



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL

OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Navajo Nation Council and City of Gallup address reports of Navajo people being targeted by fraudulent rehab and treatment centers

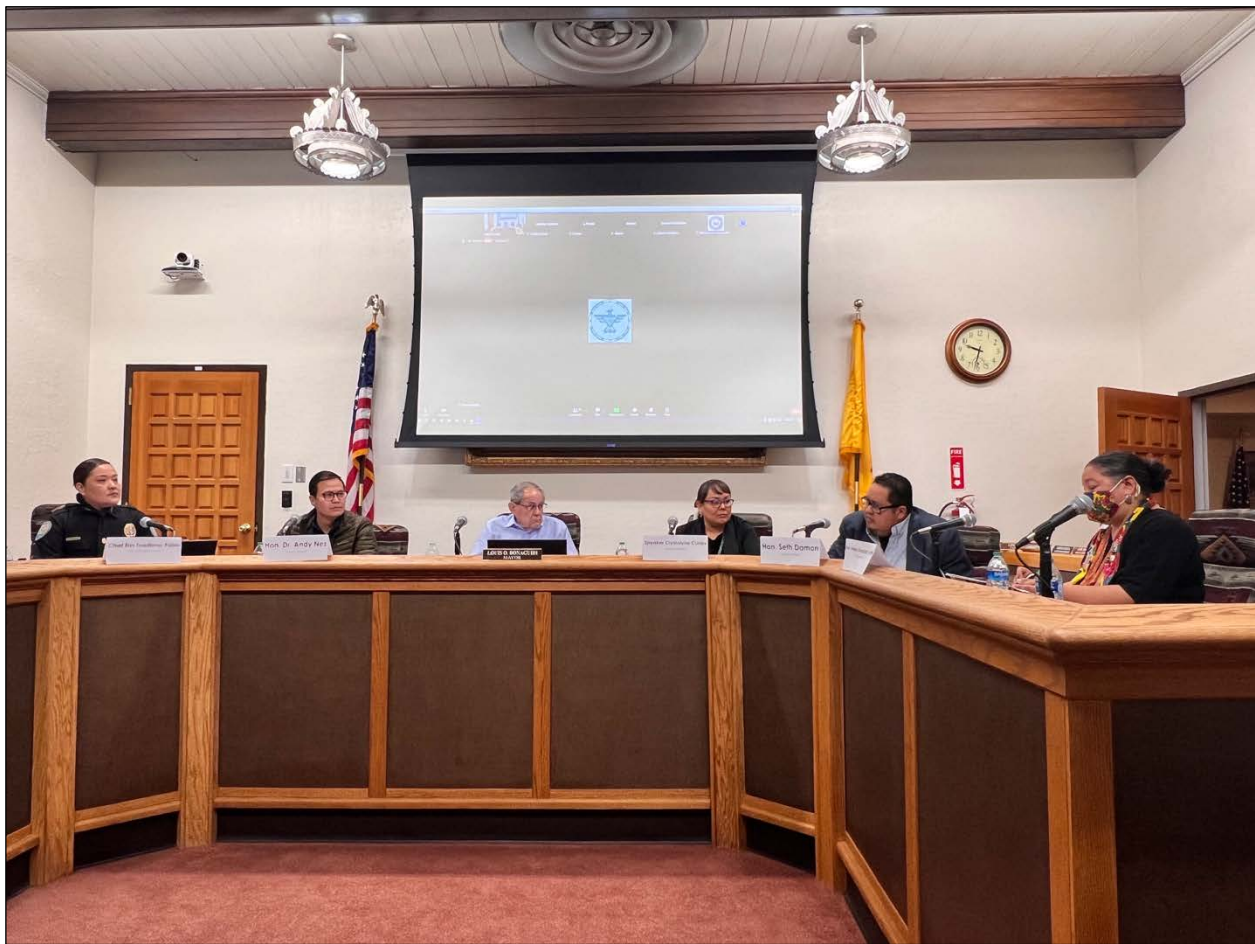


PHOTO: 25th Navajo Nation Council members, City of Gallup Mayor Louis Bonaguidi, and Gallup Police Chief Erin Toadlena-Pablo during the press conference at the Gallup City Council Chambers in Gallup, N.M. on May 17, 2023.

GALLUP, N.M. — On Wednesday, 25th Navajo Nation Council Speaker Crystalyne Curley and Council Delegates Seth Damon, Amber Kanazbah Crotty, Dr. Andy Nez, and Vince James participated in a press conference with City of Gallup Mayor Louis Bonaguidi and Gallup Police Chief Erin Toadlena-Pablo, to offer information about reports of Native Americans being targeted and transported from Gallup, N.M. to fraudulent rehabilitation and treatment centers in Phoenix, Ariz. as part of health care benefits schemes.

“The 25th Navajo Nation Council has taken a strong stance against the perpetrators who continue to target Navajo people in cities and towns and transporting them to fraudulent sober living homes and treatment centers in the Phoenix area. In many cases, the families and loved ones of those who are targeted are unaware of what occurs and many are reported missing. One important factor to help prevent these situations from continuing is to inform and educate the Navajo public about these perpetrators and to continuously communicate with law enforcement agencies to ensure these issues are at the forefront. We are thankful to Mayor Bonaguidi and the Gallup Police Chief for their support,” said Speaker Curley.

Delegate Damon stated that perpetrators in the city of Gallup also target members of other nearby tribes including Zuni Tribal members. He brought leadership together for Wednesday’s press conference to create a safer environment for tribal members who frequently visit Gallup for goods and services.

Gallup Police Chief Toadlena-Pablo reported that the Gallup Police Department has investigated 33 cases involving “sober homes” since 2022, of which 15 remain open. In 2023, the department has also investigated a total of 74 missing persons cases involving juveniles, adults, and other jurisdictions – to date, 14 of these cases remain open. She also noted that the department continues to work closely with regional law enforcement agencies including the Navajo Police Department, McKinley County Sheriff’s Office, New Mexico State Police, and federal authorities to investigate reports of people being taken to the Phoenix area with the promise of substance abuse treatment or other support.

As a member of the U.S. Department of the Interior’s “Not Invisible Act” Commission, Delegate Crotty stated that she has heard many heartbreaking accounts from victims of human trafficking and other crimes who are traumatized to point of no longer trusting law enforcement and other institutions. Delegate Crotty, who has been at the forefront of advocating for missing persons and their families, stated that there is a great need to restore that trust and to establish treatment centers within and near the Navajo Nation so that Navajo people can receive treatment and support close to home.

In 2022, Delegate Crotty sponsored legislation that established the Naabik’íyatí Missing and Murdered Diné Relatives (MMDR) Task Force to help combat the missing and murdered Diné relatives crisis on and off the Navajo Nation. The Navajo Nation Council also approved \$19 million through the American Rescue Plan Act to develop detox and residential treatment/rehabilitation centers in the communities of Shiprock, Chinle, Kayenta, and Tuba City and transitional housing facilities in Fort Defiance and Kayenta.

Delegate Dr. Nez urged law enforcement and government agencies to deliver information in the Navajo language to inform Navajo people who do not speak or understand the English language and to develop and strengthen more cross commissioning agreements that allow law enforcement agencies to partner and combine resources. He referenced a recent video circulated on social media that shows an elderly Navajo person being pressured to get into a vehicle to be transported to one of the fraudulent centers. The video shows the elderly person eventually walking away safely after another individual speaking in Navajo urged the person not to enter the vehicle.

This week, Arizona Gov. Katie Hobbs announced actions against over 100 unlicensed and fraudulent sober living homes and rehabilitation facilities in the Phoenix metropolitan area. She also announced that the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS) has suspended payments to fraudulent providers and that she has authorized a full third-party audit of claims dating back to 2019.

The Navajo Nation Executive Branch also announced “Operation Rainbow Bridge,” to help address the issues and creating an emergency operation center in Phoenix comprised of field and technical teams to assist in transitioning displaced Navajo tribal members to legitimate service providers or back home to the Navajo Nation.

On Friday, May 19 beginning at 11:30 a.m. DST, the Navajo Nation will hold a press conference to share more information about Operation Rainbow Bridge and its partnerships with state, federal, tribal, and other entities. The press conference will be available for the public and media to view via Zoom at: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/84132692851?pwd=aWplRXpleDhIWkFkeTlva3hJM2Zydz09>.

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