

## New unit established to help solve Missing, Murdered Indigenous Women and Relatives cases

Written by Staff Reports

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ALBUQUERQUE — Hoping to reunite and heal families, Navajo Nation First Lady Phefelie Nez, 24th Navajo Nation Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty were among those in attendance when the establishment of a sub-unit was announced to solve cases of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Relatives.

A press conference Dec. 16 in Albuquerque to offer support for New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham, New Mexico Indian Affairs Department Secretary Lynn A. Trujillo, and the Second Judicial District Attorney Raúl Torrez, as they signed a memorandum of understanding creating the sub-unit under the Second Judicial District Attorney's Office Crime Strategies Unit in Bernalillo County.

The MMIWR sub-unit will begin identifying all existing and new cases, review cold missing persons cases related to MMIWR, provide investigation and legal assistance, communicate with victims' families, and collaborate with the MMIWR task force, tribal, state, and federal law enforcement agencies.

"On behalf of the Navajo Nation, we thank the state of New Mexico for recognizing the importance of reuniting, restoring, and healing Native families and communities through this historic initiative," First Lady Nez said. "The New Mexico Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Task Force is helping to close the gaps that missing persons cases often fall into, identifying jurisdictional misinterpretations, fostering coordination among tribal nations, and developing innovative strategies to assist law enforcement.

"Today, we move closer to minimizing the number of unsolved MMIWR cases, and healing families on the Navajo Nation, and in New Mexico," she said

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In 2020, the New Mexico MMIWR Task Force released its final report and recommendations to Gov. Lujan Grisham, including reviews and recommendations related to data collection, resources, partnerships, improved reporting and investigation of cases, and increased support for families.

“Today, we witnessed many years of advocacy for our Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Relatives transformed into action,” Crotty said. “The new MMIWR subdivision under the Bernalillo County District Attorney’s Office sets the bar for the rest of the country to protect our sacred women and vulnerable populations in urban areas.

“As a member of the New Mexico MMIWR Task Force, I am proud of our efforts and I’m committed to providing justice and healing to our MMIWR families,” Crotty continued.

Additionally, the sub-unit will support the statewide MMIWR Task Force’s efforts to improve the data collection and analysis on all MMIWR-related cases.