



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Law and Order Committee considers establishing a medical examiners department for the Navajo Nation

WINDOW ROCK – On Tuesday, the Law and Order Committee received a report from Navajo Nation Department of Criminal Investigation director Dale West, regarding a proposal to establish a Department of Medical Examiners under the Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety.

West said the Department of Criminal Investigation has dual duties and responsibilities inclusive of conducting major crime investigations and non-criminal medical coroner duties that includes completing state death certificates.

LOC chair Council Delegate Edmund Yazzie (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau) stated that there is no other criminal investigation department in the country that conducts both criminal and non-criminal investigations.

“As a committee, we listen to recommendations from the departments we oversee and provide feedback and input. The Nation’s criminal investigators carry a heavy workload, and creating a new department may improve public safety services for the Nation,” said Delegate Yazzie.

The proposed department would provide death investigation services, such as coordinating medical records with area hospitals and referring death certificates to funeral homes.

During the discussion, LOC member Council Delegate Otto Tso (Tó Nanees Dizi) raised concerns regarding the proposal and recommended holding a work session to review the proposal in depth.

“There are many concerns and information that needs to be addressed before a new department is established, such as budgets, staffing, and plan of operation. It will take time to consider all input and recommendations,” said Delegate Tso. “Additionally, we need an internal assessment of the criminal investigator department and identify how much time is spent on criminal investigations and non-criminal medical coroner duties.”

The Law and Order Committee approved the report with a vote of 3-0. The committee also scheduled work session for June 12 to discuss the proposal in detail.

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