



## OFFICE OF NAVAJO NATION HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

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### **Immediate Release:**

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### **Navajo Nation upholds Voting Rights Act standards for Redistricting Maps**

**St. Michaels, Navajo Nation (ARIZ)** – The Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission (“Commission”) presented to New Mexico Indian Affairs Committee (“IAC”) in the Pueblo of Jemez, New Mexico on Navajo Nation redistricting maps for the House, Senate, and Public Education Commission. The Commission emphasized to representatives from the IAC that the principles for redistricting in the Voting Rights Act takes presidency when drawing new election districts.

The redistricting efforts for the Navajo Nation is to keep the same minority majority Native American districts in the House and Senate. In the House, the majority Native American districts are 4, 5, 6, 9, 65, 69. In the Senate, the majority Native American districts are 4, 3, 22. The Navajo Nation submitted finalized maps for the Northwest region on October 15, 2021 during the final meeting with New Mexico Citizens Redistricting Committee. Navajo Nation’s final maps preserve the Native American majority districts and include one influence district in the House and two influence districts in the Senate. The establishment of the influence districts allow Native Americans to bring issues to potential candidates that can sway an election in favor of Native American issues.

In a meeting on October 11<sup>th</sup>, Navajo Nation leaders both President Jonathan Nez and Speaker Seth Damon along with staff from the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission met with a number of Pueblo governors and the Jicarilla Apache tribe at the All Indian Pueblo Council of Governors complex in Albuquerque, NM. During this meeting Navajo Nation leaders did not approve to lower Native American Voting Age Population (“NAVAP”) for the House Districts. A consensus was reached with the Senate map for the northwest corner of New Mexico.

One of many concerns for the Commission include the under count during the 2020 census on the Navajo Nation. With the census data used to develop voting districts, the Commission has incorporated the use a floating deviation to reach the 64% NAVAP, which is allowable in New Mexico law. The floating 10 deviation allows districts to be drawn below a -5 deviation. Navajo’s House and Senate maps lowest deviation reaches a -6.9 with the intent to preserve the Native American majority districts needed for Navajos to elect candidates of their choice. In New Mexico, districts are drawn using precinct boundaries from each county to build election districts. McKinley County Commissioners passed a resolution to align and amend its precinct boundaries with Navajo Chapter boundaries as the precinct boundaries in the county. With this new alignment Navajo voter participation should increase, as the alignment of the county and Navajo voting boundaries will not be required to travel extensively to different locations to cast

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their ballots. Unlike San Juan County, where Commissioners significantly denied aligning its precinct boundaries with chapter boundaries, thus Navajo voters will continue to crisscross districts to vote for Navajo and State/Federal elections. It is really unfortunate that San Juan County ignored the recommendations of the Northern Navajo chapters to alleviate one challenge Navajo voters are confronted with.

The All Pueblos Council of Governors (“APCG”) and Jicarilla Apache continue to stand on their right of self-determination and each nation’s right to sovereignty. Members of APCG base their redistricting maps on self-determination. The one principled stance has had the affect of lowering the Navajo Nation’s VRA Native American Voting Population standard that create retrogression to the NAVAP. Pueblo plans allow for retrogressing from the Navajo Nation’s high NAVAP numbers by lowering the standards for future generations to build upon redistricting practices. The proposed maps from APCG does not provide the guarantee for Navajo voters to elect a candidate of their choice in the future.

Maintaining the standards of the VRA guarantees States must comply with Federal laws to protect Navajo citizens voting rights and the ability to elect a candidate for their choice. “With the uncertainty of the Navajo population increasing or decreasing in the future dictates how the Navajo Nation would preserve the VRA standards for future indigenous generations. The indigenous governments’ positions on VRA have significant impact on our children’s future voting strength. We must continue to advocate for the current Native American districts in hopes of building more Native American districts in the future.” said Leonard Gorman, Executive Director of Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission.

Gorman, further states “Navajo Voters carry the voting weight of the Indigenous people in the northwest quadrant of New Mexico. While other indigenous nations may find their full participation in civil societies a necessity, Navajos living on the Navajo Nation make up an indigenous nation.”

For more information for contact the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission at 928-871-7436 or visit the Commission website to see the finalized New Mexico maps and the Indigenous consensus Senate map at [www.nnhrc.navajo-nsn.gov](http://www.nnhrc.navajo-nsn.gov).

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