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Defendant prosecuted as part of federal initiative to address the epidemic incidence of violence against native women

ALBUQUERQUE – Shayliss Ellsworth, 24, an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation who resides in Crownpoint, pleaded guilty on Nov. 27 in federal court in Albuquerque to assault charges. Under the terms of his plea agreement, Ellsworth faces a prison sentence within the range of 70 to 87 months followed by a term of supervised release to be determined by the court.

Ellsworth was arrested on June 21 on a criminal complaint charging him with stabbing two Navajo women with a knife on June 17, on the Navajo Indian Reservation in McKinley County. As the result of the assault, the first victim suffered a cut across her face through her mouth, stab wounds on her left side and right breast, and a cut and stab wound to her left arm, which cut her artery causing profuse bleeding.

The second victim suffered cuts on her neck and finger and a stab wound on her right arm. According to the complaint, the first victim underwent multiple surgeries including a surgery to amputate her left arm as the result of the assault.

Ellsworth was subsequently charged in a four-count indictment on July 11, with two counts of assault with a dangerous weapon, a knife, and two counts of assault resulting in serious bodily injury. According to the indictment, the crimes took place on June 17, on the Navajo Indian Reservation in McKinley County.

During the Nov. 27 proceedings, Ellsworth pleaded guilty to two counts of assault resulting in serious bodily injury. In the plea agreement, Ellsworth admitted that on June 17 he assaulted

two women with a knife causing serious bodily injury to both. Ellsworth further admitted that the first victim suffered stab wounds to her right chest, cuts to her left arm, a deep puncture wound that cut an artery and disfiguring cuts to her face.

The first victim underwent multiple surgeries and eventually had her left arm amputated as the result of the injuries caused by Ellsworth. Ellsworth also admitted that the second victim suffered stab wounds to her right shoulder and neck, which required surgery to close.

Ellsworth remains in custody pending a sentencing hearing, which has yet to be scheduled.

This case was investigated by the Farmington office of the FBI and the Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Jennifer M. Rozzoni and Niki Tapia-Brito are prosecuting the case as part of the Tribal Special Assistant U.S. Attorney (Tribal SAUSA) Pilot Project in the District of New Mexico, which is sponsored by the Justice Department's Office on Violence Against Women under a grant administered by the Pueblo of Laguna.

The Tribal SAUSA Pilot Project seeks to train tribal prosecutors in federal law, procedure and investigative techniques to increase the likelihood that every viable violent offense against Native women is prosecuted in either federal court or tribal court, or both.

The Tribal SAUSA Pilot Project was largely driven by input gathered from annual tribal consultations on violence against women, and is another step in the Justice Department's on-going efforts to increase engagement, coordination and action on public safety in tribal communities.