



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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MEDIA CONTACTS
Jerome Clark | 928.637.5603
Carmenlita Chief | 928.255.3428
nmlb.communications@gmail.com

Law and Order Committee committed to ensuring successful implementation of sex offender registration offices on the Navajo Nation

UPPER FRUITLAND, N.M. – The Navajo Nation task force responsible for implementing the federal Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act (SORNA) provided a report update to the Law and Order Committee on Oct. 5, stating they were nearing complete implementation of standards on the Navajo Nation.

Capt. Steve Nelson of the Crownpoint Police District, along with Senior Police Officer Pamela Hurley and Navajo Nation Supreme Court probationary associate justice, Regina Holyan, reported on activities the SORNA Task Force has accomplished within the last two months.

LOC Chair Council Delegate Edmund Yazzie (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau), commended the task force members for their hard work to implement multiple phases of SORNA on the nation.

“We’d like to invite your staff to present this information to the Naa’bik’iyati’ Committee as well,” Delegate Yazzie said, believing this is a topic that all Council Delegates should be made aware, especially concerning the public safety of communities.

Task force members said they are working to ensure that each of the seven police districts on the Nation will have a sex offender registration office.

Currently, the task force is moving forward to provide formal legal training covering the Navajo Nation Sex Offender Law and standard operating procedures for the sex offender registration process.

The training is set to occur at the end of October, and is mandatory for all Navajo Nation SORNA officers; Navajo probation officers and corrections personnel are encouraged to attend.

Since August, an information learning session on the Navajo Nation sex offender registration program and requirements was provided to all sex offenders on Arizona federal probation.

The forms and standard operating procedures that will guide the sex offender registration process have been reviewed and approved over a week ago by the Navajo Chief of Police and the executive director of the Navajo Division of Public Safety, according to Holyan.

Public service announcements will soon begin airing, and an online registry will be made available to the public.

Task force members also informed the committee on challenges the group faces, specifically on the current constraints prohibiting the draw-down of grant funds needed for further implementation of SORNA standards.

Capt. Nelson said the task force has been working diligently to address issues that threaten compliance with requirements of a 3-year, \$357,000 grant the Nation received from the federal Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking (SMART Office).

Navajo DPS has been identified as “high risk” by the SMART office because some police districts do not have updated computer and other electronic equipment needed to appropriately implement certain sex offender registration standards.

Because of the high risk distinction, grant funds cannot be drawn down until the SORNA offices on the Nation obtain compliance with SORNA requirements.

“We can’t be in compliance if we can’t draw down funds,” said Officer Hurley.

The Nation has until December 27 to obtain compliance with SORNA implementation requirements.

Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd (Cornfields, Ganado, Jeddito, Kin Dah Łichíí, Steamboat) immediately responded, recognizing the urgency for the committee to find solutions to assist police districts in reaching compliance.

“Wherever we can make it easier, whether we have to issue a directive or work legislatively, we will explore that in order to expedite the system in order to utilize the grant funds,” said Delegate Shepherd, who does not want non-compliance to jeopardize the Nation’s ability to operate its own sex offender registration operations.

Holyan cautioned that if the U.S. Attorney General’s office finds that SORNA is not “substantially implemented” on the Nation, the states of Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah may take over registration responsibilities.

“I appreciate that you realize how critical it is to get registration going day-to-day,” said Holyan in response to the committee’s

The Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act is a part of the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act, which was passed in 2006.

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