



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**The Law and Order Committee receives a report  
from the Title 17 Sentencing Provision Review Task Force**

**WINDOW ROCK** – On Monday, the Law and Order Committee accepted a report from the Title 17 Sentencing Provision Review Task Force, which is charged with reviewing and updating the Navajo Nation Criminal Code to impose stricter penalties for certain crimes.

According to the report, in Jan. 2000, the Navajo Nation Council eliminated jail terms and fines for a number of offenses, in part because the Nation had limited resources to prosecute and jail criminal offenders. Portions of the Code are outdated and should be revised to reflect the current needs of the Navajo Nation and people.

“The initial task was to look at the criminal code because much of it was decriminalized all at once and it is time that we revise this to reflect individual criminal accountability,” said LOC vice chair Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd (Jeddito, Cornfields, Ganado, Kin Dah Lichii, Steamboat).

The task force was formed in July 2012, and began conducting bi-weekly meetings in Jan. 2013, to review all criminal penalties, and held public hearings in May to receive input and field questions from the public.

“I reviewed the offenses listed in the task force’s recommendations, but I do not see assault on a police officer or establishment of street gangs in this report,” said Delegate Shepherd. “I believe they need to be added to the code and be criminalized.”

Delegate Shepherd also recommended that crimes be classified to reflect the level of the crime, such as distinguishing between different levels of misdemeanor crimes.

“Currently, the recommended changes we made for LOC is to implement classifications for the crimes, but not all of them need them,” responded Renner.

Renner explained that drug offenses will be based off of the amount that is seized upon arrest, thus the penalty and sentencing will reflect the seriousness of the offense.

“Another suggestion I would like to make is to implement the Tribal Law and Order Act regarding these crimes,” stated LOC member Russell Begaye (Shiprock).

The Tribal Law and Order Act of 2010 was signed into law by President Obama to support tribal public safety efforts to enforce stringent prosecution of offenders on reservations for sexual assault and violence against women, as well as other crimes plaguing Indian Country.

“At this time, we do not have enough resources to implement the TLOA because it would require a state-licensed attorney and law-trained judges, which we do not have at this time,” said Office of the Public Defender director Kathleen Bowman.

Delegate Shepherd suggested that LOC members meet for a two-day work session to make appropriate changes to the criminal codes.

“Title 17 needs to be revised to strengthen the laws and that is our goal,” concluded Delegate Shepherd.

At the conclusion of the discussion, LOC chair Edmund Yazzie (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau) said the two-day work session will begin on Aug. 27.

LOC voted 3-0 to accept the report.

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