



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Pinon Community School addresses gang violence to the Law and Order Committee

WINDOW ROCK – On Monday, the Law and Order Committee received a report from Pinon Community School over the safety of students and the need for public safety officers following several shootings near and around the school.

According to Pinon Community School Principal Sherry Mitchell, in the past three months gang violence has become a rising issue in the small community of Pinon.

“The number of gang shootings has increased. The tension between two rivalry gangs has become a problem. The community and school districts are not safe. These shootings are damaging homes, vehicles, and public buildings. If this issue is not fixed immediately, the shootings will result in death. This is a very dangerous and critical situation,” stated Mitchell.

LOC member Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Low Mountain, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tachee/Blue Gap, Tselani/Cottonwood) requested for the director of Navajo Division of Public Safety and Navajo Acting Chief of Police to provide gang violence data and to provide recommendations to address the issue, but they were not present at the meeting.

“This is a prime example, when a situation needs critical attention, the leaders involved do not participate in the discussion to fix the problem. The Chief of Police walked out the meeting before he could hear the details. Communities and schools are reaching out for help and we need DPS and the Acting Chief of Police to be here,” stressed Delegate Begay.

Based on the report, the lack of police officers and the long police response times has allowed gangs to control the community. The community of Pinon does not have a police substation and school security is the only public safety personnel protecting the schools.

“The gang shootings happen near the schools. The schools are located in between two housing divisions and we are caught in the middle of danger when gang members travel across the school grounds to get to one housing project to the next. The school takes all measures, such as lockdowns and shelter-in-place, to ensure the safety of the students,” emphasized Mitchell.

LOC chair Council Delegate Edmund Yazzie (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau) stressed the importance of hiring a Chief of Police and to reevaluate the DPS priority listing to address a Pinon police substation.

“The need of a police chief is crucial to deter violent crimes; therefore, we must fill this vacant position as soon as possible. The Pinon police substation is on the DPS priority listing but we need an update report on this project,” stated Delegate Yazzie.

According to Navajo Department of Corrections Director Delores Greyeyes, the Pinon police substation is in the design stage. Land withdrawals and clearances are completed but construction funding is needed to start the project.

The Law and Order Committee voted 3-0 to accept the report and scheduled a following-up meeting with the Pinon Community School on June 20 in Pinon.

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