



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 15, 2023

Law and Order Committee Chair Charles-Newton calls for increased partnership with federal government to address violence against Native American women



PHOTO: During a recent government-to-government consultation with the Office of Violence Against Women, Delegate Eugenia Charles-Newton addressed obstacles that the Navajo Nation faces in implementing VAWA grants.

TULSA, Okla. - On Wednesday, Aug. 9, during the 2023 Department of Justice Annual Government-to-Government Violence Against Women Tribal Consultation, Council Delegate Eugenia Charles-Newton (Shiprock), who chairs the Law and Order Committee, called for increased partnership between the federal government and tribal nations in addressing the epidemic of violence against Native American women.

“Currently, we’re working with fragmented services and similar programs that operate under different departments,” Delegate Charles-Newton said. “This leads to widespread miscommunication and often, non-intervention. Federal departments need to work together for the betterment of tribes.”

In her testimony, Delegate Charles-Newton addressed the obstacles that tribal nations face regarding grant funding, public safety, funding of program staff, funding of critical tribal coalitions, and data management.

Although the 2005 reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) created grants for tribal governmental programs aimed at decreasing the incidence of violent crimes against

Indian women, Delegate Charles-Newton said the policies surrounding the VAWA grants are problematic.

“Many of these grants don’t really fix the problems we are seeing within our communities and within our tribal boundaries,” she said.

Delegate Charles-Newton recommended that federal officials eliminate the ‘one size fits all’ grant funding method because not all tribes face the same obstacles in terms of land base, enrollment, public safety services, employment opportunities, infrastructure, and jurisdictional overlap.

The Navajo Nation extends into three states, and consists of trust land, checkerboard BLM lands, state and county lands, private fee simple lands, and more. The Nation has an enrollment of over 400,000 members with roughly half living off the Nation.

“Our tribe is different and should have different factors considered when it comes to how grant funds are administered to the Nation,” Delegate Charles-Newton said. “From 2018 to 2020, our public safety service calls numbered approximately 239,376. In that same time frame, we had 21,429 arrests. Our police department has only 228 patrol officers covering 27,000 square miles with roughly 200,000 people living on it. These stats do not mirror the data across all tribal nations.”

Some tribal nations have less than 30 enrolled members and work with state, county, or municipal public safety services to assist in their communities.

Delegate Charles-Newton said that VAWA funding needs to be made available for staffing and salaries to those working within these program areas and recommended that grants be accessible to tribal coalitions that address domestic violence services on tribal nations.

“How can you create a grant to address domestic violence but not properly have funds allocated to staffing? Without this critical component, the giving of grants does nothing,” she said. “If we combined the efforts of tribes and coalitions, we could have a united front ensuring our victims are getting the help they need.”

Regarding data management, Delegate Charles-Newton called for grant funding to strengthen the system of reporting that is used to monitor and prosecute violent offenders including minors.

To support this request, she offered an account of a situation in which an elementary student was sexually assaulted by a classmate, but the incident went unreported. The offender left the school and went to another where he did the same thing. If this offense was reported and tracked, it could have saved another person from being victimized.

“We need pertinent data to be tracked and accessible to multidisciplinary teams who contribute to and observe these reports. Currently, a unified system of reporting and review does not exist,” she said. “We need a data management grant that allows sharing of information that can assist young victims and offenders. This type of information sharing is critical to protecting our communities.”



PHOTO: Delegate Eugenia Charles-Newton, Navajo Nation First Lady Jasmine Blackwater-Nygren, Restoring Ancestral Winds Director Yolanda Francisco, Navajo Nation President Dr. Buu Nygren, and NAMUS Tribal Program Specialist Cornelia Perry.

Delegate Charles-Newton stated that over 84% of Native women experience violence in their lifetime with over 56% reporting they have experienced sexual violence.

“We need to increase the chances of restorative care, prosecution, and accountability. Funding needs to be directed to restorative justice programs for victims and minors who suffer from resulting trauma,” she said. “Trauma can go unseen and affect the development of children. We need to mitigate this trauma.”

The Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women Director Rosie Hildago agreed that many tribes called for strengthened partnerships between tribal nations and the federal government. According to Hildago, the Department of Justice is committed to upholding Tribal sovereignty and the nation-to-nation partnership that addresses gender-based violence.

“The Office on Violence Against Women is committed to taking recommendations from the consultation to implement the protections and resources authorized in the Violence Against Women Act,” Director Hildago said. “This is a continuous process, and we will strive to be responsive, inclusive, and collaborative in our joint efforts. OVW will proactively review grant processes to ensure the efficient provision of essential resources to our Tribal partners.”

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