

Pinon community advocates for a police district to address high crime rates

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PINON, Ariz. – On June 27, members of the 23rd Navajo Nation Council received a report from Pinon chapter officials and community members regarding public safety issues and the need for a police sub-station.

The rural community of Pinon is located 50-miles west of Chinle on Navajo Partitioned Land and within the Chinle Judicial District.

Pinon Chapter President Bessie Allen said the community has been experiencing high rates of crime and shootings stemming from two rival gangs within the past year. She also stated that the chapter is proposing to construct a police sub-station to address the crime issues.

“The crimes committed by the two rivalry gangs are getting out of control. Our schools, public buildings, shopping centers, and residential housing are not safe from shootings, vandalism, and assaults,” Allen said. The chapter has accomplished building a court facility but we need a police station. We need our elders and children safe. We need to take back our community.”

Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Low Mountain, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tachee/Blue Gap, Tselani/Cottonwood) stated that the community is in great need of a police station and recommended that Pinon become its own police district.

Currently there are seven judicial districts within the Navajo Nation located in Shiprock, Dilkon, Tó Nanees Dizi, Kayenta, Crownpoint, Chinle, and Window Rock. Crime rates, the quantity of emergency and service calls, and the amount of arrest would justify the need to create a new judicial district in Pinon, according to the Navajo Nation Department of Public Safety.

Chinle Police District Delegated Capt. Gary Grandson explained that the community needs their own police district because the response time from police in Chinle is intensive and the amount of emergency calls are increasing.

“In 2014, there were 7,767 calls. In 2015, the number of emergency calls increased to 8,185,”

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Grandson said. "In the past five months, there have been 3,666 calls. There are only 22 police officers at Chinle district and it takes more than an hour to respond to emergency calls. Only one officer is stationed in Pinon, but if immediate back up is needed, there are five officers that live near Pinon. It would be convenient if Pinon had their own police district and it would also deter crimes committed by gangs."

On June 16, Pinon chapter officials presented a funding proposal to the Síhasiin Fund Sub-committee in the amount of \$33 million to construct a 47,000 square-foot public safety and judiciary complex facility. The facility is included in the Navajo Nation Master Plan and in the Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety's priority list.

Pinon chapter has withdrawn 20-acres of land and completed archeological, environmental, and cultural clearances. The chapter also acquired funds to complete the architectural design and engineering services for the facility.

Council Delegate Lee Jack, Sr. (Dilkon, Greasewood Springs, Indian Wells, Teesto, Whitecone) supported the funding proposal presented by the chapter and emphasized the need for public safety for rural communities.

"I hear all kinds of dangerous stories of Pinon and I wonder why public safety is not addressed," Jack, who is a member of Síhasiin Fund Sub-committee, said. "We need to consider this funding proposal because our communities need to feel protected and safe. I am in support and I will do whatever I can to help this initiative."

Following the report, Law and Order Committee Chair Council Delegate Edmund Yazzie (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau) directed Pinon chapter to provide a support resolution to establish a police district in Pinon and to have NNDPS Executive Director Jesse Delmar to station a permanent police office in Pinon until a district office is created.

Pinon chapter will provide an update report to LOC in July.