

NINA MOINI: Minnesotans will get a chance to hear stories collected for the Governor's Truth Council starting this Week. The council was created in March of this year to document the impacts of Operation Metro Surge and Operation PARRIS on Minnesotans. The first of four public presentations sharing the results of that work community will take place tomorrow.

Jennifer Prestholdt is Vice Chair of the Council and Deputy Executive Director of the Advocates for Human Rights. Thanks for being with us to tell us more about it, Jennifer.

JENNIFER PRESTHOLDT: Thank you, Nina. Thanks so much for having me back.

NINA MOINI: Absolutely. We had you on in June, just as the Council was sort of beginning its work. Would you catch us up on what's happened since?

JENNIFER PRESTHOLDT: Absolutely. So we have a very short timeline, as you remember, with the final report being due December 1. So we have been very busy. The major focus has been reaching out to individuals and communities and encouraging them to share their stories about their experiences and the impacts of Operation Metro Surge and Operation PARRIS.

So we've been engaging with hundreds of people. Hundreds of people have participated by sharing their stories individually, by coming together in groups and have community dialogues, so group story collecting. And we've actually also trained more than 200 individuals as story collectors.

NINA MOINI: OK. Can you talk a little bit about what that training entails?

JENNIFER PRESTHOLDT: Yeah. So, it's about a two-hour training that we have worked, and Advocates for Human Rights is the implementing partner for the Truth Council, so we've been responsible for this piece of it. So it sort walks people through how to do a trauma-informed interview with someone.

But the stories really are, it's voluntary. It's whatever people want to share. So we have a guide that helps to ask general questions and some follow-up questions, and then some of the logistics of how most of the stories are collected on audio. And so, some logistics about how you do that, and how you close the interview, and make sure that people are feeling comfortable and ready to go back into the world after sharing such an emotional story.

NINA MOINI: And will you give us a sense from the different walks of life of Minnesotans that you're hearing from? Are you hearing from immigrants mostly? Are you also hearing from folks who maybe acted as legal observers, people in school communities who had interactions with federal officers? I mean, how far does this span?

JENNIFER PRESTHOLDT: Every Minnesotan, everyone who experiences Minnesota, we are encouraging them to share their stories. And so it really is a wide section of population. So we definitely are working with immigrant-led groups, working with businesses, working with religious organizations that provided mutual aid. It really is a tremendous breadth of Minnesotans.

And one of the things that we're hearing just out of a really broad takeaway is how far reaching the impacts were on Minnesotans. So people from all walks of life throughout, not just in the metro, but in greater Minnesota, were affected by the actions of the federal agents. And so these are some of the things that we are hoping to highlight in the public meetings that are coming up starting tomorrow.

NINA MOINI: And, what are you hearing in terms of how people have been impacted by that trauma, and is that part of the Truth Council's work, to talk about how people are doing six or seven months later in their day-to-day?

JENNIFER PRESTHOLDT: Yes. And as the Truth Council, we'll be talking more about like, how we frame things in the final report, but absolutely, people were really traumatized, and that's ongoing. There are definitely ongoing needs for mental health support.

But also recognizing that even though there has been a drawdown of federal agents, that didn't fix everything. That trauma is still existing. And we're actually hearing from some of the story collection process that now, six months later, they're actually seeing spikes or learning in their communities about spikes in trauma. So that's huge.

And then the fear hasn't subsided, either. Federal agents are still operating. There's still surveillance. There's still intimidation. And so, that's the context that this is, it's still going on.

NINA MOINI: So turning to these public meetings, can you talk a little bit about how the four presentations will be structured, and then how people can take part or be a part of it?

JENNIFER PRESTHOLDT: Yeah, so the Truth Council itself is made up of 15 community members. I serve as the vice chair. And the chair is former or retired Judge Peter Cahill. But, this is a really great group, a representative group of Minnesota. And so we've been talking a lot about what is the story of this experience in Minnesota, and how do we capture our experience and not let that narrative be taken away?

And so, we have this kind of narrative arc over the four public meetings. The first public meeting tomorrow will really focus on the violations of the Constitution and the rule of law. The second will focus more on the impacts, so the community impacts, the health impacts, education impacts, the economic impacts. The third will be about the community response, and the fourth will be on how this all fits into the national setup.

So what people can expect to see starting tomorrow is a combination of personal testimonies. People will be testifying about specific aspects of their experience and also share the ways that they were impacted by the operations, but also, some subject matter expert testimony, as well. So how these experiences that you will be hearing from how they actually violate not only the US Constitution, but the Minnesota Constitution.

So, that's the first piece of the picture. We encourage people. It'll be at the Minnesota State Capitol, so that's the People's House, and it's open to the public, but people can also watch online. It will be live streamed and available after the event on the Truth Council's YouTube channel.

NINA MOINI: OK. Yeah, thanks for breaking that down. So the final report, due in December, how for people who aren't familiar with how things work at the Capitol or what are lawmakers going to do with a report like this, what do you hope comes out of it?

JENNIFER PRESTHOLDT: Well, I would really like to see an acknowledgment of the depth and the breadth of the experience of Minnesotans and also an acknowledgment of what needs to change in order to prevent recurrence. So the recommendations we are looking, we are also encouraging members of the public to give us recommendations for what kinds of reforms need to happen. Legislative policy, at the local level, at the state level, at the federal level, in order to help Minnesota recover and to prevent reoccurrence.

NINA MOINI: And how can people continue to stay up-to-date and just engaged with the Council's work? Like, can people submit stories still or has that portion ended?

JENNIFER PRESTHOLDT: No, no, no. That is, it's actually ramping up. We are expanding and collecting more and more stories. And we feel like it's really important that, that process remain open, at least through the end of this particular Truth Council process. The Truth Council itself was created by executive order, and so it will go away on January 4. But Advocates is considering how we can continue to collect these stories.

So if you go to theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/mntruthcouncil, there's information about how to participate and share your story individually. Or if you want to be a partner with us and host a community dialogue, we would love to do that, as well. So, yes, please, for anyone listening out there, please consider how you want to be involved and how you want to participate.

NINA MOINI: All right, Jennifer, thanks for coming by and sharing about the Truth Council with us. We really appreciate your time.

JENNIFER PRESTHOLDT: Thank you so much for the opportunity to be here.

NINA MOINI: Jennifer Prestholdt is the Vice Chair of the Minnesota Truth Council.