

TESTIMONY: House Appropriations

1. Read aloud the NAMES OF THOSE MISSING:
 - a. Paul Benally
 - i. Male Dine relative, from Dilkon, Arizona; the earliest known missing Dine we have in our records; Mr. Benally was last seen in California in 1972.
 - b. Anna Curley
 - i. Female Dine relative from Kayenta, Arizona who is the earliest known missing woman we have in our records; Ms. Curley was last seen in Kayenta, Arizona.
 - c. Ella Mae Begay
 - i. An elderly masaani (grandma) from Sweetwater (Tolikan), Arizona who went missing on June 15, 2021.
 - d. Ranelle Bennett
 - i. A beautiful young lady from my community of Shiprock, who also went missing the same day as Grandma Ella Mae, June 15, 2021.
 - e. Everette Charley
 - i. A classmate of mine who I remember danced to Michael Jackson in our 1st grade class; I didn't even know he was missing.
 - f. These are a few of the names I want to read aloud so they know they are not forgotten.
2. Read STATISTICS
 - a. Total number of Dine relatives missing? 75 as of May 1, 2024.
 - b. Total number of Dine relative murdered? That number is unaccounted for since the Navajo Nation lacks the manpower to track those cases properly and lacks the infrastructure to record all cases. We still have 3G on our Nation in certain places on the Navajo Nation and no cell coverage in large areas of our Nation but I digress.
3. 2 MAJOR ISSUES that hinder justice for missing murdered Dine relatives: Jurisdictional lines that many families and relatives don't see, and non-communication and/or miscommunication amongst law enforcement, and non-communication and/or miscommunication with families.
 - a. Invisible jurisdictional lines? Let me explain, crimes that begin in towns that border the Navajo Nation are sometimes passed along to our Navajo Nation law enforcement for jurisdictional reasons. Sadly, because the person is Navajo it is sometimes assumed that Navajo will handle the case. In essence, the buck gets passed.
 - b. And because the Navajo Nation lacks funding, has shortage of law enforcement, and faces recruitment and retention issues, cases go unresolved, lose momentum, and cold cases become frozen cases in time.
 - c. As time marches on, the communication stops and everybody assumes that somebody is doing the work.
 - i. I have a good friend, Vangie Randall, that I have known since high school. She had a loving, kind, caring son named Zachariah Juwaun Shorty.

- ii. On July 21, 2020, Zach was reported missing to the Farmington Police Department in Farmington, New Mexico. Like any mom who finds themselves in that situation, Vangie launched her own missing person party and started looking for Zach. She traveled between friends who lived on and off the Navajo Nation hoping to find him but on July 25, 2020, 4 days after reporting Zach missing, Vangie was informed that her son was found deceased in a field located in Nenahanzaad, New Mexico, on the Navajo Nation.
- iii. Vangie said that when Zach left this world, “a part of me died with him; I am not the same person I used to be.” Vangie wanted me to share with you all today that her fight for justice continues and often starts with a word of prayer.
 - 1. Zach was only 23 years old when he was murdered; and his murderer still walks free.
 - 2. Vangie explained the jurisdictional issues she experienced when she reported Zach missing. The Farmington Police Department, where Vangie went to report her son missing, said Shiprock police department had the case but Shiprock PD said FBI had the case;
 - 3. Vangie said there was no communication between law enforcement about the case and even worse, there was no communication with Vangie about the case.
 - 4. The message I share from Vangie today is she wants justice. She wants Zach to forever be remembered; she said to me, “I want equality with all cases and when someone goes missing, it should be taken seriously and everybody should be communicating.”
- iv. As with many Nations and reservations, The Navajo Nation lacks the proper number of personnel to investigate crimes and when someone goes missing, little to no resources are devoted to the case. And if there are resources available, it often is only for the first few days.
 - 1. The Navajo Nation is 27,000 square miles and has roughly 200,000 Navajo living on the Nation.
 - 2. Our Nation spans across 3 states (Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah) and is said to be the size of West Virginia.
 - 3. We are the largest tribe in the Nation with about 400,000 Navajo citizens registered as Navajo.
 - 4. In terms of law enforcement, we have an estimated 218 law enforcement officers when the national average, per the Tribal Law and Order Act, reports that 2.8 officers are needed per thousand members of the service population. We would need 560 officers to meet the national average.
 - 5. As for Criminal Investigators? The Navajo Nation has 32. These Investigators are responsible for investigating crimes committed by an Indian and those crimes that fall under the Major Crimes Act, 18 USC section 1153.

- a. These 32 Investigators work in join cooperation with the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) and the United States Attorney's Office.
- b. On Navajo, because of the lack of personnel, our Investigators also serve in the unique capacity of being not only investigators, but also coroner and medical examiner.
 - i. Instead of spending their time investigating crimes and looking for our Dine relatives who are missing, our Investigators spend 75% of their time investigating all deaths, even those that are natural. They complete and certify death certificates, review medical records, assess medication(s), conduct home assessments, administer external examinations of the body, draw fluids for lab analysis, review lab reports, conduct interviews, and do much more, to determine cause and manner of death.
- c. Be mindful that Navajo proposed for 2 year funding to establish a medicolegal death investigation system. If approved, this would allow the Navajo Nation to be the first tribe to hire coroners and possibly 1 medical examiner to handle deaths on the Navajo Nation. This would allow our criminal investigators to spend more of their time investigating major crimes such as missing and murdered crimes.

4. CONCLUSION

- a. Aheeh. Thank you for hearing my words.
- b. My name is Eugenia Charles-Newton. I proudly serve my Dine people as a Council Delegate on the 25th Navajo Nation Council. I represent the largest community on the Navajo Nation, Shiprock, New Mexico.
- c. I am bitahnii, born for ashii, my maternal grandfathers are clah chii and my paternal grandfathers are twoi baha.