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Council members commend approval of Navajo Nation Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act amendments and Supreme Court funding

WINDOW ROCK – Council members including Law and Order Committee members commended the approval of two separate legislations that were unanimously approved by the Navajo Nation Council during the 2016 Winter Council Session in late January.

On Feb. 11, President Russell Begaye signed Council Resolution CJA-6-16, which provides much needed funding in the amount of \$300,000 to assist in the completion of modular buildings that will house the Navajo Nation Supreme Court and the Administrative Office of the Courts in Window Rock.

The bill was sponsored by Council Delegate Otto Tso (Tó Nanees Dizi), a member of the Law and Order Committee, and provides funds for the design of the electrical system, installation of a new waterline, add concrete for site access and curbing, asphalt for an access road, and a parking lot for the facility that was purchased by the Judicial Branch.

Delegate Tso said the facility would provide a safer work environment for judicial employees who have been forced to relocate on several occasions due to dilapidated buildings and the risk of mold contamination.

“The approval of funding addresses a major issue for the Supreme Court and we will continue to work with the Acting Chief Justice Allen Sloan to address other issues,” said Delegate Tso.

Council Delegate Edmund Yazzie (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau), who chairs the Law and Order Committee, expressed his appreciation for all sides working together to address the needs of the Supreme Court.

Council members also applauded the approval of amendments to the Navajo Nation’s Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act of 2012, which was unanimously passed by the Council on Jan. 27 and signed into law on Feb. 11.

The amendments to the original Act implement a stronger sex offense tier classification and bans non-Navajo offenders in the Tier III sex offender category. Sex offenders are categorized into Tier I, Tier II, Tier III, according to the severity of their crimes.

Tier I sex offenders, the least serious offenses, are required to register for 15 years, renewing their registration once a year. Tier II sex offenders are required to register for 25 years, renewing their registration every six months. Lastly, Tier III sex offenders that are convicted of the most

serious offenses are required to register for life and are required to renew their registration every three months.

According to the legislation, the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking (SMART) Program reviewed the Navajo Nation's implementation of SORNA and found that the language in Navajo Nation Code Title 17 did not properly tier with SORNA standards and could undermine its true purposes.

Delegate Yazzie said the amendments strengthen the Nation's current law and provides a heightened level of protection for Navajo people and communities.

"This was a working effort between the Law and Order Committee and Acting Chief Justice Allen Sloan and this was a much needed change to the law," said Delegate Yazzie, who sponsored the legislation that was approved by Council.

LOC members said they would continue to work with the Supreme Court to addresses other laws to resolve current issues and strengthen the judicial system.

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