



ALBUQUERQUE – Tom Begaye, Jr., 28, entered a guilty plea Aug. 1 to a six-count indictment charging him with murder, aggravated sexual abuse and kidnapping offenses arising out of the abduction and murder of an 11-year-old Navajo child on May 2, 2016.

Begaye entered the guilty plea under a plea agreement that requires the imposition of a mandatory term of life imprisonment without the possibility of release.

"The Navajo Nation mourned when we learned of the vicious murder of Ashlynne Mike. The Nation has carried this pain ever since. Today, as we learn that her murderer has pleaded guilty to the six charges against him, we have taken one-step forward in healing. We know the pain will be lifelong for Ashlynne's parents and immediate family," President Russell Begaye said. "The Navajo Nation is taking every step necessary to strengthen our laws and emergency response communication system. We are furthering the implementation of an Amber Alert System to protect our children from horrendous crimes such as this one. This tragedy reminds us, as Navajo people, that we must adhere to our traditional teachings of K'é and Hozho in respecting each other. We ask our people to continue to love their children, take care of them, and watch them closely. The Navajo Nation will continue to move forward in protecting our children so that no other life is taken in such a tragic manner."

"Today's guilty plea, which holds Tom Begaye, Jr., fully accountable for kidnapping, sexually abusing and murdering Ashlynne Mike, and for the trauma he inflicted on her brother, is the result of the strong evidence developed by our law enforcement partners who worked tirelessly on this case to secure justice for the victims," Acting U.S. Attorney James D. Tierney said. "Although the guilty plea cannot return Ashlynne to her family or relieve their profound sorrow, we hope that the mandatory sentence of life imprisonment that awaits Begaye will bring a measure of solace to the family and some comfort to a community that was shocked to its core by these brutal crimes. Little in life is more emotionally taxing than losing a child to violence, and we commend Ashlynne's parents for channeling their grief into advocacy to improve the Amber Alert System on the Navajo Nation and other tribal communities in the hope that other families can be spared the heartbreak they have endured."

"The death of any innocent crime victim is tragic, but when it's a child, the impact on law enforcement is doubly hard. We hope today's plea brings justice and some measure of comfort to Ashlynne Mike's family, friends and the community that came together to express its sorrow after her death," Special Agent in Charge Terry Wade of the FBI's Albuquerque Division said. "The FBI thanks the U.S. Attorney's Office and our other partners who worked so hard on this case."

"This case was very unfortunate, as it startled every community within and outside the Navajo Nation. We remain very emotional and devastated over the loss of a little Navajo child from the Shiprock community. It was especially hard for officers of the Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety and other public safety agencies from the surrounding areas who responded and worked this case us. To the citizens of Shiprock who responded and assisted us with the search, I thank each and every one of you," Director Jesse Delmar of the Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety said. "The law enforcement response in this case was exceptional. I praise and thank the core investigators from our Division, the FBI and the U.S. Attorney's office for their excellence and hard work in bringing justice to the victims and their family."

The FBI and Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety arrested Begaye, an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation from Waterflow, N.M., on May 4, 2016, on a criminal complaint charging Begaye with kidnapping, sexually abusing and murdering an 11-year-old Navajo child on May 2, 2016, on the Navajo Indian Reservation in San Juan County, N.M. On May 24, 2016, a federal grand jury returned an indictment charging Begaye with six offenses: first-degree murder, felony murder, kidnapping resulting in death, aggravated sexual abuse resulting in death (two counts), and kidnapping of a minor. According to the indictment, Begaye killed a female child under the age of 12 years by striking her with a tire iron, and caused her death while kidnapping and sexually assaulting her. The indictment also charged Begaye with kidnapping a second victim, a

male child under the age of 18 years.

During today's change of plea hearing, Begaye pled guilty to all six-counts of the indictment. According to the plea agreement, Begaye kidnapped the 11-year-old victim and her nine-year-old brother on May 2, 2016, by tricking the children into getting into his van by offering to drive them to their home. Instead, Begaye drove them to a location near the Shiprock Monument where he led the victim away from the van to an area beyond her brother's field of view. Begaye sexually assaulted the victim before killing her by strangling her and repeatedly hitting her on the head and face with a tire iron. Begaye then returned to his van, directed the victim's brother to get out of the van, and drove away, leaving the child behind.

Begaye has been in federal custody since his arrest and remains detained pending his sentencing hearing, which has yet to be scheduled.

The FBI and Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety investigated the case with assistance from the FBI Child Abduction Rapid Deployment Team, U.S. Marshals Service, New Mexico State Police, San Juan County Sheriff's Office and the Farmington Police Department. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Niki Tapia-Brito and Jennifer M. Rozzoni are prosecuting the case.

The case is being prosecuted under a federal anti-violence initiative that targets "the worst of the worst" offenders for federal prosecution. Under this initiative, the U.S. Attorney's Office and federal law enforcement agencies work with New Mexico's District Attorneys and state, local and tribal law enforcement agencies to target violent or repeat offenders for federal prosecution primarily based on their prior criminal convictions with the goal of removing repeat offenders from communities in New Mexico for as long as possible.