FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Law and Order Committee approves support of Arizona H.B. 2559 to aid in the construction of a Navajo Nation Supreme Court complex

CHURCHROCK, N.M. – The Law and Order Committee met on Monday and discussed Legislation No. 0072-14, which seeks support from the Navajo Nation for Arizona House Bill 2559, sponsored by Representative Albert Hale, D – St. Michaels (District 7).

According to the legislation, H.B. 2559 aims to appropriate approximately $7.5 million to the Arizona Department of Economic Security, which would then distribute the funding to the Navajo Nation to aid in the construction of the Supreme Court complex. The total cost to construct the complex currently sits at $15 million.

Navajo Nation Chief Justice Herb Yazzie explained that the Nation’s support of H.B. 2559 would not only benefit the initial construction of the complex, but it would mark the second time the state of Arizona has contributed to the development of a court complex on the Navajo Nation.

“We’ve gone through one [other] similar experience with the Arizona legislature four to five years ago, and through coordinated efforts and the Navajo Nation’s support, [the state of Arizona] appropriated $2 million for the construction of the courthouse in Dilkon,” said Chief Justice Yazzie. “We are trying to repeat that [effort].”

LOC member Council Delegate Russell Begaye (Shiprock) voiced his support of the legislation and suggested that the Judicial Branch remind the state of Arizona of the many tax revenues the Navajo Nation has contributed to the state over the years.

“We have contributed to the state through the Navajo Nation fuel excise tax and gaming revenue from our casinos,” said Delegate Begaye. “I think it is appropriate to ask the state of Arizona to support and approve this appropriation.”

Chief Justice Yazzie added that the Navajo Nation also provides Transaction Privilege Taxes to the state from coalmine operations and revenues on the reservation, noting that it is time the Navajo Nation receives a return on the taxes paid to the state of Arizona.

The TPT is a sales tax imposed by the state of Arizona on non-Indian owned businesses operating on Indian lands, such as Peabody Coal Company in Kayenta.
The fuel excise tax is derived from gasoline sales on the Navajo Nation, and the state of Arizona also receives a percentage of the Nation’s gaming revenue on an annual basis.

LOC member Council Delegate Duane Tsinigine (Bodaway/Gap, Coppermine, K’ai’bi’i’tó, LeChee, Tonalea/Red Lake) applauded the Judicial Branch’s efforts to seek state funding, and encouraged other Navajo Nation departments to begin lobbying for financial assistance from the states of Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah.

LOC members voted 4-0 to approve Legislation No. 0072-14. The legislation now moves forward to the Naabik’íyátí’ Committee who serves as the final authority for the legislation.

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