



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Law and Order Committee receives highway safety report from Navajo Department of Highway Safety

WINDOW ROCK – On Monday, the Law and Order Committee received a report from the Navajo Department of Highway Safety, under the Navajo Nation Division of Transportation, regarding current activities, initiatives, and challenges. The program is tasked with implementing measures to reduce traffic-related fatalities, injuries, and property damage on roadways within the jurisdiction of the Navajo Nation.

Department of Highway Safety program manager Norma Bowman, stated that the program’s goal is to provide extensive awareness and education regarding safer driving habits, underage and impaired driving, seatbelt usage, child safety, aggressive driving, and texting and driving.

LOC chair Council Delegate Edmund Yazzie (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau) commended the program for providing a report to the committee regarding the efforts to decrease the number of highway accidents.

“The Resources and Development Committee is the legislative oversight for the program, however, the focus of the program aligns with the committee’s priorities. It is important to receive updates from the program to monitor progression and to identify any policies that need improvements,” said Delegate Yazzie.

During the discussion, LOC member Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Low Mountain, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tachee/Blue Gap, Tselani/Cottonwood) asked why the program is not housed within the Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety to proactively enforce highway safety laws.

“There is not enough highway patrol or safety enforcement on the Nation. This type of program is needed within the NNDPS to enforce highway safety laws. This raises a concern – no one is enforcing highway safety laws on the Nation,” said Delegate Begay.

According to NNDOT executive director Garrett Silversmith, the Navajo Department of Highway Safety operates from NNDOT’s federal funding agreement and other funding sources including the Indian Health Service, which allows the program to conduct education, training, and data collection.

Delegate Begay also urged the program and NNDPS to work together to enforce traffic laws and to create a strategic plan to address highway police patrols.

In response to Delegate Begay's concern, Bowman stated that the program is currently seeking partnerships with local and state law enforcements in highway safety initiatives such as seatbelt and child restraint usage, impaired driving awareness, and data sharing.

LOC vice chair Council Delegate Raymond Smith, Jr. (Houck, Klagetoh, Nahata Dziil, Tsé Si áni, Wide Ruins) recommended NNDPS to utilize the program's vehicle crash data and analysis to increase highway patrol in high-density areas of fatal and injury crashes on the Navajo Nation.

The Law and Order Committee approved the report with a 2-0 vote.

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