



STATE OF NEW MEXICO  
INDIAN AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT

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Michelle Lujan Grisham, Governor  
Lynn Trujillo, Secretary  
Nadine Padilla, Deputy Secretary

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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**New Mexico Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Task Force  
Holds First Meeting**

Albuquerque – The New Mexico Indian Affairs Department held the first meeting of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Task Force in Albuquerque today.

The task force, established by the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Act, HB278, will bring together tribal representatives, law enforcement and the U.S. Department of Justice to determine the scope of the problem, identify barriers in policing and develop partnerships that improve processes for reporting and investigating of these 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. HB278 which passed and was signed in 2019 was co-sponsored by Representative Andrea Romero, Representative, Doreen Wonda Johnson, Representative Derrick Lente and Representative Melanie Stansbury.

“The status quo for Indigenous women is unacceptable, and I am encouraged by the fact we are finally taking steps to ensure justice for affected tribal communities,” said Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham. “I want to thank the Legislature, Secretary Trujillo and all the committed stakeholders who have pushed for this work to begin and now have the opportunity to come together and find the solutions Indigenous women and communities expect and deserve.”

“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 on 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’s tribal communities safer and stronger for everyone.”

“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 Phefelia Nez, Navajo Nation First Lady and MMIW task force member, 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>