



## 23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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### **Law and Order Committee supports healthcare services for inmates**

**WINDOW ROCK** – On Monday, the Law and Order Committee considered Legislation No. 0177-18, requesting the Indian Health Service to assign adequate medical staff at all of the Navajo Nation correctional facilities to ensure the medical needs of the inmate population.

Council Delegate Jonathan L. Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels), who sponsored the legislation, asked for the committee's support to improve the healthcare of inmates in all federally funded correctional facilities on the Nation to avoid drastic emergencies and liabilities.

"Many tribes throughout the U.S. have been working on this initiative for many years. The absence of medical staff in jails is a liability issue. The federal government should be obligated to fund correctional healthcare," said Delegate Hale.

In support of the legislation, Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Low Mountain, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tachee/Blue Gap, Tselani/Cottonwood), stated that this has been an on-going issue and that none of the correctional facilities on the Nation have nurses or medical staff.

"Many medical incidents have occurred in jails and correctional officers had to scramble in emergencies. Currently, correctional officers have to transfer inmates to the local IHS or 638 healthcare centers for all medical services, including emergencies," said Delegate Begay.

He added that the committee previously received a report from the Tuba City Regional Health Care Corporation regarding this issue and recommendations were made for the Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety to provide policy solutions and a plan.

The legislation includes a report by the Arizona Tribal Correctional Healthcare Coalition titled, "Locked Up & Forgotten," which resulted from outreach efforts by from the Tuba City Regional Health Care Corporation that examined the federal government's failure to adequately fund tribal correctional healthcare.

According to the report, the federal government pays for healthcare provided at Federal Bureau of Prisons facilities because they are federal facilities. However, the federal government does not provide health care at BIA tribal jails, although federal funds were used to construct the jails.

Delegate Hale added, "State corrections are able to pay for inmate healthcare by leveeing property taxes. The Navajo Nation does not have the same ability because federal policies prohibit tribes from imposing property taxes on trust land. Therefore, the federal government should be able to provide and fund inmate healthcare."

During the discussion, Council Delegate Herman Daniels, Jr. (Shonto, Naa'tsis'Áán, Oljato, Ts'ah Bii Kin) recommended the Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety and Navajo Nation Department of Corrections to provide a plan and budget to ensure that the medical needs of inmates are promptly and adequately met in tribal jails.

The Law and Order Committee approved Legislation No. 0177-18 with a 2-0 vote with one directive. The Naabik'íyáti' Committee serves as the final authority for the bill.

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