



24th Navajo Nation Council

Office of the Speaker

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 13, 2019

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Council Delegates Applaud Introduction of BADGES Act in the US Senate, Bill Will Enhance Resources Addressing Missing, Murdered Indigenous Persons

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation Council Delegates commend the June 13 introduction of a bipartisan bill that will open more resources to combat the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons epidemic across Indian Country.

S.1853 – the Bridging Agency Data Gaps & Ensuring Safety (BADGES) for Native Communities Act was introduced by U.S. Sen. Tom Udall (D-N.M.) and is co-sponsored by Senators Jon Tester (D-Mont.), Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska), Catherine Cortez Masto (D-Nev.), Martha McSally (R-Ariz.), and Tina Smith (D-Minn.).

“For too long, poor coordination, limited data, and an unacceptable lack of federal resources have erected enormous barriers to justice all across Indian Country,” said Udall. “When public safety programs are underresourced, crimes are underreported and cases go unsolved. Our bill addresses these barriers head on by increasing the efficiency of federal law enforcement programs and providing Tribes and states with the tools they need to ensure that Native communities are safe and strong.”

Among other provisions, the BADGES Act authorizes the Bureau of Indian Affairs to perform their own background checks for newly-hired law enforcement personnel; enhances the ability of Tribal governments to retrieve and enter information into federal missing persons databases; and requires the U.S. Attorney General to ensure that missing persons and unidentified remains cases entered into federal law-enforcement databases are automatically entered into the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System, commonly known as NamUs.

Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Beclabito, Cove, Gadi’i’áhi/To’Koi, Red Valley, Tooh Haltsooi, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Tséaináoz’t’l’i) has worked closely with the Nation’s state and federal partners, in addition to introducing Council resolutions to support the issues addressed in the BADGES Act.

“The Navajo Nation, like other indigenous nations in the U.S., have grappled with the issue of data collection and analysis. I applaud the efforts of this bill to aid tribes in addressing crime and social issues,” said Delegate Crotty. “As any expert may tell you, data is integral to how we view and understand social problems, strategize, and create long-term solutions. As we

continue working to bring our Missing and Murdered Diné Relatives home, I appreciate Sen. Udall for taking a step forward to aid indigenous communities. In addition, I would call on the federal government to grant tribes access to how federal agents investigate missing and murdered cases, and to increase transparency through providing us that critical information.”

Law and Order Committee Chair Eugenia Charles Newton (Shiprock) previously served as a Navajo Nation prosecutor, gaining firsthand experience on many issues the bill seeks to address, before her election to the Council.

“As a former tribal prosecutor, I am all too familiar with the shortcomings among existing resources for handling missing and murdered persons cases,” said Delegate Charles Newton. “It is critical that the federal government fulfill its obligations to deliver justice for Native Americans by implementing appropriate tools, proven solutions, and innovative programming. By streamlining data sharing processes, strengthening existing resources, and developing new programming, the BADGE Act will empower federal, state, Tribal, and non-profit organizations to design better protocols for addressing the crisis of Missing and Murdered Diné Relatives. Safe communities are the cornerstone of economic development, and I am confident this bill will begin to provide a clear understanding of the broader set of issues affecting public safety in Indian Country.”

“The Navajo Nation now spans four states and over a dozen counties. With dozens of law enforcement agency partners, responding to cases of Missing and Murdered Diné Relatives requires improved coordination between law enforcement agencies and enhanced data sharing and input in federal databases,” said Navajo Council Speaker Seth Damon (Bááháálí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Tsé Lichíí’, Rock Springs, Tsayatoh). “I thank Senator Udall for seeking to address an issue that is all too common across Indian Country.”

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