



Delegate Crotty advocates for Missing and Murdered Diné Relatives during White House Task Force listening session

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SHEEP SPRINGS, N.M. — On Friday, Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty participated on the online Presidential Task Force on Missing and Murdered American Indians and Alaska Natives listening session. Delegate Crotty spoke on behalf of the Navajo Nation to advocate for Missing and Murdered Diné Relatives, known as MMDR.

In November 2019, President Trump issued an executive order that established Operation Lady Justice. It created a task force aiming to enhance the operation of the criminal justice system and to address critical concerns of American Indian and Alaska Native communities regarding missing and murdered people, particularly missing and murdered women and girls.

Delegate Crotty, chair for the Naabik'iyáti' Sexual Assault Subcommittee, conveyed to the task force the ongoing work of MMDR and emphasized critical issues that the Navajo Nation is facing in terms of the missing and murdered crisis. These issues include jurisdiction problems, lack of data sharing, cold cases and direct engagement with families of MMDR.

“The MMDR task force was created to support Diné families to elevate their voices and address the challenges they face when working with law enforcement. Our advocacy efforts highlight their stories and the ongoing issues with missing persons cases, such as the lack of data collection and entering cases into federal databases. I cannot tell you how many of our Navajo relatives are missing. However, we work with advocates who are self-trained at entering cases into NamUs,” said Delegate Crotty.

In their presentation, the Presidential Task Force stated that they would also focus on cold case. Delegate Crotty requested for the official process in investigating cold cases and how they would ensure those cases are entered into all federal databases so data sharing with tribes could take place.

Meskee Yatsayte, who is the founder of Navajo Nation Missing Persons Updates and a member of MMDR, also provided testimony to the task force regarding challenging issues that arose from the COVID-19 pandemic. She spoke of the shelter-in-place orders that hindered search and rescue efforts for her uncle James Willie, who has been missing for 29 days.

“My uncle has been missing for 29 days and due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our search party of five family members had very little time to find my uncle. Each minute we lose is time against us and it demolishes all hope of finding him. The task force needs to provide search and rescue support for volunteers and even provide cadaver dogs so we cover all bases during a search,” said Yatsayte.

Delegate Crotty stated that the 24th Navajo Nation Council would reach out to the Presidential Task Force to invite them to consult directly with the Nation due to its vast geography spanning across three states and how the Navajo Nation can foster a relationship with the task force to address the unique issues of MMDR.

MMDR is a grassroots collective of volunteers, co-founded by Delegate Crotty. The group is seeking to establish a data institute, create programming surrounding awareness and prevention, promote community healing and to provide policy recommendations to Navajo leadership. In addition, MMDR

continues to hold community forums and is developing a missing persons community toolkit that would directly aid families to mobilize and recover their missing loved ones.

For more information on Missing and Murdered Diné Relatives, please visit www.navajommdr.com or email navajommdr@gmail.com.

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