



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Missing and Murdered Diné Relative Task Force hosts annual Sexual Assault Awareness Walk



Members of the Missing and Murdered Diné Relative Task Force, advocates and the Navajo Nation Youth Advisory Council attended the Sexual Assault Awareness Walk.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — On Monday, the Missing and Murdered Diné Relative Task Force held its annual Sexual Assault Awareness Walk, bringing together survivors, families, advocates, and community leaders in a unified call to end sexual violence across the Navajo Nation.

The walk served as both a public show of solidarity and an educational effort to raise awareness about the lasting impacts of sexual assault and the resources available to survivors.

Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty, who serves as chair of the task force, emphasized the shared responsibility of leadership and community in addressing violence and supporting survivors.

“As leaders, we must continue pushing for laws that better protect our people and ensure victims of crime receive the care and justice they deserve,” said Delegate Crotty. “This walk is a message to our relatives that they are not alone. We see you, we stand with you, and we are here to support you every step of the way.”

The awareness walk highlighted the importance of community education, prevention, and advocacy. Participants included representatives from Victim Witness Services of Northern

Arizona, Utah Navajo Health Services, AMA Doo Ałchini Bighan, Inc., the Division for Children and Family Services, and federal partners.

Speaker Crystalyne Curley offered words of encouragement, reaffirming the Navajo Nation Council's commitment to survivors and those working on the front lines.

"We stand with every survivor and every advocate who continues this difficult but necessary work," said Speaker Curley. "This walk reflects our shared commitment to protecting our people and ensuring that no one has to face these challenges alone."

Althea James, a victim advocate with the Division for Children and Family Services, spoke about the harm caused by victim blaming, stressing that sexual assault affects individuals emotionally, spiritually, and mentally. She urged families and communities to break cycles of intergenerational trauma by supporting victims and creating safe, nurturing environments for those seeking help.

Laurelle Sheppard, a task force member and program manager at Victim Witness Services of Northern Arizona, addressed the connection between sexual assault, child abuse, and missing and murdered Indigenous people. She highlighted the need for policy reform, including improvements to Title 17, and emphasized that Victim Witness Services provides 24-hour advocacy to victims regardless of whether a police report has been filed.

Loretta Halwood, executive director of AMA Doo Ałchini Bighan, Inc., reassured participants that shelter and support services remain available to anyone in need, underscoring the importance of accessible and consistent care for survivors.

Deputy Division Director Sonlatsa Jim discussed the Diné Action Plan and its coordinated approach to addressing violence through multiple task forces. She explained how efforts related to violence prevention, substance abuse, suicide prevention, and missing and murdered Diné relatives are interconnected and require a unified, community-driven response.

Regina Roanhorse-Begay, regional outreach coordinator for the U.S. Department of Justice Missing or Murdered Indigenous Persons Program, recognized the collaborative work of tribal and local advocates. She also emphasized the commitment of federal prosecutors to pursue sexual assault cases, noting that these crimes leave lasting impacts not only on individuals but on entire families and communities.

The Sexual Assault Awareness Walk continues to serve as a platform for education, healing, and outreach. As the Missing and Murdered Diné Relative Task Force advances its work, the walk remains a reminder of the strength found in unity and the importance of sustained advocacy.

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