FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Law and Order Committee receives report on the update of operation and maintenance of the Navajo Nation Judicial/Public Safety complexes

WINDOW ROCK – On Monday, the Law and Order Committee approved several reports on the operation and maintenance activities of the Navajo Nation judicial/public safety complexes from the Navajo Nation Department of Corrections, Judicial Branch, Navajo Nation Design and Engineering, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs regional office.

Each entity provided an update report regarding the operation and maintenance of the justice centers, including the certificate of occupancy, inspections, and construction related activities.

“This meeting was called because of the outcry from the Crownpoint [corrections] facility being shut down recently,” said LOC chair Council Delegate Edmund Yazzie (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau). “There is a lack of communication between all the entities here.”

Each entity discussed issues ranging from funding shortfalls, lack of personnel, and the need to improve operation and maintenance of the justice centers to function efficiently.

Navajo Nation Department of Corrections director Dolores Greyeyes stated she strongly supports the development of the justice centers, however, the most critical issue DOC is facing are funding shortfalls that directly affect the hiring of additional corrections staff.

“According to the 1992 Consent Decree requirements, we must be fully staffed in order to operate at an optimum capacity,” said Greyeyes. “However, we are no where near the fulfillment of this agreement, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs have not provided sufficient dollars to aid the shortfalls.”

The 1992 Consent Decree stems from a lawsuit in which DNA Legal Services sued the Navajo Nation over alleged mistreatment and health safety concerns of inmates. In response, the Navajo Nation set forth a decree to enhance medical care services, improve carrying capacity, and to have proper staffing to handle inmate population.
“Crownpoint is only operating with eight corrections officers and [recently] a part of the jail was shut down,” said LOC member Council Delegate Russell Begaye (Shiprock), “how do we avoid this from occurring at the other new jail facilities?”

Greyeyes stated that in order to avoid the shut down of any portion of the jail facilities, Navajo Nation policy makers need to advocate for more funding from the federal government to ensure they fulfill their trust responsibility to the Nation, which would aid in avoiding future shortfalls.

Navajo Nation Chief Justice Herb Yazzie was in agreement with Greyeyes, saying that much of the issues plaguing the justice centers is the lack of funding at all levels, mainly law enforcement and the courts.

LOC vice chair Alton Joe Shepherd (Jeddito, Cornfields, Ganado, Kin Dah Lichii, Steamboat) stressed that all entities involved need to improve their communication and partnerships, and recognize that the goal of the justice centers is to provide safety for the Navajo people.

At the conclusion of the meeting, Delegate Yazzie suggested that all entities meet annually, prior to the finalization of their budgets to discuss funding needs and areas for improvement.

LOC voted 3-0 to accept the report.

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