



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Navajo Nation supports the proposed Native American Cultural Property Protection Act of 2016

WINDOW ROCK – The Naabik’iyátí’ Committee issued its unanimous approval on Thursday for Legislation No. 0095-16, urging Congress to support a draft bill entitled the “Native American Cultural Property Protection Act of 2016.”

The draft bill, which has yet to be officially introduced in Congress, would enhance the protections of Native American cultural items under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act by increasing the sentencing penalty from five years to 10 years for violating NAGPRA, prohibiting the exporting of Native American cultural items obtained in violation of NAGPRA, and calling upon the Comptroller General to conduct a study to determine the scope of illegal trafficking of tribal cultural items, both domestically and internationally.

Legislation sponsor Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) said the efforts to protect sacred items have escalated since December 2014 when the Navajo Nation sent a delegation to retrieve seven sacred Navajo masks that were taken from the Navajo Nation to be auctioned in Paris, France.

Delegate Hale also stated that the Naabik’iyátí’ Committee Sacred Sites Subcommittee has worked with the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission, Navajo Nation Washington Office, and the U.S. Embassy in France, to address the transfer and sales of sacred items abroad.

“This is a united effort to prevent our people’s sacred items from being exploited in exchange for money in foreign countries as well as our own,” stated Delegate Hale.

The legislation is also supported by a resolution passed on March 4 by the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission, which also directed the Office of Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission “to do all things necessary to continue advocating for the protection of sacred cultural items.”

In addition to supporting the draft Congressional bill, the legislation passed by the Naabik’iyátí’ Committee also authorizes the Navajo Nation president, speaker, and their designees to advocate for the draft bill’s introduction and passage at the Congressional level.

The Resources and Development Committee also considered the legislation on June 7 and issued a “do pass” recommendation with no amendments with a vote of 4-0.

On Thursday the Naabik'iyát' Committee, which serves as the final authority for the bill, approved Legislation No. 0095-16 with a vote of 9-0.

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