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New Mexico Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Task Force Gets Members

SANTA FE – Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham on Wednesday completed appointments to the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Task Force.

The task force, established by the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Task Force Act, will collaborate with tribal governments, tribal law enforcement and the U.S. Department of Justice to determine the scope of the problem, identify barriers and create partnerships to improve processes for reporting and investigating cases.

The task force must report its findings and recommendations to the Governor, the legislative council service library, and the appropriate interim legislative committee before Nov. 1, 2020.

“We’ve known of this problem for far too long without acting. We will no longer stand by silently as our Indigenous women and girls are victimized,” said Governor Lujan Grisham.

“We recognize that Indigenous women in the United States experience some of the highest rates of violence and murder in the country, and we must rise together to give a voice to the Indigenous women in our communities,” said Secretary Lynn Trujillo of the Indian Affairs Department. “Through the task force we will work together to make effective and data-driven decisions to protect our Indigenous women and girls.”

“Collecting the data of violence against Indigenous women is a first step,” said Deputy Secretary Nadine Padilla. “Our native women deserve better and we need additional resources to properly address this epidemic. By working together, we can make New Mexico tribal communities safer and stronger for all.”

“New Mexico has the highest number of cases involving missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in the entire country and that is unacceptable,” said E. Paul Torres, Chairman of the All Pueblo Council of Governors. “This enforces the fact that we need to develop safety initiatives that respond to the unique cultural and traditional needs of each of our tribal communities. By developing this task force, we will bring everyone together to address this crisis and ensure that we are taking direct action as a state to help correct these injustices and secure the protection of our people.”

Mescalero Apache Tribe President Gabe Aguilar said tribal members across Indian Country know the statistics all too well, and many have firsthand knowledge of violence and abuse of women.

“Only through task forces like this one, where we can build relationships and share ideas, can we overcome the hurdles that have long stymied efforts to address this pervasive problem. I applaud the governor and fully support this effort,” said President Aguilar.

“Women deserve to feel safe in their homes and communities”, said Navajo Nation First Lady Phefelia Nez, who called for better data about the problem.

“The shortage in data collection contributes to the ongoing problems, including the lack of prosecution and lack of coordination among local, state, and federal law enforcement. This needs to change so our Indigenous families can begin to restore balance, love and harmony,” said First Lady Nez.

The Indian Affairs Department Secretary will chair the task force, which also includes New Mexico Department of Public Safety Secretary Mark Shea, and Kathy Howkumi of the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs Office of Justice Services.

The members appointed by the Governor are:

- Beata Tsosie, Pueblo representative
- Sharnen Velarde, Jicarilla Apache Nation representative
- Bernalyn Via, Mescalero Apache Tribe representative
- First lady Phefelia Nez, Navajo Nation representative
- Matthew Strand, representative of a statewide or local non-governmental organization that provides legal services to Indigenous women
- Linda Son-Stone, representative of an Indigenous women’s non-governmental organization that provides counseling services to Indigenous women
- Elizabeth Gonzales, representative of the Office of the Medical Investigator
- Becky Jo Johnson, an Indigenous woman who is a survivor of violence or who has lost a loved one to violence

House Bill 278 - Missing & Murdered Indigenous Women:
<https://nmlegis.gov/Sessions/19%20Regular/final/HB0278.pdf>

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