



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Health, Education, and Human Services Committee supports the establishment of an Indian Country Criminal Justice major at NAU

WINDOW ROCK – The Health, Education, and Human Services Committee considered Legislation No. 0246-17, which requests the Navajo Nation’s support for the establishment of an undergraduate major entitled “Indian Country Criminal Justice,” at Northern Arizona University located in Flagstaff, Ariz.

According to the legislation, the Law and Order Committee met with NAU’s Office of Native American Initiatives, the Department of Applied Indigenous Studies, and the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice several times regarding the proposed undergraduate major.

Legislation sponsor Council Delegate Raymond Smith, Jr. (Houck, Klagetoh, Nahat’a Dziil, Tsé Si áni, Wide Ruins), who serves as vice chair for the LOC, stated that the bill would provide support for the university’s initiative to create a curriculum specific to teaching and aiding students in understanding the criminal justice system within Indian Country.

“This will allow our Navajo police officers who may want to go to school and further their education to be future investigators or police chiefs. We also want higher educated Navajo officers and it would be open to all law enforcement agencies. It would include tribal, state, and federal law enforcement and legal professionals seeking additional knowledge,” said Delegate Smith.

He added that the LOC is in full support of the newly created major and said it would serve as a model to other universities and colleges to begin implementing similar curriculum relating to criminal justice issues in Indian Country.

The bill states that the undergraduate major would provide an understanding of Indian Country’s unique jurisdictional laws, rules, and procedures, as well as educate students on the importance of culture, language, sovereignty, and significant court decisions at the tribal, state, and federal levels.

HEHSC member Council Delegate Nelson S. BeGaye (Lukachukai, Rock Point, Round Rock, Tsaille/Wheatfields, Tsé Ch’izhi) expressed support for the new major, but said the Navajo

Nation's two colleges also need to create a criminal justice program that is specific to Navajo Nation law enforcement and criminal justice processes.

"We have Diné College and Navajo Technical University here on the Navajo Nation. They are up to that level where they can do this and I don't know why we don't advise them to do the same. The Nation's colleges have agreements with the other university institutions and it should be taught here, especially if we are talking about teaching Navajo Nation officers," said Delegate BeGaye.

Delegate BeGaye said he would begin working on an amendment for the legislation when it reaches the Navajo Nation Council's Naabik'iyáti' Committee to direct Diné College and NTU to create a criminal justice program that is Navajo-specific for Navajo Nation police officers, in addition to the law enforcement training curriculum both colleges have been developing for their future police academies.

Delegate Smith said he supports the idea of a Navajo-specific criminal justice program, however, he reiterated to HEHSC members that the proposed establishment of the new major would benefit all law enforcement agencies throughout the United States who want to learn about the complexities and processes of criminal justice within Indian Country.

HEHSC member Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Beclabito, Cove, Gadi'i'áhi/To'Koi, Red Valley, Tooh Haltsooi, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Tsé ahnáoz't'í) suggested to the legislation sponsor to include input from Diné College and NTU regarding the proposed undergraduate major and to determine if they may collaborate to initiate the program on the Navajo Nation.

"I believe it is important for the colleges within our Nation to provide comments and input on the legislation, but I also want to make my colleagues aware that if we support the establishment of the new major at NAU, they could possibly seek funding from our Nation to support their program in the future. I just want us to keep that in mind," said Delegate Crotty.

HEHSC members issued a "do pass" recommendation for Legislation No. 0246-17 with a vote of 2-1. The bill moves forward to the Law and Order Committee and the Naabik'iyáti' Committee, which serves as the final authority for the legislation.

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