



25th Navajo Nation Council

25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Tribal Interior Budget Committee's Public Safety and Justice Subcommittee addresses Tribal Law Enforcement challenges



Chair Eugenia Charles-Newton (center-right) calls on the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to create a dedicated budget line to fund School Resource Officers.

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Tribal Interior Budget Committee's (TIBC) Public Safety and Justice Subcommittee (PS&J) met on Monday to discuss pressing tribal law enforcement and justice issues, including the need for School Resource Officers (SROs), the Bureau of Indian Affairs-Office of Justice Service (BIA-OJS) budget, and jurisdictional challenges in Indian Country.

Law and Order Chair Eugenia Charles-Newton, who chairs the PS&J Subcommittee, emphasized the importance of educating federal leaders about the critical public safety challenges facing Indian Country, particularly as funding for tribal law enforcement continues to decrease.

"We must educate federal leaders on the urgent needs of public safety and justice in Indian Country, especially with the ongoing cuts to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Indian Education, and Indian Health Services budgets," said Chair Charles-Newton.

Richard Melville, Deputy Bureau Director of the BIA-OJS, outlined the challenges of a flat budget for Fiscal Years 2024-2025, compounded by the need to absorb rising costs, including cost-of-living increases, despite the lack of new funding.

Several Subcommittee members advocated for a dedicated budget line to fund School Resource Officers (SROs). Lawrence Palmer, BIE Supervisory Budget Officer, explained that while some SROs have been funded through the Indian School Equalization Program (ISEP) reimbursements, the BIE budget has remained stagnant for the past three years.

“We’ve had limited success with SROs, but most schools rely on security guards funded through operational budgets, not true SROs,” Palmer noted, adding that the BIE has proposed additional funding to expand SRO staffing.

Chair Charles-Newton has called on the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to create a dedicated line item for SRO funding. “We’re pushing for an SRO budget line under BIE before this administration ends,” she said.

The Subcommittee also received an update from Acting Director of the Office of Tribal Justice, Daron Carriero, who acknowledged that crime rates in Indian Country are on par with federal levels but stressed the need for more federal support to reduce these rates. “More base funding is essential to address these issues,” Carriero stated.

Carriero also highlighted the challenges tribes face in prosecuting non-Indians who commit crimes on tribal lands. “We must extend federal jurisdiction to address these crimes and relieve tribal resources,” he said.

Chair Charles-Newton urged the DOJ to expedite the prosecution of cases referred to the federal level, expressing concern that some cases are not being prosecuted without clear explanation.

“Indian Country should not be a stepping stone for attorneys to advance in the DOJ. We need resolution for cases that remain unaddressed,” Chair Charles-Newton stated.

PS&J Subcommittee members expressed frustration with the current performance of the BIA and DOJ, calling for greater investment in tribal law enforcement and a comprehensive law enforcement plan from both agencies. The Subcommittee emphasized that BIA funding should fully support tribal law enforcement efforts.

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