



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Law and Order Committee receives update regarding 911 service initiatives

WINDOW ROCK – On Monday, Law and Order Committee members received a report in which Navajo Nation Telecommunications Regulatory Commission acting director Brian Tagaban presented a proposed plan to implement a 911 emergency system for the Navajo Nation.

Established under the Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President pursuant to 2 N.N.C. § 3451, the NNTRC is an independent commission authorized by the Navajo Nation Council to establish and enforce rules, regulations, policies, for the health and safety of the general public in regard to telecommunications matters.

LOC chair Council Delegate Edmund Yazzie (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau) requested an update from the commission after members of the LOC and the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee convened on Mar. 14 in the community of Black Falls, Ariz. to hear firsthand accounts from residents on delayed emergency response times due to a lack of communication infrastructure and rural landscapes.

Black Falls, located approximately 27 miles northwest of the community of Leupp, is a remote area in which most residents lack basic utility services such as electricity and running water.

According to the proposed organizational structure for the Navajo 911 program, three necessary components will need to be developed to stabilize the program: public safety answering point, location information system, and rural addressing.

LOC member Council Delegate Russell Begaye (Shiprock) reminded his colleagues that jurisdictional boundaries are also a necessary component that needs to be addressed.

“Based on the testimony we heard from residents of Black Falls, it’s clear that jurisdictional issues need to be ironed out so that emergency services are not delayed, jeopardizing the lives of our people,” Delegate Begaye said.

The proposed 911 program drew support from LOC vice chair Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd (Jeddito, Cornfields, Ganado, Kin Dah Lichíí, Steamboat) who urged NNTRC and fellow colleagues to expedite the process that began years ago.

“My chapters are telling me they’ve done a lot of work on their part to begin this process, and it doesn’t seem to be moving forward fast enough,” Delegate Shepherd said.

Tagaban told LOC members the proposed plan was developed after months of consultation and feedback from various entities, including various wireless communications organizations, Frontier Communications Corporation, Navajo Tribal Utility Authority, Navajo Nation Department of Public Safety, and individuals who experienced delayed emergency response times.

To fund the 911 program, Tagaban explained that perhaps a tax and/or a surcharge will be necessary to ensure continued funding, especially in times of budget shortfalls.

LOC member Council Delegate Duane Tsinigine (Bodaway/Gap, Coppermine, K'ai'Bii'To, LeChee, Tonalea/Red Lake) reminded those in attendance that construction of Navajo Route 20 will begin this month.

Cell phone reception, Delegate Tsinigine said, is not available along most or all of the 28-mile stretch of road from Bodaway/Gap to Coppermine.

“As more and more traffic passes through this road, there is an increased need for phone and emergency services,” said Delegate Tsinigine. “It is a public safety concern for people in my area.”

Tagaban told LOC members that the plan is an overview and does not include many details that still need to be worked out between various entities and members of Council.

At the conclusion of the discussion, LOC members voiced continued support for the 911 program and agreed to continue working with all sides to make the program a reality.

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