



25th Navajo Nation Council

# 25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Missing and Murdered Diné Relatives Task Force receives report from the Navajo Nation Victim Witness Advocacy Program**



**Juanita Martinez, Principal Victim Witness Advocate for the Office of the Prosecutor**

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** – On Thursday, during a regular meeting of the Missing and Murdered Diné Relatives Task Force, the Navajo Nation Victim Witness Advocacy Program provided an update on the program’s recent accomplishments.

Missing and Murdered Diné Relatives (MMDR) Task Force Chair, Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Cove, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Red Valley, Tse’alnaozt’i’i, Sheepsprings, Beclabito, Gadiiahi/To’Koi), opened the meeting by sharing victim advocacy resources that are offered on and off the Navajo Nation.

“I want to make sure you’re aware of these resources because they provide training, and I think they could enhance support for advocates in very rural communities,” said Council Delegate Crotty.

The discussions underscored the urgent need for a robust victim support system, especially for cases involving missing and murdered Indigenous relatives. The meeting brought together representatives of the 25th Navajo Nation Council, Judicial Branch, advocacy groups, and community stakeholders.

Juanita Martinez, Principal Victim Witness Advocate for the Office of the Prosecutor, provided an update on the Office's progress since her appointment on July 1, 2024. Martinez has led efforts to expand the program's reach and effectiveness, particularly in assisting victims of major crimes, including those involving children.

Currently, the program employs three dedicated Victim Witness Advocates (VWA) stationed in Chinle, Ariz., Tohajilee, N.M., and Window Rock, offering round-the-clock support to victims. Martinez highlighted the need for strengthened communication between victim's advocates and law enforcement agencies when requesting and accessing police reports that are crucial for pursuing compensation claims and legal proceedings.

She announced plans to create a dedicated website for the program and distribute informational brochures to educate the public about their rights under the Navajo Nation Victims' Rights Act of 2023.

The meeting provided a platform for affected families to share their experiences. Cindy Hayes, whose brother Leon Hayes remains missing, advocated on behalf of victim's families who are frustrated by the unsolved cases of their loved ones.

"The families' voices need to be heard," Hayes insisted. "In my brother's case, I'd like to see more accountability. His body is still out there; we need help finding him."

Deiandra Reid, whose sister Tiffany Reid has been missing for 20 years, shared the emotional toll her family has endured due to systemic failures.

"In those 20 years, we found that she was purged from the system early on, and it wasn't until 15 years later that we found out. This should not have happened to her and to us," Reid urged the adoption of trauma-informed practices in working with families of missing and murdered Indigenous people.

Similarly, Stephanie Tsosie, representing the Davidson Tso family, voiced concerns about the transparency and effectiveness of managing cases of missing persons.

"There is a severe lack of personal accountability in reporting arrest data and pursuing accurate reporting," Tsosie remarked, reflecting the broader frustrations of many families within the Navajo Nation.

The MMDR Task Force is actively addressing these concerns by advocating for the expansion of the Victim Advocacy Program. This includes securing additional funding, hiring more advocates, and enhancing coordination with other services, such as behavioral health and law enforcement. The Task Force is also focusing on improving interagency collaboration and data sharing to ensure that victims receive the comprehensive support they need.

"The path to justice and healing is long, but through continued collaboration and dedication, we can make a real difference in the lives of those who have suffered," said Chair Crotty. "The voices of the families are driving these efforts, and we are committed to ensuring that they are supported every step of the way."

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