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SENATE MEMORIAL 53

54TH LEGISLATURE - STATE OF NEW MEXICO - FIRST SESSION, 2019

INTRODUCED BY

Linda M. Lopez and Michael Padilla

A MEMORIAL

HONORING VICTORIA CHAVEZ, GINA MICHELLE VALDEZ, CINNAMON ELKS,
JULIE CYNDIE NIETO AND THE NINE "JANE DOES" OF THE WEST MESA
MASS GRAVE.

WHEREAS, in 2009, the Albuquerque police department
unearthed the remains of thirteen individuals buried in an
apparent mass grave on the west mesa of Albuquerque; and

WHEREAS, it is believed that most of the remains belong to
women who were buried there by the same individual or
individuals; and

WHEREAS, according to a February 2016 *Albuquerque Journal*
story, only one Albuquerque police department detective
remained assigned to investigate the deaths of the women buried
in the west mesa mass grave; and

WHEREAS, Victoria Chavez, who was last seen in 2003 and

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1 reported missing in 2004, was the first woman whose remains
2 were identified by police; Gina Michelle Valdez, who had been
3 missing since September 2004, was the second woman whose
4 remains were identified by police; Cinnamon Elks, who had been
5 missing since 2004, was the third woman whose remains were
6 identified by police; and Julie Cyndie Nieto, who had been
7 missing since 2004, was the fourth woman whose remains were
8 identified by police; and

9 WHEREAS, the Albuquerque police department compiled a list
10 of women who have been reported missing, which includes Darlene
11 Maria Trujillo, missing since 2001; Sonia Bernadette Lente,
12 missing since 2002; Monica Diana Candelaria, missing since
13 2003; Jamie Barela, missing since 2004; Virginia Ann Cloven,
14 missing since 2004; Doreen Márquez, missing since 2004; Anselma
15 Guerra, missing since 2004; Evelyn Jesúsmaria Salazar, missing
16 since 2004; Veronica Romero, missing since 2004; Anna Vigil,
17 missing since 2005; Shawntell Waites, missing since 2005; Nina
18 Herron, missing since 2005; Felipa Gonzales, missing since
19 2005; and Leah Rachelle Peebles, missing since 2006; and

20 WHEREAS, families of missing women from across New Mexico
21 file missing persons reports with police, to no avail, and
22 these families continue to search, in agony and without
23 support, for their loved ones; and

24 WHEREAS, according to the federal bureau of
25 investigation's national crime information center, there were

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1 eighty-eight thousand eighty-nine active missing person cases
2 reported in the United States as of December 2017; and

3 WHEREAS, the women whose remains were identified in the
4 west mesa mass gravesite were depicted by both the police and
5 the media not as victims of violence and crime, but rather as
6 criminals themselves; and

7 WHEREAS, the labeling of these victims creates an
8 atmosphere of ambivalence with regard to the crimes that have
9 been perpetrated against them, while also denying their
10 humanity and their role in our communities as daughters,
11 mothers, sisters, cousins, nieces and granddaughters; and

12 WHEREAS, the deceased and missing women of New Mexico
13 deserve diligence and respect under the law and in our public
14 discourse, while their families deserve the right to carry
15 their memories with dignity; and

16 WHEREAS, communities across New Mexico are seeking further
17 details and a more thorough explanation of the Albuquerque
18 police department's and the federal bureau of investigation's
19 treatment of the crimes committed against these women, in
20 relation to the collection of evidence at the mass grave and in
21 relation to the methods that were used to determine the facts
22 of the disappearances; and

23 WHEREAS, New Mexico persistently has one of the nation's
24 highest rates of women living in poverty, one of the highest
25 rates of female homicide victims and the second-highest

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1 domestic violence rate in the United States; and

2 WHEREAS, thousands of New Mexico women are not safe in
3 their own homes, in their intimate relationships or in public
4 spaces, and they lack the resources they need to escape the
5 cycle of violence that traps them;

6 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE STATE
7 OF NEW MEXICO that, in recognition of the heinous crimes that
8 have been perpetrated against Victoria Chavez, Gina Michelle
9 Valdez, Cinnamon Elks, Julie Cyndie Nieto and the nine other
10 "Jane Does" of the west mesa mass grave and in recognition of
11 the missing women of New Mexico whose loss continues to be felt
12 in communities across the state, the Albuquerque police
13 department and the Bernalillo county sheriff's department be
14 urged to proceed with due diligence in resolving these murders;
15 and

16 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the mayor of Albuquerque and
17 the members of the Bernalillo county board of county
18 commissioners join in the effort proposed by this memorial to
19 ensure that these crimes are thoroughly investigated and that
20 the resources of the federal bureau of investigation, the
21 Albuquerque police department and the Bernalillo county
22 sheriff's department be employed in the most expeditious manner
23 possible; and

24 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the media change its focus
25 from an emphasis on the victims' characters and lifestyles to

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1 the provision of details of the heinous crimes that resulted in
2 the mass grave on the west mesa of Albuquerque; and

3 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the state of New Mexico ensure
4 that services be available for addiction treatment and
5 rehabilitation for women in need of such services and that
6 state policy and funding be directed toward providing those
7 services to the women who need them rather than toward the
8 criminalization and incarceration of those women; and

9 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that all New Mexicans be encouraged
10 to show their support for women who are victims of violence or
11 who are missing and for their families; and

12 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that copies of this memorial be
13 transmitted to the mayor of Albuquerque, the chair of the
14 Bernalillo county board of county commissioners, the chief of
15 the Albuquerque police department and the Bernalillo county
16 sheriff.