



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Law and Order Committee directs Navajo Nation Police Department to establish a Dził Yijiin police district

WINDOW ROCK – On Monday during a special Law and Order Committee meeting, members unanimously supported Legislation No. 0346-16, directing the Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety to immediately establish a Dził Yijiin police district. The Dził Yijiin region consists of seven Navajo chapters including the Black Mesa, Forest Lake, Hardrock, Pinon, Whippoorwill, Low Mountain, and Tachee/Blue Gap.

In Oct. 2016, the committee tabled the legislation due to a shortage of Navajo police officers and personnel within the Navajo Nation Police Department.

Council Delegate Dwight Witherspoon (Black Mesa, Forest Lake, Hardrock, Pinon, Whippoorwill), who sponsored the legislation, asked for the committee’s support to establish a Dził Yijiin police district to address the high rates of crime and gang activities within the communities.

“The high rates of crime and gun shootings from gang activities has led to disruption within the communities, school, government offices, residents, and local businesses,” said Delegate Witherspoon. “Two years ago, the legislation was tabled due to the shortage of police officers. Today, there are fewer police officers than two years ago; this situation should be treated as a state of emergency by the Nation.”

According to Navajo Nation chief of police Phillip B. Francisco, NNPD has approximately 183 commissioned police officers that cover approximately 27,000 square-miles of Navajo land area. Chief Francisco added that he discourages the establishment of an additional police district due to the shortage of manpower and resources.

In disagreement with Chief Francisco, LOC vice chair Council Delegate Raymond Smith, Jr. (Houck, Klagetoh, Nahata Dziil, Tsé Si áni, Wide Ruins) said that the communities of Dził Yijiin and Nahat’á Dziil need special attention and services due to an increase in population by families who had to relocate to those areas as a result of the 1974 Navajo-Hopi Land Settlement Act.

“In 1974, Congress passed Public Law 53-531 that relocated many Navajo families from their traditional homelands. Many families moved within the communities of Dził Yijiin and Nahat’á

Dziil, and the relocation created land disputes and friction, which led to more crime,” said Delegate Smith.

During the discussion, LOC chair Council Delegate Edmund Yazzie (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau) raised concerns that the chief of police is responsible for modifying and establishing police districts based on factual assessment.

“On April 8, the committee approved the NNPD’s Plan of Operation, which gave the authority to the police chief to establish and recommend police districts. The committee needs to support the police chief and his recommendations because this legislation could be handled differently,” said Delegate Yazzie.

The Law and Order Committee voted 2-0 to approve Legislation 0346-16 with one amendment to establish the Dził Yijiin police district for FY2019. The committee serves as the final authority for the bill.

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