



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Health, Education, and Human Services Committee seek to amend and strengthen laws against drunk driving and bootlegging

WINDOW ROCK – Last week, the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee held a discussion during their regular meeting to begin addressing drunk driving and illegal alcohol sales on the Navajo Nation, also known as “bootlegging.”

HEHSC member Council Delegate Nelson S. BeGaye (Lukachukai, Rock Point, Round Rock, Tsaile/Wheatfields, Tsé Ch’izhi) raised the issue regarding the recent accidents relating to alcohol and bootlegging, and said that Navajo Nation laws are not stringent enough in prosecuting the offenders.

“It was reported that Safe Ride, the non-emergency transportation company, had four accidents in the Chinle Agency and they were all related to alcohol. They take a patient to a border town and then bring back liquor onto the Nation. This is one way bootlegging occurs, and we need to get legislation drafted to fix this issue and amend our criminal code,” said Delegate BeGaye.

He added that he has met with the Navajo Nation Department of Justice to begin analyzing the Navajo Nation Criminal Code Title 17 to identify areas to amend and strengthen penalties for convicted drunk drivers and bootleggers. Delegate BeGaye said he would be sponsoring the legislation at a later date and is seeking support from his committee colleagues.

HEHSC chair Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) expressed support for the initiative and suggested that families affected by alcohol-related crimes and tragedies be compensated through fines and penalties of the offender.

“This issue has not had ample enough discussion and as we progress in amending our criminal code, this is definitely an area that needs to be strengthened. I would also suggest that offenders receive mandatory rehabilitation and complete a program as a stipulation of some sort, such as probation or less jail time,” said Delegate Hale.

He added that the HEHSC begin working with the Navajo Nation Department of Health and Navajo Nation Department of Behavioral Health Services to develop and implement rehabilitation

processes and programs. To end the cycle of alcoholism, drunk driving, and bootlegging, those who offend deserve just as much help as anyone else, said Delegate Hale.

In support of amending the criminal code, HEHSC member Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Beclabito, Cove, Gadi'í'áhi/To'Koi, Red Valley, Tooh Haltsooi, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Tsé ałnáoz't'í'í) said that restructuring the Navajo Nation Police Department's Drug and Gang Unit to target illegal alcohol sales would be a constructive start.

"Bootlegging has a major impact on families and communities throughout the Navajo Nation, which is attributed to the negative legacy of alcohol. What will it take for community members and families to report bootleggers and bring harmony back to their areas? It will take a lot of work and we definitely will need to work closely with our public safety officials," said Delegate Crotty.

Delegate Crotty said that there have been inquiries by the committee to look at banishment laws in regards to the most extreme offenders relating to sex crimes, violent crimes, extreme DUIs, drunk driving resulting in death, and bootlegging. The committee will need to have further discussion on the initiative and hope to have a proposed plan in the near future, said Delegate Crotty.

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