



# 24<sup>th</sup> Navajo Nation Council

## Office of the Speaker

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## Law and Order Committee Advocates for Increased Public Safety Funding with Executive and Judicial Branches



Members from the 24<sup>th</sup> Navajo Nation Council Law and Order Committee and DPS officials met with U.S. Sen. Martin Heinrich's staff to discuss critical Navajo Nation public safety funding needs at his Washington office on June 25, 2019.

**WASHINGTON** – The 24<sup>th</sup> Navajo Nation Council Law and Order Committee traveled to Washington June 24-25 to meet with federal lawmakers and programs regarding critical, unmet public safety funding needs on the Navajo Nation.

Three council delegates, Navajo Division of Public Safety officials and the Navajo Nation Chief Justice JoAnn Jayne visited 11 congressional offices, the White House, and the Depts. of Interior and Justice to convey the impacts inadequately funded federal safety programs have on the Nation. The delegation documented deteriorating jails and judicial complexes, the need for more funding for Navajo court personnel and judges, and the potential closure of Navajo jails when grant monies run out in August.

“At our Window Rock Judicial Complex there are very few rooms that are OK...health wise we shouldn’t be operating in those conditions,” Law and Order Committee Chair Eugenia Charles Newton (Shiprock) explained to the office of U.S. Sen. Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ).

“When it comes to funding issues...we’re left without what we really need in direct services to the Navajo people,” Vice Chair Otto Tso (Tó Nanees Dizi) said. “We just want our fair share for our population and our land base, not any more, not any less.”

Sen. Sinema’s office assured the delegation that a conference call would be scheduled in the near future to discuss grant funding and how to potentially increase funding for Navajo public safety.

DPS Executive Director Jesse Delmar, Police Chief Phillip Francisco, Criminal Investigations Director Dale West, and Corrections Director Delores Greyeyes expressed a variety of issues facing their respective departments, including difficulty recruiting and retaining personnel, a fleet of aging police vehicles, an absence of medical examiners, and the limited number of criminal investigators for a land base larger than ten US states.

“We’re requesting an additional \$4 million based on Dept. of the Interior guidelines, however we estimate that it would take at least \$74 million in additional funding to ensure proper law enforcement, detention, and judiciary services,” Delmar told congressional representatives.

With 174,000 people residing on the Navajo Nation, there are 13.4 police officers per 10,000 people, trailing the national average of 24 officers per 10,000. In order to close the gap, DPS officials told lawmakers 115 more patrol officers and 30 more criminal investigators need to be hired. The corrections department is facing a more than \$3.2 million shortfall and if immediate funding is not acquired by the end of August, 146 corrections officers would be laid off and jailed inmates would need to be released.

In response to the funding shortfall, the delegation presented a partial solution to the BIA Office of Justice Services. Greyeyes and the Dept. of Corrections received approval to transfer juvenile detention funding to cover the costs of adult detention.

“I’m happy I will not have to lay off 146 individuals who rely on these salaries to support their families,” Director Greyeyes said. “I believe that the federal government is not honoring their 638 trust responsibilities by saying to just transfer between programs [rather than supplying further funding]. It’s like robbing Peter to pay Paul.”

The delegation also met with U.S. Reps. Tom O’Halloran (D-AZ), Andy Biggs (R-AZ), Paul Gosar (R-AZ), David Schweikert (R-AZ), and Raul Grijalva (D-AZ), in addition to Sens. Martha McSally (R-AZ), Martin Heinrich (D-NM) and Senate Committee on Indian Affairs staff. Executive branch meetings included educating White House intergovernmental affairs staff and Office of Management and Budget covering the Depts. of Justice and the Interior.

“As a delegation representing the three branches, we’ve been meeting with lawmakers and administrative bodies who are in charge of the budget and I feel our trip went well,” Delegate Charles Newton said. “Many of the comments we’ve been hearing is that this is the first time they are receiving this message. It’s kind of a tough love feeling on how we should be looking

at our funds, but I believe we are planting a seed in their ear that we really need more funding for Navajo public safety.”

Delegate Tso said he felt that a lot was accomplished and the efforts given on the committee's trip to Washington was well organized and everyone's participation in the lobbying effort was the most effective of past trips he's made with the committee.

Delegate Vince James (Jeddito, Cornfields, Ganado, Kin Dah Łichíí, Steamboat), also a member of the LOC, participated in the lobbying and education meetings.

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