

Quote from Ethel Branch, Navajo Nation Attorney General:

“I have reviewed the complaint in the human trafficking lawsuit brought against Dineh Benally and his associates by workers employed in their unlawful marijuana operations. The allegations are horrendous and shocking, but not surprising based on the Navajo Nation’s experience addressing these operations. At one of our darkest hours, when Navajo law enforcement was focused day and night on responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, and our Navajo People faced the highest COVID-19 infection rates in the country, Benally and his associates took advantage of the Nation, and tried to personally enrich themselves. As the complaint alleges, they also misled and took advantage of hard-working individuals trying to make a living for their families during the uncertain times of the global pandemic.”

“I commend these brave individuals for coming forward to seek justice. As we approach the three-year anniversary of the multi-agency law enforcement operation that eradicated these illegal marijuana operations on the Navajo Nation and is considered to have been the largest such eradication ever in the state of New Mexico. It is long past time for the federal government to take action and hold those responsible to account. As noted in the 2020 press release by the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the District of New Mexico, ‘During the court-authorized operation, agents eradicated approximately 260,000 live plants and processed an estimated 60,000 pounds (30 tons) of evidence. Additionally, agents found 19 trash bags filled with fully processed marijuana - 1,000 pounds - in baggies, ready for distribution.’ Yet, to date, nobody responsible for the harm caused to the Navajo Nation and to these workers by Benally and his associates’ illegal marijuana operation has been prosecuted. This must change. The Navajo Nation and the Shiprock, New Mexico community deserve justice. Those responsible need to face their day in court. The Navajo Nation calls on the federal government to take action on this matter in the same spirit of cooperation that law enforcement showed in eradicating the horrendous marijuana operation run by Benally and his associates.”