



P.O. Box 129  
St. Michaels, AZ 86511  
Phone: (928) 871-7436  
Fax: (928) 871-7437

**IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**  
**August 11, 2014**

## **Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission meets with Albuquerque Mayor Richard Berry to formulate plans on working together**

**St. Michaels, Arizona** — The brutal July murder of two homeless Navajo men in Albuquerque, N.M., prompted the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission to seek out a meeting with the city's mayor. Navajo Nation Human Rights Commissioner Jennifer Denetdale, PhD., led the commission's inquiry into understanding the city's response to the two senseless deaths. Along with Dr. Denetdale, Interim chief of Staff Leonard Gorman and NNHRC Policy Analyst Lauren Bernally, raised questions as to whether a pervasive pattern of violence is perpetuated against Native Americans and in specific to Navajo Indians living in the streets of Albuquerque. The admission by one of teen perpetrator's that fifty attacks were made to homeless individuals in the last month also raised considerable concern. The fact that a substantial number of the homeless are Native Americans and choose to stay in camps instead of the overnight shelters raise concern with whether many of the fifty attacked were Navajo. Moreover, the response from APD after learning about this and whether they (APD) received any calls on this matter was of great concern. The NNHRC is currently investigating this matter to identify solutions to crimes against Navajos.

The July 24<sup>th</sup> meeting was the initial meeting, to start this discussion and to ask what else the city is doing to protect the homeless, and if it is doing enough, to alleviate crimes against Navajo citizens within city limits.

At the conclusion of this meeting, NNHRC representatives met with the city's human rights program to discuss an early initiative with city of Albuquerque to consider entering into a Memorandum of Understanding between the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission and the City of Albuquerque.

In 2010 under former Mayor Marty Chavez, NNHRC and the same city's human rights office begun negotiations toward the terms of the MOU. However, upon the election of the Mayor Berry the MOU was shelved. Efforts are now underway to revisit the MOU. NNHRC has this six other border towns that surround the Navajo Nation who agreed to uphold the terms of the agreement. The agreement allows for a cooperative and collaborative relationship in addressing race and discrimination issues confront Navajo citizens in border communities.

NNHRC staff took time to meet met with Deputy Chief of Police Eric Garcia to gather information about the COAST program that was established by Mayor Berry to serve the homeless. The program is composed of city officials and local programs that work

together to streamline homeless services for individuals that find themselves without homes in Albuquerque. The program also supports the heading home project which has gain national attention in metropolitan communities with large homeless populations. Albuquerque's program has provided 327 homes for homeless individuals with 36 of that total identified as Native American since 2012. The ethnicity breakdown of how many Navajo families were served will be provided at a later date.

Staff will also meet with local programs that serve Native Americans to understand how services can be improved and why many choose to live in camps and not the shelters provided by the city. There is concern Navajo homeless do not trust the system that is trying to help them. Antidotal information received is that APD are not as friendly and interested as they appear. There is a growing concern that police brutality may have something to do with the perceptions Native Americans have with law enforcement.

At the end of the day, a discussion was started with city officials and the nonprofit organizations that work with American Indians that will formulate and develop a strategy to address issues involving Navajo citizens.

The commission plans on future meetings with the city, and to meet with American Indians dealing homelessness, to identify encounters of discrimination among shelter programs and/or interactions with police officers.

More information is available by contacting the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission at 928-871-7436.

###