

Law and Order Committee discusses Diné Marriage Act, public safety

Written by gallupsun

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TOHATCHI — The 25th Navajo Nation Council's Law and Order Committee held a regular committee meeting on Aug. 25 at the Tohatchi Chapter House to hear two legislations and listen to the concerns of the community regarding public safety.

Officials from the Navajo Nation Police Department, Department of Public Safety and Department of Justice and Chapter Officials from Tohatchi were in attendance.

Legislation No. 0139-23, sponsored by Council Delegate Seth Damon (Baahaali, Chilchiltah, Manuelito, Red Rock, Rock Springs, Tsayatoh), seeks to repeal 9 N.N.C. § 2 (C) of the Diné Marriage Act of 2005, to uniformly recognize all marriages within the Navajo Nation and amend other provisions in Title 9 of the Navajo Nation Code related to marriage within the Navajo Nation.

LOC Chair Eugenia Charles-Newton (Shiprock) motioned to move the legislation forward. In the absence of a seconding motion, the legislation still moves forward to the Budget and Finance Committee.

LOC also voted 2-0 in support of Legislation No. 0203-23, sponsored by Damon, amending the Navajo Nation Procurement Act at 12 N.N.C. §301-§371 and the Navajo Nation Business Opportunity Act at 5 N.N.C. §201-§215. The legislation moves forward to the BFC, Naabik'iyati' Committee and Navajo Nation Council for final consideration.

BFC Chair and legislation co-sponsor Shaandiin Parrish (Chilchinbeto, Dennehotso, Kayenta) presented the bill and addressed questions from the attendees regarding the budgeting process. Parrish provided a brief overview including explanations on general funds, unmet needs, federal funds verses state, county, Fiscal Recovery Fund and American Rescue Plan Act funding.

A community member provided input regarding the procurement process as it relates to small business owners and the challenges of obtaining costly liability insurance in excess of over \$1 million.

Parrish said that proposed amendments to the Procurement Act and Navajo Nation Business Opportunity Act will provide equal representation between small business owners and corporations.

The LOC also received concerns regarding safety issues within the community and surrounding areas.

Division of Public Safety Executive Director Michael Anderson and Navajo Nation Chief of Police Daryl Noon addressed concerns regarding the excessive delays in response times, the need for additional officers throughout the Nation, E911 rural addressing, the need for police station substations, elimination of dispatch districting, and others.

Anderson said DPS is addressing E911 rural addressing and response times which he anticipates will improve within the next five years. Anderson advised that DPS will utilize available ARPA funding of \$35 million dollars to implement an initiative to reduce DPS response times for agencies like law enforcement, EMS, and Fire and Rescue. DPS plans to have two main dispatch centers to service the Navajo Nation once infrastructure is implemented. The proposed facilities are planned for Kayenta, Arizona and Yatahey, New Mexico.

Noon addressed the need for additional officers and cited challenges such as low interest in recruitment, uncompetitive wages, challenging background checks, and underqualified academy candidates. Noon stated there are currently 170-180 police officers to service the entire Navajo Nation, which does not provide adequate service to the Navajo people per capita.

"Dispatch and officers currently work within the territory they are assigned. We are trying to rid the imaginary boundary lines," Noon said. "The message we are pushing is just go and provide the service that the community expects. We can correct the administrative duties later."

Charles-Newton addressed the Committee and the 25th Navajo Nation Council's efforts to obtain funding through the Tribal Interior Budget Council to address Navajo public safety needs. She stressed concerns over outdated Title 17 laws that hinder implementation of needs regarding law enforcement within schools, rehabilitation detox centers, crime data collection to

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build courts, substations, jails and manpower to staff these facilities.

“We, at the 25th Navajo Nation Council, are working diligently to address the needs and funding for the safety of our Navajo people,” Charles-Newton said.

