



The Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President

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Navajo Nation plays vital role in new Native American Rights Fund report

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – The Navajo Nation is pleased with Thursday’s announcement of the release of the Native American Rights Fund (NARF) report entitled, “Obstacles at Every Turn: Barriers to Political Participation Faced by Native Americans,” which is a comprehensive outline of the obstacles and barriers that Native American people face at every turn in the political process.

Native Americans have faced barriers to political participation for generations — from registering to vote to getting votes counted. The Native American Voting Rights Coalition, of which the Navajo Nation Department of Justice is a member, held nine public hearings across the United States with 120 witnesses from dozens of tribes. The report summarizes the findings from these hearings and comes at a time when many states are considering options for the 2020 elections amid the COVID-19 pandemic, including vote-by-mail options. The report identifies the ongoing struggle for Native American voter access and participation in state and federal elections.

“The political clout of the Navajo vote will be a strong factor in the upcoming elections, yet the current voting systems often oppress Navajo turnout. It is important that states and local governments work with the Navajo Nation to break down these barriers to political participation. The more that our Navajo people participate in state and federal elections, the more improvements we will see on the Navajo Nation,” said Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez.

On April 25, 2018, one public hearing was held in Tuba City on the Navajo Nation and included the testimony of several citizens of the Navajo Nation including James Adakai who serves as the President of Oljato Chapter; Moroni Benally, co-founder of Utah League of Native American Voters; Angelo Baca of Aneth, Utah; Darrell Marks, community organizer; Brian Chambers Curley with the Navajo Nation Department of Justice; and Shirlee Smith community member. This was the only public hearing held on any tribal lands.

“We greatly appreciate the testimonies offered by our Navajo citizens,” stated Vice President Myron Lizer. “They were able to bring light to the struggle of many Navajo people. Without their testimony this report would not carry the same weight.”

“I am pleased that the Navajo Nation Department of Justice (DOJ) was able to play a part in this report” said Navajo Nation Attorney General Doreen McPaul. “Our attorneys successfully advocated for the public hearing to be held on the Navajo Nation, so that the voices of our

citizens could be heard. The Navajo DOJ takes the voting rights of the Navajo people very seriously, and closely monitors state and local community compliance with federal and state laws.”

A copy of the report can be found at: <https://vote.narf.org/obstacles-at-every-turn/>.

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