



## 23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

June 20, 2017

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### **Law and Order Committee supports to enact the Navajo Nation Building Codes**

**WINDOW ROCK** – On Monday, the Law and Order Committee considered Legislation No. 0135-17, which seeks to enact Navajo Nation building codes within Title 6 of the Navajo Nation Code, and would also establish a Building and Safety Department within the Navajo Nation Division of Community Development and a Building Codes Board of Appeals.

The proposed building codes would be based on the latest International Building, Mechanical, Plumbing, Fire, Residential, and Energy Conservation Code.

Legislation sponsor Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) stated that the enactment would be the first of its kind for the Navajo Nation.

“Currently, there are no existing building codes within the Nation and no building code recommendations have come forward to Council for adoption. The enactment would allow the Nation to protect its investment in housing. This would ensure that safe and suitable homes are built,” stated Delegate Hale.

LOC member Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Low Mountain, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tachee/Blue Gap, Tselani/Cottonwood) asked how the building codes might affect Navajo families that choose to construct their own homes.

“Will this enactment create more barriers for Navajo families that are building their own homes? Our people already face many obstacles to build homes and they don’t need any more restrictions. How will this affect them?” asked Delegate Begay.

According to the legislation, the building codes will be applicable to new construction and improvements to existing structures that are funded by Navajo Nation, state, and federal funds, and commercial construction. The building codes will not be applicable to Navajo traditional buildings and traditional structures.

“This policy will provide checks and balances for housing and commercial projects. This will ensure the quality of homes and buildings being built on the Nation. We need to keep contractors accountable. Liability of homes should rest upon the contractors, not the homeowner,” stated LOC vice chair Council Delegate Raymond Smith, Jr. (Houck, Klagetoh, Nahata Dziil, Tsé Si áni, Wide Ruins), who is a co-sponsor of the legislation.

Delegate Begay added, “How will enforcement be done and how will we fund it? Currently, we don’t have the resources to comply with the proposed codes.”

The legislation states that a Building and Safety Department will be created, which will be responsible for ensuring compliance with the building codes, to calculate and collect building fees for the administration of building permits, and to assess fines for non-compliance.

Additionally, the Building Code Board of Appeals will hear and determine appeals regarding the suitability of construction materials and methods and hear requests for variances on the application of the codes, added Delegate Hale.

LOC member Council Delegate Otto Tso (Tó Nanees Dizi) recommended for the Navajo Tribal Utility Authority, Navajo Nation Division of Community Development, Navajo Housing Authority, Navajo Engineering and Construction Authority, Navajo Housing Improvement Program, and two private contractors to provide input and recommendations regarding the legislation.

“We need to hear from all the entities that build homes and buildings on the Nation regarding the enactment. We also need to know what building and home standards they use,” stated Delegate Tso.

The Law and Order Committee approved Legislation No. 0135-17 with a 4-0 vote. The Council serves as the final authority for the bill.

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