



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL

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Law and Order Committee calls on federal lawmakers to act on Navajo public safety and justice priorities



In meeting with the staff of Sen. Brian Schatz, the Law and Order Committee highlighted the disparity in law enforcement coverage.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – The Law and Order Committee (LOC) used the momentum of National Police Week, May 12–16, to meet with federal lawmakers in Washington, D.C., and advocate for the Navajo Nation’s public safety and justice priorities.

Discussions focused on the need for mandatory funding for the Department of the Interior’s Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), increased staffing for Navajo law enforcement, the implications of proposed federal budget cuts, and concerns over federal prosecution decisions.

In meetings with staff from Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), Chair of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs (SCIA) Majority, and Senator Brian Schatz (D-MI), Vice Chair of the SCIA Minority, LOC Chair Eugenia Charles-Newton highlighted the disparity in law enforcement coverage.

“The national average is 2.8 officers per 1,000 people,” said Charles-Newton. “To meet that standard, the Navajo Nation would need 560 officers to patrol our 27,000 square miles within the Navajo Nation. We currently have only 218 due to insufficient funding. To properly serve our people, we need to double our police force and criminal investigators.”

Chair Charles-Newton urged the SCIA to support mandatory spending for the BIA’s Office of Justice Services, which funds tribal public safety and justice programs. She emphasized that unreliable federal support forces tribal law enforcement to anticipate funding shortfalls, often leading to staff reductions.

When meeting with Senator Ben Ray Lujan (D-NM), Council Delegate Arbin Mitchell expressed concern over the White House's proposed "Skinny Budget," which would reduce funding for tribal public safety and justice by \$107 million.

"The Skinny Budget also proposes cuts to the Departments of Health and Human Services, BIA, Bureau of Indian Education, and would eliminate the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program," said Mitchell.

Council Delegate Nathan Notah noted that these cuts would exacerbate already significant challenges in improving public safety on the Nation.

"These reductions would force tribal nations to compete for fewer resources," Notah said.

Chair Charles-Newton, who co-chairs the Public Safety and Justice Subcommittee of the Tribal Interior Budget Council (TIBC), told Senator Martin Heinrich's (D-NM) staff that TIBC ranked public safety and justice funding as its second-highest priority.

"If Congress follows this proposal, we'll have even fewer officers," said Charles-Newton. "The cuts will also impact the operation and maintenance of BIA facilities. We need funding for new public safety buildings and to remove old, unsafe ones."

The Committee also met with U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) Office of Tribal Justice (OTJ) Deputy Director Christopher Chaney and Chief of Staff Jeanne Jacobs to advocate for a dedicated federal prosecutor for the Navajo Nation and greater consultation on federal declinations of cases.

Delegate Notah shared that between 2016 and 2024, federal authorities declined to prosecute 525 cases from the Navajo Nation. Many serious crimes are not pursued due to reasons like insufficient evidence or low likelihood of conviction.

"When these cases aren't prosecuted, it sends a message that serious crimes will go unpunished," said Notah. "Victims feel unprotected. We need a dedicated prosecutor."

Chair Charles-Newton added that lack of DOJ-OTJ communication on declined cases hinders the Nation's ability to address evidentiary gaps.

"If we're notified, we can work with investigators to gather the necessary evidence," she said.

Delegate Mitchell expressed concern over the Trump administration's proposed "skinny budget," which threatened to eliminate nearly 40 Department of Justice grant programs, many of which support violence prevention, law enforcement training, and justice-related research.

He pressed Chief of Staff Jacobs for clarity on which of these cuts would specifically impact Indian Country. Jacobs, however, was unable to identify which programs might be affected, highlighting a troubling lack of transparency and awareness regarding the potential consequences for tribal communities.

"We're grateful to all the senators and representatives who met with our delegation and offered guidance on how we can advance our priorities," Charles-Newton said. "Although we



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are presenting Navajo-specific concerns, we're not speaking solely for the Navajo Nation. Many other tribal nations are facing the same challenges."

During National Police Week, the LOC also met with Senator Mark Kelly (D-AZ), Congresswoman Melanie Stansbury (D-NM), Congressman Jeff Hurd (R-CO), and staff from Senator Bernie Sanders' (I-VT) office.

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