



25th Navajo Nation Council

25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

MEDIA CONTACT:

nnlb.communications@gmail.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 26, 2024

25th Navajo Nation Council's Naabik'iyáti' Committee voices support to reform workplace sexual misconduct laws and policies



WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – On Thursday, 25th Navajo Nation Council Speaker Crystalyne Curley placed the topic of sexual harassment prevention, awareness, and response on the Naabik'iyáti' Committee's agenda to provide an overview of current Navajo Nation workplace policies provided by the Navajo Nation Division of Human Resources.

The Naabik'iyáti' Committee voiced overwhelming support to initiate legislation aimed at reforming and creating new measures within Navajo Nation policy to prevent and appropriately respond to allegations of sexual misconduct, including sexual harassment and assault, and to provide more resources to victims and hold perpetrators accountable.

"The 25th Navajo Nation Council hears the voices of our Navajo people. We understand the frustration and immediate demands for change, not only for the protection of employees in workplaces, but for our people in all communities. Based on Thursday's discussion, the Council is prepared to move forward with developing and passing legislation to strengthen policy and laws and to provide enforcement measures," said Speaker Curley. "It's a sensitive topic, but as leaders, it's our responsibility to take on such challenges and to listen to our people who are demanding change."

Last year, Speaker Curley mandated sexual harassment prevention training for all Legislative Branch employees on an annual basis, and continues to make additional trainings available on a regular basis.

During Thursday's discussion, several Council Delegates also called for immediate action to address a sexual harassment and assault allegation against the general manager of the Navajo Tribal Utility Authority (NTUA), by an NTUA-affiliated employee, which was made public through press conferences on social media. Several Delegates also urged the NTUA Management Board to take action to protect the alleged victim and to ensure accountability.

Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Beclabito, Cove, Gadi'í'áhi/To'Koi, Red Valley, Tooh Haltsooi, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Tsé ałnáoz't'í), who chairs the Naabik'iyáti' Committee's Missing and Murdered Diné Relatives Task Force, requested copies of the Department of Personnel Management's (DPM) information regarding all the Navajo Nation court cases involving sexual harassment allegations.

"What were the Department of Personnel Management's responses to these cases? For our legislative side, what are the recommendations and how have laws been changed to address the issue that the courts are determining when it comes to sexual harassment cases?" Chair Crotty asked.

Division of Human Resources Director, Debbie Nez-Manuel stated that she will work with the Department of Personnel Management to compile and provide the information.

"While DPM is a resource for reporting, not everyone will report to the Department of Personnel Management," Nez-Manuel said. "Reporting happens based on the individual that is impacted, who they feel comfortable with, and where they feel they will get the best response. If they feel uncomfortable with DPM they might go elsewhere."

Council Delegate Eugenia Charles-Newton asked for the statute of limitations for reporting sexual harassment, stating that it is not outlined in any DPM or Human Resource policy. She added that some employees might have self-doubt when it comes to determining what can be considered sexual harassment.

According to Nez-Manuel, there is no statute of limitation for reporting sexual harassment to the Department of Personnel Management. "It's critical to record incidents by writing them down. Those details can fade with time and become more difficult to prove what happened. My understanding is that there is no statute of limitation for reporting," Nez-Manuel said.

Council Delegates also urged for comprehensive policies that are inclusive of Navajo Nation enterprises, political and professional at-will positions, and elected leaders. Currently, the Navajo Nation Office of Ethics and Rules oversees claims that are brought against elected officials within the Navajo Nation.

The Naabik'iyáti' Committee voted to accept the report with 16 in favor and none opposed. The Office of the Speaker is tasked with developing and introducing legislation to sexual misconduct policies and laws for the Council's consideration.

###