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Budget and Finance Committee approves cross-commission agreement between the Navajo Nation and the San Juan County Sheriff's Office

WINDOW ROCK – On Tuesday, the Budget and Finance Committee voted 4-0 to approve a cross-commission agreement between the Navajo Division of Public Safety and the San Juan County Sheriff's Office in Utah that will allow for increased law enforcement presence and protection in emergency situations.

Legislation No. 0022-13, outlines specific provisions and regulations that will allow Navajo Nation Police and San Juan County Sheriff Officers to function as the "primary law enforcement" in its own jurisdiction and as a "secondary law enforcement" in the other's jurisdiction.

The legislation was first considered by the Law and Order Committee on Feb. 25, which referred it to the Budget and Finance Committee with a "do pass" recommendation with no amendments.

Legislation co-sponsor and Law and Order Committee Vice Chairperson, Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd (Jeddito, Cornfields, Ganado, Kin Dah Lichíí, Steamboat) expressed support for the agreement, asserting that Navajo Nation Police are shorthanded, especially in remote areas on the reservation.

Delegate Shepherd, a former police officer for ten years, attributes the lack of Navajo Nation police officers to the challenging process and stringent qualifications that police candidates must meet.

The few who become police officers often choose to leave the Nation for higher paying jobs, Delegate Shepherd said.

BFC Vice Chairperson and legislation co-sponsor, Council Delegate Jonathan Nez (Shonto, Navajo Mountain, Oljato, Ts'ah Bii Kin) thanked the Law and Order Committee, San Juan County Sheriff's Office, and Navajo Nation Department of Justice attorneys Regina Holyan and Paul Spruhan for working on this agreement, and two prior cross-commission agreements with the Arizona Department of Public Safety and Navajo County in Arizona.

"The agreement provides law enforcement services that will supplement the Navajo Nation police force," Delegate Nez said.

Delegate Nez encouraged Law and Order Committee members and the San Juan County Sheriff's Office to work together to ensure that provisions and regulations under the newly re-authorized Violence Against Women Act are fully understood and adhered to by Navajo Nation police officers and San Juan County police officers.

"In a way, there's no more excuses when it comes to domestic violence between a Navajo and non-Navajo," said Delegate Nez. "Jurisdictional issues are no longer an excuse with this agreement in place."

BFC member Council Delegate Danny Simpson (Becenti, Crownpoint, Huerfano, Lake Valley, Nageezi, Nahodishgish, Tse'ii'ahi, Whiterock) praised the legislation agreement and encouraged both committees to work toward establishing more cross-commission agreements.

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