



The 24TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL  
Office of the Speaker

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## **Law and Order Committee on Capitol Hill lobbying for public safety and judicial**



*PHOTO: Law and Order Committee Chairwoman Eugenia Charles-Newton, and Council Delegates Vince James and Nathaniel Brown advocated for funding for Navajo Nation judicial and public safety facilities this week on Capitol Hill. They were joined by Legislative Staff Assistants Hope McDonald-Lonetree and Sherylene Yazzie.*

WASHINGTON — The Law and Order Committee is on Capitol Hill this week to advocate for the construction of judicial and public safety complexes on the Navajo Nation. Chairwoman Eugenia Charles-Newton (Shiprock), Council Delegate Vince James (Cornfields, Ganado, Jeddito, Kinlichee, Steamboat) and Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown (Chilchinbeto, Dennehotso, Kayenta) are lobbying for Navajo communities at the House and Senate. Kayenta Township Manager Gabriel Yazzie is also in attendance to advocate on behalf of the Kayenta District Court project.

Chairwoman Charles-Newton said the Navajo delegation came to the Hill with one goal, educating congressional staff about the public safety needs of the Navajo Nation. “A large portion of our facilities have become dilapidated and condemned,” she said, adding that Shiprock Police District serves three states and the public safety facility has only been operating at 10 percent in the past year.

Chairwoman Charles-Newton said public safety concerns have increased and Shiprock Police officers should not be left considering what an arrest would mean, which currently entails transporting to Crownpoint, N.M. or Kayenta, Ariz., both located more than 100 miles away. “An officer may have to spend four to five hours on transporting one individual and that interferes with public safety because officers are removed from their communities during that timeframe,” she said. “In the past, Navajo has advocated for more money to address their manpower, but very

little has been done for the facilities on Navajo. With each visit, Navajo is simply trying to remind the federal government of its trust responsibilities. Right now, Navajo is doing what they can with limited resources and manpower when it comes to arresting people and not having anywhere to house them, that presents a major issue that needs addressing.”

The Navajo delegation received word that the BIA construction for jails was approved around \$40 million. There’s been an increase in U.S. Department of Justice for construction as well. The Navajo Nation is requesting an increase for both of those line items.

Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown said his chapters are executing self-determination when it comes to public safety for their communities. “We’re reclaiming our communities when it comes to bootlegging and the illegal sale of drugs. Our communities have said they are going to be the eyes and ears for the police department. We’re working with the National Guard for sting operations on bootlegging,” he said. Council Delegate Brown also spoke about the need to keep Kayenta and surrounding chapters safe for visiting tourists traveling to Monument Valley Navajo Tribal Park and other scenic points of interest. He also spoke about the missing and murdered indigenous relatives and the efforts to heal families and prevent human trafficking.

During the meetings, the Navajo delegation provided a 12-page document to House and Senate staffers, which included a letter from Speaker Seth Damon and Chairwoman Charles-Newton on the Window Rock and Shiprock public safety facility requests for facility condition assessments, the facility costs including operations and maintenance, construction and staffing for 12 judicial and public safety projects across the Navajo Nation, case load statistics, and photos with narratives on the project need for Navajo public safety and judicial improvements.

One project on the list was for the Dilkon Police Department, which recently closed its doors for health reasons and left the community without police presence. Chairwoman Charles-Newton said, “No community should be left without public safety protection.” She said the importance of not only keeping communities safe, but also the need for economic development. “What business is going to invest in Navajo if public safety cannot be offered?” she asked.

Chairwoman Charles-Newton also stressed the need for the federal government to assess the current conditions of Navajo, but to also consider that of Indian Country since she chairs the Public Safety and Justice Subcommittee at the Tribal Interior Budget Council. She said, “The facility list from the BIA is a start, but also requires updating since many tribes across Indian Country have addressed their facility concerns through gaming revenues. The Navajo Nation, on the other hand, has matched funding for the needed public safety and judicial facilities, but more funding is required to provide construction costs, staffing, and operations and maintenance,” she said.

Sherylene Yazzie, Legislative Staff Assistant with the Office of the Speaker said, “In preparation for the Tribal-Interior Budget Council meeting, Chairwoman Charles-Newton and the Navajo Nation Council are working on a resolution to be presented at TIBC. We are all facing a crisis with a shortage of public safety manpower, but we must also address the facility concerns as well,” she said.

The Navajo delegation also advocated for Indian Health Services funding for inmates in tribal jail to receive basic healthcare, including mental health counseling to address the issues that led to incarceration and to reduce the rate of recidivism. The need for funding a medical examiner’s office for the Shiprock Public Safety and Judicial Complex and Window Rock Public Safety and Judicial Complex was also discussed. Currently, Navajo Criminal Investigators have to serve as coroner and investigator when they should be devoted to investigating cases.

Council Delegate Vince James said the Navajo Nation, like much of Indian Country, is hurting when it comes to public safety and judicial issues. “Just the other day, our brothers and sisters in the White Mountain Apache Nation lost a police officer in the line of duty. These dangers exist and are what our tribal public safety officers facing every day,” he said.

The Navajo delegation met with Sen. John Barrasso’s office (R-Wyo.), Sen. Steve Daines’ office (R-Mont.), Sen. Martha McSally’s office (R-Ariz.), Rep. Ben Ray Lujan’s office (D-N.M.), Rep. Tom O’Halloran’s office (D-Ariz.), Eugenia Tyner-Dawson, Senior Tribal Affairs Advisor for BIA Office of Justice Services, and Tracy Toulou, Director of the Office of Tribal Justice with the U.S. Department of Justice.

The delegation will continue with meetings on Capitol Hill through Feb. 21, including the Department of Veterans Affairs (pertaining to public safety matters), and other meetings with the House and Senate. Chairwoman Charles-Newton will chair her first sub-committee meeting in March for TIBC. “Navajo is usually at the forefront of tackling issues in Indian Country and if facility needs are what we are dealing with, I can only imagine what other tribes are facing,” she said, adding that she will advocate for all tribes across Indian Country when it comes to public safety and judicial issues.



*PHOTO: The Navajo delegation met with Tracy S. Toulou, Director of the Office of Tribal Justice at the U.S. Department of Justice.*

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