



25th Navajo Nation Council

25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Law and Order Committee calls on Congress to strengthen support for public safety on the Navajo Nation



LOC Chair Eugenia Charles-Newton and Navajo Nation Police Sergeant Dwayne P. Hogue stand beside Congressman Daniel Newhouse (center) who introduced The Parity for Tribal Law Enforcement Act.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Law and Order Committee (LOC) Chair Eugenia Charles-Newton and Council Delegate Nathan Notah met with U.S. Department of the Interior officials, White House Senior Staff, and congressional leaders on Capitol Hill during National Police Week to advocate for critical public safety needs on the Navajo Nation.

“Navajo Public Safety and Justice systems are chronically underfunded causing law enforcement services to be cut to adjust to budget allocations. We’re calling for mandatory funding be allocated for public safety and justice services, as opposed to the current situation of discretionary funding,” said Chair Eugenia Charles-Newton.

The budget for the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) funds related to public safety and justice often faces delays in authorization and appropriations, which results in significant uncertainty for tribal programs. Mandatory funding would circumvent these issues.

The LOC also advocated for school resource officers, medical examiner positions, funding for public safety facilities including housing, and to renegotiate the Navajo Nation’s 638 contract with Indian Health Service.



Delegate Nathan Notah, Chair Charles-Newton, and Speaker Crystalyne Curley met with Congressman Paul Gosar (AZ-09-R) to advocate for mandatory funding for tribal public safety and justice systems.

When meeting with IHS Director Roselyn Tso, Delegate Notah spoke about the need for IHS to renegotiate the 638 contract to reflect the nation's current statistics to increase funding, and to create a Medical Examiner position to assist the Nation's criminal investigators.

"Our 638 Contract with IHS hasn't been renegotiated in approximately 20 years. Our enrollment and the number of residents has increased in that time. We need this contract to reflect today's numbers," Delegate Notah said. "Currently, the Nation contracts out medical examiner services. In doing this, we lose critical data, and we need to have more control over our medical investigations."

Director Tso said that her office would present an overview of the Nation's current 638 contract to the LOC and would assist in renegotiating the contract.

Navajo Nation Vice President Richelle Montoya spoke on behalf of the Navajo Nation in addressing flexibility in funding to implement traditional practices of resolution to White House Senior Native Policy Advisor Morgan Rodman.

"We need flexibility when it comes to contract funding for public safety and justice systems. As a sovereign nation, we know the needs of our people. We want to be able to use funding to implement traditional and cultural solutions for individuals who are on the wrong path. We need a seat at the table to determine these solutions," Vice President Montoya said.

Rodman committed support for law enforcement and public safety facilities across Indian Country.

The Navajo Nation faces challenges in prosecuting heinous crimes committed on the Nation due to jurisdictional issues. Additionally, many cases are declined for prosecution by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ). Chair Charles-Newton told U.S. Department of Justice Attorney Advisor Tamera Begay that untimely notification regarding reasons for declination has impacted

the statute of limitations by which the Nation could undertake prosecution itself.

“For the safety of the Navajo people, we demand increased communication. If the USDOJ is not going to prosecute cases, we need to know why so that we can investigate on our own. We can’t be informed after the statute of limitation has lapsed. If the Nation can get a conviction, it can be used at the federal level. This process currently broken,” Chair Charles-Newton said.

Bureau of Indian Affairs Deputy Bureau Director R. Glen Melville met with the LOC, addressing the circumstance of underfunded public safety and justice departments. Melville stated that when broken down between 190 tribes, the Tribal Law and Order Act funds only 13 percent of what tribal nations need.

“It’s unimaginable that any city in the U.S. would only get funded at 13 percent. The message being sent is that it’s okay for Indian Country,” Melville said.

Chair Charles-Newton suggested that a resolution be put forth from the Tribal Interior Budget Committee and the Coalition of Large Tribes addressing mandatory funding for public safety and justice department.

“This is a bipartisan issue. These are lives we are dealing with. We need mandatory funding for public safety and justice,” Charles-Newton said.

Chair Charles-Newton and Delegate Notah met with Congressman Daniel Newhouse who introduced The Parity for Tribal Law Enforcement Act that seeks to treat certain tribal law enforcement officers (LEO) as federal LEOs for the purpose of better retirement and benefits.

“I’m optimistic in its passage. We’re not going to balance the budget on the backs of the Native Americans,” Congressman Newhouse said.

Navajo Nation Police Sergeant Dwayne P. Hogue supports parity for tribal law enforcement, stating that pension and benefits help keep Navajo Police officers from looking elsewhere for employment.

“Tribal law officials desperately need these benefits,” Sergeant Hogue said.

Chair Charles-Newton reiterated that federal leaders need to know the situations that tribal nations face regarding public safety and justice in their communities.

“We must be proactive. We see this resolution as the first step toward bringing our tribal officers toward parity with federal officers,” Chair Charles-Newton said.

The LOC met directly with US Senate Committee on Indian Affairs Vice Chairman Senator Lisa Murkowski (AK-R), Senator Elizabeth Warren (MA-D), Congresswoman Teresa Ledger Fernandez (NM-3-D), Congresswoman Melanie Stansbury (NM-1-D), House Minority Leader Representative Hakeem Jeffries (NY-D), Congressman Paul Gosar (AZ-09-R), and Congressman Eli Crane (AZ-2-R).

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