ranks McKinley County as having the fourth highest number of alcohol-related crashes in the state.

"We need consistent checkpoints on the Navajo Nation. We need a lot more and for them to be more frequent," said Peshlakai as she spoke of actionable needs that will make an impact to reduce fatalities and crashes overall.

In addition to stiffer penalties, she spoke about the need for rehabilitation on the Nation so those who struggle with alcoholism can seek help, resources, and understanding.

Chair of the Law the Order Committee, Eugenia Charles-Newton, stated that she stands behind the Navajo Nation Police Department's stance that penalties are not strict enough.

"We need to increase jail times and fines, we cannot allow people to be processed and get back on the road," said Delegate Charles-Newton. "Listening to the Peshlakai's story of their daughters is emotional and I still think about the family since the day I first met them. As a mother, losing a child like that, something has to change."

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