HEHSC approves an enabling legislation which seeks to implement a 9-1-1 emergency response system within the Navajo Nation

WINDOW ROCK – The Health, Education, and Human Services Committee met on Wednesday, and approved Legislation No. 0212-13, which proposes to amend Title 2 and Title 21 of the Navajo Nation Code, authorizing the Navajo Nation Telecommunications Regulatory Commission to implement and manage a 9-1-1 emergency response system within the Navajo Nation.

Legislation sponsor Council Delegate Walter Phelps (Cameron, Coalmine Canyon, Leupp, Tolani Lake, Tsidi To ii) said the legislation would allow for the NNTRC to begin developing a framework for a sustainable and adequate 9-1-1 system.

“There are many areas on the Nation that have no way to call emergency authorities and, we are losing lives as a result of it,” said Delegate Phelps. “This is something that needs to be done. We will have to work with the Federal Communications Commission to do this.”

The legislation developed from a joint meeting between the Law and Order Committee and HEHSC on Mar. 13, where residents of the rural community of Black Falls, Ariz. gave testimony about accidents that resulted in fatalities due to the lack of emergency services and response.

NNTRC executive director Brian Tagaban, said the legislation would allow for the NNTRC to be the lead agency in establishing the three main necessary components for a 9-1-1 system: public safety answering point (PSAP), location information system, and rural addressing.

“Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah all have a 9-1-1 program which funds their PSAP system, this is what this legislation begins to do for the Nation,” said Tagaban.

A PSAP is responsible for answering emergency calls for police, fire fighting, and ambulance services. Trained telephone operators are usually responsible for dispatching emergency services.

“When you have an emergency here on Navajo, you call 9-1-1 and the county sheriffs office gives you another phone number to call for Navajo Police,” said HEHSC chair Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels). “This legislation will bring a better system for the Nation.”

The HEHSC approved Legislation No. 0212-13 with a vote of 3-0.

The legislation now moves on to the Law and Order Committee and the Naabik’íyáti’ Committee for final consideration.

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