

Navajo Nation discusses anti-cyberbullying measure

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WINDOW ROCK – On Jan. 16 during a special meeting, the Law and Order Committee received a report from the Navajo Nation Department of Justice, Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President, and the Navajo Nation Peacemaking Program, regarding cyberbullying on the Navajo Nation.

During the report, the committee also raised concerns regarding a bill that seeks to amend several sections of Title 17 of the Navajo Nation Code to define and criminalize cyberbullying, and to implement penalties.

On Jan. 11, the Naabik'iyáti' Committee issued a “do pass” recommendation for the bill. The Navajo Nation Council will next consider the bill, which would also require consideration by the Navajo Nation president. LOC member Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Low Mountain, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tachee/Blue Gap, Tselani/Cottonwood) questioned whether or not the Judicial Branch would have the resources and personnel to prosecute offenses related to cyberbullying.

“The Judicial Branch lacks prosecutors and judges, which raises concerns if the Nation’s courts are ready to prosecute cyberbulling offenses. Addressing cyberbulling through the offenses of manslaughter, stalking, and harassment also needs to be analyzed carefully,” Begay said.

LOC member Council Delegate Otto Tso (Tó Nanees Dizi) said that offenses related to cyberbullying must be prosecuted to deliver justice for victims and to deter such offenses. “I hope the new policy would also keep parents of juvenile offenders accountable. The teachings of respect, love, and integrity should be taught at the home. Parents need to take responsibility

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if their child commits cyberbullying because it can cause dangerous consequences, such as suicide and physiological distress,” Tso said.

According to NNDOJ attorney Daniel Moquin, parents under the Navajo Nation Áłchínií Bi Beehaz’áanii Act of 2011 may be civilly liable for the actions of their children if they fail to provide adequate supervision and are bound by clear and convincing evidence, which would include cyberbullying.

LOC vice chair Council Delegate Raymond Smith, Jr. (Houck, Klagetoh, Nahata Dziil, Tsé Si áni, Wide Ruins) said that if the Council approves the bill and it is signed into law, the stakeholders need to provide extensive education and awareness of the new policy regarding cyberbullying on the Navajo Nation.

The Law and Order Committee approved the report with a 3-0 vote.