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**Naabik'iyáti' Committee approves bill supporting and recommending an agreement to settle bus transportation issues affecting Navajo students**

**WINDOW ROCK** –During a meeting held on Tuesday, Naabik'iyáti' Committee members approved Legislation No. 0301-13, supporting and recommending a cooperative agreement between the Navajo Nation, McKinley County, San Juan County, and the New Mexico Public Education Department in an effort to resolve bus transportation disputes that have affected dozens of Navajo students living in or near the community of Naschitti.

Over the last few months, the Central Consolidated School District which includes Naschitti and the Gallup-McKinley County School District which includes Tohatchi, have met with state and tribal officials to resolve the boundary issues and have yet to come to an agreement to allow Gallup-McKinley buses to cross boundary lines to transport students living in San Juan County.

Legislation sponsor Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) explained that students living in the vicinity of Naschitti are often forced to walk miles to meet Gallup-McKinley County District buses at the county boundary line to be transported to their school in Tohatchi, located approximately 18 miles from Naschitti.

“Sometimes students had no ride from the drop-off point to their home so they walked,” said Delegate Hale. “That has been an issue that has been in existence with the State of New Mexico for over 30 years.”

Delegate Hale further explained that the legislation calls for action by the New Mexico State Legislature to bring this issue to a resolution.

According to the legislation, road construction is currently underway on U.S. Highway 491, making safety concerns a major problem for students walking to and from the county boundary.

Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake) proposed an amendment to add language to the legislation for the inclusion of “other Navajo Nation chapters or communities” when addressing transportation issues that are found in other communities as well.

“We’re appreciative that Naschitti is raising the issue,” said Delegate Tsosie. “Here is an opportunity to work with the legislature and the school board to address transportation all over.”

Naabik'iyáti' Committee members voted 15-0 to approve the amendment.

Several delegates also voiced concerns over possible restrictions over the use of county bridges by school buses due to county boundaries and weight limits that cause parents and students to drive longer distances to meet their school buses.

Following the meeting, Delegate Hale who also chairs the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee said he is working with school officials to identify and address transportation policies that may help to resolve issues involving the usage of bridges in Navajo communities.

Naabik'iyátí' Committee members also approved an amendment by Council Delegate Mel Begay (Coyote Canyon, Mexican Springs, Naschitti, Tohatchi, Bahastl'a'a') to add language to further outline and define the language and intent of the proposed cooperative agreement.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the Naabik'iyátí' Committee approved Legislation No. 0301-13 with 17 supporting and 0 opposing.

The Naabik'iyátí' Committee serves as the final authority for the bill.

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