



The 24TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL
Office of the Speaker

MEDIA CONTACTS

Alray Nelson, Communications Director
Kyrn Hardy, Public Information Officer
E-mail: nnlb.communications@gmail.com
Phone: (928) 565-0440

Reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act applauded by Navajo Nation Leader

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PHOTO: Meskee Yatsayte of the Missing and Murdered Diné Relatives Task Force, State Senator Shannon Pinto, and Madam Chair Amber Kanazbah Crotty support the signing of several MMIWR bills in Albuquerque, N.M.

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The 24th Navajo Nation Council applauds President Joe Biden for signing the reauthorization of the 2022 Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) during a White House ceremony today.

Members of the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee (HEHSC) and the Law and Order Committee (LOC) are in Washington, D.C. this week for meetings with Congressional representatives and federal officials from the Biden-Harris Administration to advocate for various priorities including veteran services, education, law enforcement, and infrastructure projects.

By signing the \$1.5 trillion omnibus spending package Tuesday, the 3000-page bill reauthorized VAWA through 2027 to combat crimes by aiding domestic violence prevention and support organizations, protecting survivors, and promoting safer communities for women and families.

“Indian Country was provided key provisions in this reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act to allow tribal courts to exercise jurisdiction over non-Native perpetrators of violence and assault towards our Indigenous women. We are grateful for our Navajo law enforcement who are working hard with limited resources to keep communities safe. This bipartisan law sends a message to survivors and the families of victims that we are committed to protecting our women,

people with disabilities, and our LGBTQ+ family members. The Navajo Nation commends our congressional representatives and President Biden for pushing this historic bill forward,” said Speaker Seth Damon (Bááhaalí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Red Rock, Rock Springs, Tséyatoh).

First written by then-Senator Biden in 1994, the law was initially enacted to provide protections for survivors of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking.

“We are grateful for the passage of the Violence Against Women Act that will continue to protect another generation of our Navajo women and children from sexual assault and violence. In the Navajo culture, our women are sacred matriarchs that we respect and honor. VAWA ensures our police officers, prosecutors, and tribal courts are provided the resources to properly hold criminals accountable. The Navajo Nation applauds President Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris for being champions for our Indigenous women and our women of color,” said Council Delegate Charlene Tso (Mexican Water, Tółikan, Teec Nos Pos, Aneth, Red Mesa).

According to the Office on Violence Against Women that is located within the U.S. Department of Justice (USDOD), over \$8 billion in grant funding has already been awarded to states and tribes to fund domestic violence and sexual assault programs, family shelters, and strengthen law enforcement to persecute violent crimes against women properly.

“The Violence Against Women Act is saving women and children across Indian Country. The reason that many people struggle to leave abusive situations is they are made to feel worthless or are silenced. Survivors must feel supported and empowered to move forward in life. Our Navajo women are the matriarchs who raise our families and they should be protected. VAWA now also has the first grant program dedicated to LGBTQ+ domestic violence and sexual assault survivors. Every life is precious and people deserve to live a life free of violence and discrimination,” said Madam Chair Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Cove, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Red Valley, Tsé’á’náoozt’í’í, Sheep Springs, Beclabito, Gad’ii’á’áhí/Tó Ko’í).

According to the White House, preventing and responding to gender-based violence wherever it occurs, and in all of its forms, has remained a cornerstone of President Biden’s career in public service. He launched a national campaign to combat campus sexual assault and pushed reforms to address violence and harassment in the military.

“There is a need for robust law enforcement on the Navajo Nation as criminal activity has increased in the last few years. Currently, there are not enough officers covering approximately 18 million acres of Navajo land. That has to change and the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act highlights the growing problems we deal with every day. The Navajo Nation will continue to hold criminals that commit violence or sexual assault, fully accountable under federal law,” said Madam Chair Eugenia Charles-Newton (Shiprock).

In a USDOD report, the effects of domestic abuse are long-lasting. Trauma can affect a survivor for a lifetime, manifesting in post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injuries, chronic pain, sleep disorders, depression, drug and alcohol abuse, and an increased risk for suicide.

In prepared remarks, President Biden added, “The Violence Against Women Act provides protection against domestic violence, stalking, sexual assault, and to support survivors and help them find a way out of those abusive situations they were locked into because they had no means

to leave, with support for race crisis centers, as well as housing and legal assistance. The law has saved lives, and that's helped women rebuild their lives and make children a heck of a lot safer. Today, with this bill, we reauthorize and strengthen the Violence Against Women Act. Tribal courts will now be able to exercise jurisdiction over non-Native perpetrators of sexual assault and sex trafficking. And we're providing more support for legal services and for law enforcement to get the training they need to help handle the trauma survivors are experiencing.”

The bipartisan legislation was sponsored by United States Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) alongside Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Senator Joni Ernst (R-IA), and Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) that was passed by Congress this week.

Key sections of the 2022 VAWA reauthorization law include:

- Reestablishing the Tribal Prisoner Program which allows some offenders convicted in tribal courts to be held in federal prisons.
- Improving the Services, Training, Officers, and Prosecutors (STOP) grant program to support responding law enforcement and require prosecutors to include best practices.
- Significantly increasing the authorized amount of grant funding to support domestic violence prevention and response organizations that provide victim services.
- Reauthorizing funding for violence reduction and prevention programs.
- Directly tackling the shortage of health professionals who perform medical sexual assault forensic examinations.
- Expanding access to safe housing for victims.
- Increasing enforcement of cybercrimes and supporting victims of “revenge porn.”
- Increasing authorized funding for responses to child abuse and child sex crimes.

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