



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Law and Order Committee considers establishing a Navajo police academy

TSAILE, Ariz. – On Tuesday, the Law and Order Committee received a report from the Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety and the Diné College Board of Regents regarding the initiative to establish a partnership to develop a Navajo police academy. In 2012, the Navajo Nation's only police academy was shut down due to maintenance and operation issues. Currently, the Navajo Nation does not operate an academy.

LOC chair Council Delegate Edmund Yazzie (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau) emphasized the critical need to create a police academy to address the shortage of police officers on the Navajo Nation.

"The Navajo Nation is in critical need of police officers. If we establish a police academy on the Nation, more individuals would show interest in the program. Currently, NNDPS is sending new police recruits to police academies off the reservation. They are away from their homes and families. If we have a police academy on the Nation, they would feel comfortable and they don't have to travel far from their families," stated Delegate Yazzie.

NNDPS executive director Jesse Delmar stated that the opportunity would benefit Diné College and NNDPS. NNDPS's goal is to train their own Navajo officers, which will be culturally sensitive to the Navajo policies and values.

Last year, Diné College and NNDPS met to explore the potential of operating a Navajo police academy on the college campus. The college drafted a Memorandum of Understanding, which was sent to the Navajo Nation Department of Justice and NNDPS for review. Subsequent meetings were held to discuss the progress of the police academy, which included securing a college modular building for the police-training center.

According to Diné College Board of Regents President Greg Bigman, the draft MOU was created by the previous college administration, whom are no longer with the college.

"To date, no MOU has been legally reviewed and formally approved by the Board or Regents. We found many deficiencies with the MOU draft that was written by the former college administration. For example, the requested college modular building cannot be used for the police academy due to Arizona Compact fund policies, which was used to purchase the facilities. There are many policy issues that need to be addressed," stated Bigman.

Additionally, Diné College Center for Diné Studies Faculty Wilson Aronilth Jr. stated that the proposed police academy would contradict the philosophy, foundation, and values of the college. The college holds a significant medicine bundle created through ceremonies, songs, and prayers that were conducted to maintain the harmony of the college campus and a police academy would defeat that purpose. The use of firearms and weapons on the college campus would cause a cultural issue, according to Aronilth.

“The request is only for general education for police recruits. The college would teach reading, writing, and basic math to the recruits. The request does not include the usage of firearms and weapons on campus but I will consider the cultural significance of the college. I think NNDPS and LOC need to step back and look at this initiative again before any agreement is made with the college. How do we address Navajo values when we talk about violence?” asked LOC member Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Low Mountain, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tachee/Blue Gap, Tselani/Cottonwood).

LOC vice chair Council Delegate Raymond Smith, Jr. (Houck, Klagetoh, Nahata Dziil, Tsé Si áni, Wide Ruins) recommended that NNDPS search for other educational institutes, such as Navajo Technical University, or Navajo chapters that would allow the opportunity to host a police academy.

LOC issued four directives instructing Diné College to review the MOU, to present a funding proposal for police academy operation and maintenance, dormitory, and personnel costs, to invite culturally concerned community members of Tsaile to the next meeting, and to give an update report to the LOC in July.

The Law and Order Committee approved the report from Diné College and NNDPS with a 2-0 vote.

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