

Pamela Foster
TESTIMONY
March 03, 2022

My name is Pamela Foster and I am a Navajo from the Navajo Nation. On May 02, 2016, my children Ian Mike 9 years old and Ashlynn Mike 11 years old were kidnapped at the bus stop/after school, on the Navajo reservation in New Mexico. My children were abducted by a stranger and taken deep into the desert miles from home where Ian managed to escape and to a great sadness Ashlynn was brutally assaulted and murdered.

With the kidnapping of my children and horrific murder of my daughter I felt a great injustice. It is during the events of the abduction that I found out there were no AMBER Alerts established on the Navajo reservation. There were no 911's to call, and no roadway digital signs. The Tribal Law Enforcement did not act quickly enough and had poor communication systems and had little to no training on missing persons and child abductions. The lack of technology and infrastructure made it difficult to search for my children. Because I felt there was a slow response from Tribal Law Enforcement, I got on social media and reached out to family and friends asking them to share my urgent message. My community had no training regarding abductions plus they had no idea an abduction had occurred. Myself, family and friends reached out to Law Enforcement and Search and rescue teams off reservation and pleaded for help. Due to jurisdictional laws, authorities off reservation were not able to help. They had to receive word from Tribal Police that an abduction had occurred. This amplified the strain we felt. That evening Ian was found by a passerby and taken to Law Enforcement. After what seemed like an eternity, an AMBER Alert was finally issued for Ashlynn 12 hours after we made that first call to Law Enforcement, and 12 precious hours were wasted.

Since the kidnapping of my children, I found out the first 48 hours after an abduction are the most crucial times to search and investigate for a missing person. As each hour passes, the likelihood that a missing person will be found decreases substantially.

I began voicing my concerns about the problems that I faced during the abduction of my children and I found other Tribes were experiencing the same problems as Navajo.

My daughter's death may have been prevented if there was an AMBER Alert in place at the time of her abduction. Prior to the abduction The Navajo Nation had been given the opportunity to implement an AMBER Alert system and they failed to do so.

I began advocating about the tragedy we experienced and vowed to make a difference on Indian country. I spoke about the many crimes that happen to our indigenous people on and off Indian country, kidnapping, sexual assaults, child abuse, violence against women and girls. I also felt the urgency to ask our Leaders to locate all sexual offenders on reservations because many had not registered in the system and their whereabouts were unknown.

Shortly after, I started a petition called "AMBER Alert in In Country Act" to bring protection to indigenous families and their children. With the help of Representatives from Washington, I was able to pass my Bill into law. This Bill was signed into Law on April 13, 2018 and renamed "Ashlynnne Mike AMBER Alert in Indian Country Act". Aslynnne's Law amends the PROTECT Act, help tribes implement their own AMBER Alert systems, help tribes with education and training, and technological challenges encountered by tribes.

We were actively implementing AMBER Alert Legislation directly into Indian Country when covid-19 hit. There's still a lot of reservations which need to implement the AMBER Alert system and hopefully this progress will move forward again.

The dynamics of violence contributing to missing and murdered indigenous people is immensely difficult and challenging to understand. It is important to bring to awareness to the challenges that indigenous people face on a daily basis. To bring attention to the obstacles that can only be fixed by Law makers like you. I am fortunate I had a large platform to share my story, because there are thousands of stories that don't have the media coverage and they have been silenced by falling through the crack of the judicial system.

I hope my story can help make the changes that we desperately need. If it means my story helped to save one life than it was worth sharing.

Thank you!