



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Law and Order Committee supports the creation of a Navajo Sex Offender Registration Notification Act unit

WINDOW ROCK – On Monday, the Law and Order Committee received a report from Navajo Sex Offender Registration Notification Act officials regarding recent initiatives and also considered Legislation No. 0211-16, which seeks to amend Navajo Nation Code Title 17 regarding SORNA. In 2006, the Navajo Nation Council passed a resolution to create the Sex Offender Task Force, which is overseen by the Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety.

The SORNA program was created to protect the public on the Navajo Nation from convicted sex offenders by ensuring that all convicted sex offenders who reside, work, or attend any schools on the Nation are registered with NNDPS, who then notifies communities that sex offenders are living within the area.

NNDPS Sr. Police Officer Pamela Hurley-Vandever stated that SORNA is operating in all seven NNDPS districts on the Nation. Each police district has two designated police officers to be part of the task force pursuant to Navajo Nation Code Title 17.

LOC member Council Delegate Otto Tso (Tó Nanees Dizi) emphasized the importance of the SORNA program within NNDPS and said it is highly needed when an emergency occurs.

“The committee needs to support the efforts of SORNA. They are crucial to the division when an emergency occurs such as child abductions. They have the database to identify potential suspects. What can the committee do to make this program strongly effective?” asked Delegate Tso.

“One of NNDPS’s priority goals is to make the SORNA program a unit within the division. The division has a drug, gang, and K-9 unit, but we don’t have a sex offender unit. SORNA has drafted a Plan of Operation, which will be brought forth to Council soon. The Plan of Operation will allow the program to become a unit,” added Hurley-Vandever.

Navajo Nation Department of Justice attorney Regina Holyan, recommended that SORNA become a unit within NNDPS to protect confidential information of sexual offenders and to maintain consistency of police officers assigned to the task force.

“Confidentiality is very important. NNDPS shouldn’t be rotating officers within the sexual offender program. There needs to be consistency and assigned officers need to know the offenders they

are assigned to, which will ensure the safety of the community,” stated LOC vice chair Council Delegate Raymond Smith, Jr. (Houck, Klagetoh, Nahata Dziil, Tsé Si áni, Wide Ruins).

According to NNDPS Lt. Henry Moore, the 10 officers who are assigned to the sex offender task force are highly trained and that rotating officers within in the program would distress the system. The task force has to track 527 sex offenders in the Nation and the 10 officers are each assigned specific offenders that they track. Additionally, the 10 officers also have different assignments within the department due to the shortage of officers, added Moore.

Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd (Jedito, Cornfields, Ganado, Kin Dah Lichíí, Steamboat), who co-sponsored Legislation No. 0211-16, stated that previous amendments to SORNA had been made to make the program more effective.

“The amendments will allow SORNA to become its own division in NNDPS. Also, it will assist officers to register and track offenders efficiently. The intent is to establish better policies for SORNA and it will also allow the program to comply with federal guidelines, which will allow SORNA to be federally recognized within the Nation,” stated Delegate Shepherd.

Delegate Smith recommended SORNA to improve the draft of the Plan of Operation and present an updated report during the next LOC meeting.

LOC approved Legislation No. 0211-16 with a 2-0 vote on Monday and the Naabik’iyátí’ Committee approved the legislation with a 12-0 vote on Wednesday. The Navajo Nation Council serves as the final authority for the legislation.

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